

A "TRINITARIAN" THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS?

AN AUGUSTINIAN ASSESSMENT OF SEVERAL RECENT PROPOSALS

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Contemporary theology is driven by a quest to make the doctrine of the Trinity “relevant” to a wide variety of concerns. Books and articles abound on the Trinity and personhood, the Trinity and ecclesiology, the Trinity and gender, the Trinity and marriage, the Trinity and societal relations, the Trinity and politics, the Trinity and ecology, etc. Recently a number of theologians have suggested that a doctrine of the Trinity may provide the key to a Christian theology of religions. The purpose of this study is to evaluate critically the claim that a proper understanding of “the Trinity” provides the basis for a new understanding of religious diversity.

Drawing upon the trinitarian theology of Augustine (principally *De Trinitate*), I critically examine the trinitarian doctrine in Mark Heim’s trinitarian theology of multiple religious ends, Amos Yong’s pneumatological theology of religions, Jacques Dupuis’ Christian theology of religious pluralism and Raimundo Panikkar’s trinitarian account of religious experience (along with Ewert Cousins’ efforts to link Panikkar’s proposal to the vestige tradition). My Augustinian assessment is structured around three trinitarian issues in the Christian theology of religions: (1) the relationship of the “immanent” and the “economic” Trinity, (2) the relations among the divine persons (both *ad intra* and *ad extra*) and (3) the *vestigia trinitatis*.

In conversation with Augustine, I argue (1) that there is good reason to question the claim that the “Trinity” represents the key to a new understanding of religious diversity, (2) that current “use” of trinitarian theology in the Christian theology of religions appears to be having a deleterious effect upon the doctrine, and (3) that the trinitarian problems I document in the theology of religions also encumber attempts to relate trinitarian doctrine to a variety of other contemporary issues including personhood, ecclesiology, society, politics and science. I further argue that contemporary theology is driven by a problematic understanding of what it means for a doctrine of the Trinity to be “relevant” and that Augustine challenges us to rethink the “relevancy” of trinitarian doctrine.

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Preface

I was first introduced to “trinitarian” approaches to the theology of religions in a seminar on the doctrine of the Trinity with Geoffrey Wainwright at Duke Divinity School when we read Gavin D’Costa’s book *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*. D’Costa’s book initially stimulated my interest in the relationship between Trinity and religious diversity. I decided to explore the relation between the doctrine of the Trinity and the Christian theology of religions in my master’s thesis (which was entitled “Toward a Theology of Religions via the Doctrine of the Trinity”). The primary focus of my investigation was the constitutive role of trinitarian doctrine in the proposals of Jacques Dupuis and Mark Heim. That inquiry left me with a series of unanswered questions about the role of trinitarian doctrine in the Christian theology of religions.

When I commenced doctoral study the following year, I determined to pursue these questions further. At the outset of my research process, I envisioned that I would clarify certain pitfalls on the way to a more adequate “trinitarian” grammar for a Christian theology of religions. In my attempt to answer the questions outlined above, I immersed myself in the classical trinitarian tradition (particularly the formative patristic period). My engagement with these classical theologians (especially Augustine) had an unanticipated result. Not only did I become deeply suspicious of the way trinitarian doctrine is currently being employed in the theology of religions but I also began to

realize that the problems I discovered were not limited to Christian reflection on religious diversity. On the contrary, some of the same methodological problems that encumber “trinitarian” approaches to religious diversity also encumber “trinitarian” approaches to a host of other issues (e.g., trinitarian accounts of the personhood, church and society). I came to the conclusion that these methodological problems are rooted in a distorted understanding of the purpose of trinitarian doctrine. This narrative of my developing interests finds systematic embodiment in the thematic questions and overall structure of the present writing.

Ultimately, this investigation is not about the theology of religions; it is about the role of the trinitarian doctrine in contemporary theology. Through an Augustinian examination of trinitarian doctrine in the Christian theology of religions (specifically the proposals of Mark Heim, Jacques Dupuis, Amos Yong and Raimundo Panikkar), I want to want to challenge contemporary theologians to rethink the role of this central doctrine. I am convinced that Augustine has much to contribute to this end. It is somewhat ironic that the theologian whose trinitarian teaching is supposedly responsible for the “marginalization” of trinitarian doctrine might have something important to teach us about what it means for this doctrine to be “relevant.”

1. The Turn to the Trinity in the Theology of Religions

Immanuel Kant declared that the doctrine of the Trinity “has no practical relevance” whatsoever.¹ Kant would be hard-pressed to make this criticism stick today. Contemporary theology is driven by a quest to make the doctrine of the Trinity “relevant” to a wide variety of concerns. Books and articles abound on the Trinity and personhood, the Trinity and ecclesiology, the Trinity and gender, the Trinity and marriage, the Trinity and societal relations, the Trinity and political theory, the Trinity and science, the Trinity and ecology, etc. Theologians of every stripe are attempting to relate trinitarian doctrine to a wide variety of contemporary issues.

Recently a number of Christian theologians have suggested that the doctrine of the Trinity holds the key to Christian understanding of religious diversity. According to one theologian, “God has something to do with the fact that a diversity of independent ways of salvation appears in the history of the world. This diversity reflects the diversity or plurality within the divine life itself, of which the Christian doctrine of the

¹ “The doctrine of the Trinity, taken literally, has *no practical relevance at all*, even if we think we understand it; and it is even more clearly irrelevant if we realize that it transcends all our concepts. Whether we are to worship three or ten persons in the Divinity makes no difference: the pupil will implicitly accept one as readily as the other because he has no concept at all of a number of persons in one God (hypostases), and still more so because this distinction can make no difference in his rules of conduct.” Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Abaris Books, 1979), 65-67 (italics original).

Trinity provides an account. The mystery of the Trinity is for Christians the ultimate foundation for pluralism.”² Similarly,

I believe that the Trinitarian doctrine of God facilitates an authentically Christian response to the world religions because it takes the *particularities* of history seriously as well as the *universality* of God’s action. This is so because the doctrine seeks to affirm that God has disclosed himself unreservedly and irreversibly in the contingencies and particularity of the person Jesus. But within Trinitarian thinking, we are also able to affirm, in the action of the third person, that God is constantly revealing himself through history by means of the Holy Spirit. . . . Such a Trinitarian orientation thereby facilitates an openness to the world religions, for the activity of the Spirit cannot be confined to Christianity.³

Finally, “It is impossible to believe in the Trinity *instead* of the distinctive claims of all other religions. If Trinity is real, then many of these *specific* religious claims and ends must be real also. . . . The Trinity is a map that finds room for, indeed requires, concrete truth in other religions.”⁴

Although these statements reflect a growing consensus that the doctrine of the Trinity provides the key to a proper understanding of the relationship between Christianity and other religions, I will argue that these trinitarian claims merit careful scrutiny. Thus, the purpose of my investigation is to examine critically contemporary appeal to trinitarian doctrine in the Christian theology of religions; however, before I

² Peter C. Hodgson, “The Spirit and Religious Pluralism,” in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2005), 136.

³ Gavin D’Costa, “Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions,” in *A Universal Faith? Peoples, Cultures, Religions and the Christ: Essays in Honor of Prof. Dr. Frank De Graeve*, ed. Catherine Cornille and Valeer Neckebrouck (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 147.

⁴ Mark Heim, “The Depth of the Riches: Trinity and Religious Ends,” *Modern Theology* 17 (2001): 22 (italics original).

outline the nature of my investigation in greater detail, we need to explore two developments that provide a crucial context for this investigation: the contemporary trinitarian renaissance and the rise of the Christian theology of religions. After exploring these developments, I will chronologically survey recent appeal to the Trinity in the theology of religions. I will close the chapter by describing the purpose, scope and method of my investigation.

1.1 The Contemporary Trinitarian Revival

A number of excellent studies have been written chronicling the renaissance of trinitarian theology in the twentieth century and there is no need to repeat at length what others have said.⁵ For the purpose of this study, it will suffice to examine the work of Karl Barth and Karl Rahner with attention to themes in their work that have shaped the contemporary revival.⁶

⁵ See Claude Welch, *In This Name: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952); John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Geoffrey Wainwright, "The Ecumenical Rediscovery of the Trinity," *One in Christ* 34 (1998): 95-124; and Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

⁶ A discussion of the extent to which trinitarian doctrine was marginalized in various ecclesial contexts in the early part of the twentieth century (and thus needed to be recovered) lies outside the scope of this investigation. What is clear is that a trinitarian revival emerged in the twentieth century and that the work of Barth and Rahner exerted significant influence upon the character of this revival.

1.1.1 Karl Barth

The twentieth-century trinitarian revival was energized, on the Protestant side, by the work of Karl Barth.⁷ In his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth introduces the doctrine of the Trinity as a foundational element of his prolegomena. This move is driven by the assumption that it is impossible to reflect on the nature of Christian doctrine apart from the material content of Christian doctrine.⁸ Barth insists that one cannot think about the nature of “revelation” apart from the One who is *revealed* in revelation.⁹ He suggests that three questions naturally arise as one considers the nature of revelation. First, who is revealed in revelation? Second, how does revelation happen? Third, what is the result of revelation? According to Barth, the answer to the first question is that “*God reveals himself.*”¹⁰ The answer to the second is that “*He reveals himself through himself.*”¹¹ The answer to the third question is that “*He reveals himself.*”¹² For Barth, God is the

⁷ For a brief overview of Barth’s life and theology, see Robert W. Jenson, “Karl Barth,” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, 2d ed., ed. David F. Ford (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997), 21-36.

⁸ Commenting on his approach, Barth explains, “The most striking anticipation of this kind will consist in the fact that we shall treat the whole doctrine of the Trinity and the essentials of Christology in this connection, namely as constituent parts of our answer to the question of the Word of God. We cannot pose the questions of formal dogma without immediately entering at these central points upon material dogma.” Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1, The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 2d ed., trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 44.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 295.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 296 (italics original).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 296 (italics original).

¹² *Ibid.*, 296 (italics original).

subject of revelation, the *act* of revelation and *object* of revelation. "It is from this fact," explains Barth, "that we learn we must begin the doctrine of revelation with the doctrine of the triune God."¹³ When we recognize that "to the same God who in unimpaired unity is the Revealer, the revelation and the revealedness, there is also ascribed in unimpaired differentiation within Himself this threefold mode of being,"¹⁴ we are brought directly to the problem of the Trinity.¹⁵

Barth's decision to locate the doctrine of the Trinity in his prolegomena was a novel move that stood in contrast to a well-established tendency in Christian theology of discussing God's existence, nature and attributes prior to any discussion of the triunity of God. Because the doctrine of the Trinity "is what basically distinguishes Christian doctrine of God as Christian,"¹⁶ Barth contends that it must be given a place of priority. Barth's concern is not chronological (i.e., that the doctrine of the Trinity must merely be the first topic discussed in any theological text); rather his concern is more fundamental. He insists that the doctrine of the Trinity should be "decisive and controlling for the

¹³ Ibid., 296.

¹⁴ Ibid., 299.

¹⁵ "If, then, in understanding the concept of revelation it is right to ask first who God is, and if guided by the Bible we have to ask this in a way we have just done briefly, then, in accordance with the question thus disclosed, we have to pursue the answer already disclosed. That is to say, we must first address ourselves, naturally following again the answer just disclosed, i.e., Holy Scripture, to a development of the doctrine of the Triune God." Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, 300.

¹⁶ Ibid., 301.

whole of dogmatics.”¹⁷ In the latter context, he presents the doctrine of the Trinity as both an interpretation of, and a necessary prerequisite for, revelation.

Barth’s methodological claim that the doctrine of the Trinity should be “decisive and controlling” for all theological reflection may well represent one of his most significant contributions to the twentieth-century trinitarian revival. Robert Jenson explains that what is noteworthy about Barth’s doctrine of the Trinity is not its content, which “turns out to be a fairly standard Augustinian doctrine,”¹⁸ but rather his theological method.¹⁹ Contemporary theologians have learned from Barth “that this doctrine has and must have explanatory and regulatory use in the whole of theology,

¹⁷ “In giving this doctrine a place of prominence our concern cannot be merely that it have this place externally but rather that its content be decisive and controlling for the whole of dogmatics.” Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, 303.

¹⁸ Jenson, “Karl Barth,” 32. Barth offers the following summary of his trinitarian doctrine: “Generally and provisionally we mean by the doctrine of the Trinity the proposition that He whom the Christian Church calls God and proclaims as God, the God who has revealed Himself according to the witness of Scripture, is the same in unimpaired unity and yet also the same thrice in different ways in unimpaired distinction. Or, in the phraseology of the Church’s dogma of the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the biblical witness to revelation are the one God in the unity of their essence, and the one God in the biblical witness to revelation is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the distinction of His persons.” Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, 307-08. One can see the Augustinian influence upon Barth’s thought mostly clearly in the final sentence.

¹⁹ “Barth’s move is always the same: from the formal structure, the *plot* of historical revelation to the content of that revelation, that is, to God. Or rather, his move is that he refuses to separate the form and content at all. What God reveals about himself is that he is Lord; but that he is Lord means that he can reveal himself in the way Scripture describes. *What* is revealed is no more or less than that revelation *does occur* and *can occur*.” Jenson, “Karl Barth,” 33 (italics original).

that it is not a separate puzzle to be solved but the framework within which all theology's puzzles are to be solved."²⁰

1.1.2 Karl Rahner

The trinitarian revival was invigorated, on the Catholic side, through the work of Karl Rahner.²¹ In 1967 Rahner wrote what proved to be an influential essay on the Trinity that was first published in German in a multi-volume work entitled *Mysterium Salutis* and later translated into English and published as a separate book.²² In this essay, Rahner laments the marginalization of the Trinity in contemporary theology and piety: "All of these considerations should not lead us to overlook the fact that, despite their orthodox confession of the Trinity, Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere 'monotheists.' We must be willing to admit that, should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged."²³ Rahner claims that at least three factors contributed to marginalization of

²⁰ Jenson, "Karl Barth," 31.

²¹ Inasmuch as the doctrine of the Trinity constitutes formal "dogma" for the Catholic Church, it would be inappropriate to speak in any formal sense about the doctrine being "recovered" among Catholics. Certainly the doctrine was not lost. Rahner, as we will see below, speaks in terms of the marginalization of the doctrine. Alongside the work of Rahner, Vatican II played an important role in stimulating the trinitarian revival among Catholics. A trinitarian framework shapes many of the conciliar documents.

²² Karl Rahner, "Der dreifaltige Gott als transzendenter Urgrund der Heilsgeschichte," in *Mysterium Salutis: Grundriß heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik*, vol. 2, *Die Heilsgeschichte vor Christus*, ed. Johannes Feiner and Magnus Löhrer (Einsiedeln: Benziger Verlag, 1967), 317–401; Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970; New York: Crossroads, 1999).

²³ Rahner, *The Trinity*, 10-11.

trinitarian doctrine: (1) a trend, beginning in medieval theology texts, of separating discussion of trinitarian doctrine from discussion of the economy of salvation (e.g., the incarnation), (2) increased preoccupation with the immanent Trinity and (3) a tendency to treat the doctrine of God under two headings, first from the standpoint of the divine essence (*De Deo Uno*) and then only secondarily from the standpoint of the divine persons (*De Deo Trino*).²⁴

According to Rahner, the first step in recovering the significance of the Trinity for the Christian life is recognizing that this doctrine is a mystery of salvation: "The isolation of the treatise of the Trinity *has* to be wrong. There *must* be a connection between Trinity and man. The Trinity is a mystery of *salvation*, otherwise it would never have been revealed."²⁵ Rahner further explains that reconnecting the Trinity and salvation involves recognizing the axiomatic unity of the "economic" and the "immanent" Trinity: "The *basic thesis* which establishes this connection between the treatises and presents the Trinity *as* a mystery of salvation (its reality and not merely as a doctrine) might be formulated as follows: *The 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity.*"²⁶ The latter is frequently characterized as "Rahner's rule" and has exerted a tremendous influence on

²⁴ Ibid., 15-24.

²⁵ Ibid., 21 (italics original).

²⁶ Ibid., 21-22 (italics original).

contemporary theology. According to Rahner, the unity of the “economic” and the “immanent” Trinity can be seen most clearly in the incarnation.²⁷ What Jesus is and does, as a human, reveals the eternal Logos. As a result, “we can assert, in the full meaning of the words: here the Logos with God and the Logos with us, the immanent and the economic Logos, are strictly the same.”²⁸ Rahner suggests that the incarnation represents a single instance of a broader phenomenon—the self-communication of the triune God. In God’s self-communication, each of the divine persons communicates himself to human beings in a way that reflects the particularity of that divine person.²⁹

Rahner insists that all trinitarian reflection (and, for that matter, dogmatic presentation) must *begin* with the self-revelation of the triune God in the economy of salvation and only thereafter move to a doctrine of the “immanent” Trinity.³⁰ Rather

²⁷ According to Rahner, one must reject the assumption that any one of the divine persons could have become incarnate. If this assumption were regarded as true, it would mean that no connection exists between the temporal missions of the divine persons and their eternal processions. Instead one must “cling to the truth that the Logos is really as he appears in revelation, that he is *the one* who reveals to us (not merely *one* of those who might have revealed to us) the triune God, on account of the personal being which belongs exclusively to him, the Father’s Logos.” Rahner, *The Trinity*, 30.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁹ “[T]hese three self-communications are the self-communication of the one God in three relative ways in which God subsists.” Rahner, *The Trinity*, 35. God the Father gives himself as Father; God the Son gives himself as Son; and God the Holy Spirit gives himself as Holy Spirit.

³⁰ “We may start from the self-revelation of God (the Father) as given in salvation history, as mediated by the Word and the Spirit. We may show that these distinctions of ‘God for us’ are also those of ‘God in himself.’” Rahner, *The Trinity*, 44. This approach would allow one to see the Trinity in an inchoate form in the Old Testament as Yahweh acts by his “Word” and his “Spirit.” Of course, within the framework of the Old Testament one has no way to know whether God’s Word and Spirit are “created mediations” or whether these “two ‘mediations’ persist, revealing themselves as truly divine, hence as God himself, in unity with, yet distinct from the God of revelation, in a unity and distinction which belong therefore to God

than merely presupposing the divine “missions,” the latter should constitute the starting point of theological reflection. Following this methodology, Rahner develops his constructive doctrine of the Trinity beginning with God’s economic “self-communication.”³¹ Although he affirms the unity of the economic and the immanent Trinity, he does not conflate them; they remain distinct. It is because of God’s immanent self-communication that God can freely communicate himself in the economy.

1.1.3 Implications

Barth and Rahner share several important assumptions that continue to shape the contemporary trinitarian revival.³² First, both share a vision for recovering the centrality of this doctrine for the life of the church. Arguably, this vision fuels the

himself” (ibid., 42). The starting point for recognizing that these “two mediations” represent distinctions in God is the doctrine of “missions.”

³¹ God’s self-communication is one—it possesses an inner unity. At the same time, God’s self-communication involves two fundamental modalities—truth and love. Both modalities condition one another. They come from the incomprehensible God whose self-communication remains a mystery. Moving from the economic to the immanent Trinity, Rahner claims that these self-differentiations in history (truth and love) must belong to God “in himself”; otherwise God’s communication would not be a genuine self-communication: “For those modalities and their differentiation either are in God himself (although we first experience them from our point of view), or they exist only in us, they belong only to the realm of creatures as effects of the divine creative activity.” Rahner, *The Trinity*, 100. If the latter were the case, no genuine self-communication would exist. God would be present only as represented by a creature. If there is to be an authentic self-communication, God must not merely be the “giver,” he must also be the “gift.” Genuine self-communication means that God reveals himself *as God* through his self-communication.

³² This is not to suggest that all their shared assumptions have proved influential. For example, both Barth and Rahner were quite hesitant to speak of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as “persons” in the modern sense of the word. Barth preferred to speak of divine hypostases as “modes of being” while Rahner preferred the term “distinct manners of subsisting.” In contrast, many contemporary theologians—especially “social” trinitarians—speak quite freely about Father, Son and Spirit as “persons” in the strongest possible sense.

contemporary quest for establishing the “relevance” of trinitarian doctrine. Second, both believe the doctrine of the Trinity should play a governing role in Christian theology. Barth expresses this conviction when he says that trinitarian doctrine should be “decisive and controlling for the whole of dogmatics.”³³ One can see the outworking of Barth’s assumption in contemporary attempts to identify the implications of the doctrine of the Trinity for our understanding of human personhood, worship, ecclesiology, missions, marriage, ethics, societal relations, political theory, non-Christian religions, etc. Third, both posit a close relationship between the economic and the immanent Trinity. Barth articulates a “rule” that is quite similar to Rahner’s: “But we have consistently followed the rule, which we regard as basic, that statements about the divine modes of being antecedently in themselves cannot be different in content from those that are to be made about their reality in revelation.”³⁴ Rahner’s “rule” has sparked extensive debate about the relationship between the economic and the immanent Trinity among contemporary theologians.³⁵ Finally, both emphasize the *epistemic* priority of the economic Trinity (God’s self-revelation in the economy of salvation) and present their trinitarian doctrine in a way that underscores this basic

³³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, 303.

³⁴ Barth continues, “All our statements concerning what is called the immanent Trinity have been reached simply as confirmations or underlinings or, materially, as the indispensable premises of the economic Trinity.” Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, 479.

³⁵ In chapter three I will argue that assumptions about the relationship between the economic and the immanent Trinity play an important role in the Christian theology of religions.

assumption. Rahner's presentation moves from God's "self-communication" in the economy of salvation to the intra-trinitarian "self-communication" that grounds it. Similarly, Barth discusses each divine "mode of being" under two headings—first, from the standpoint of the economic Trinity (e.g., "God as Reconciler") and then from the standpoint of the immanent Trinity (e.g., "The Eternal Son").³⁶

1.2 The Christian Theology of Religions

The Christian theology of religions (which should be distinguished from the "history of religions" and the "philosophy of religion") emerged as a distinct theological discipline following Vatican II.³⁷ Questions discussed under the rubric of the theology of religions include the following: Under what circumstances may individuals experience salvation apart from the witness of the church? To what extent, and on what basis, can one recognize elements of truth and goodness in non-Christian religions? To what

³⁶ The critical link for Barth between the economic and the immanent Trinity can be found in the phrase "antedecently in himself." The Son can be our Reconciler only because "antedecently in himself" apart from his salvific action on our behalf, he is the Eternal Son. For Barth, the relationship of the economic to the immanent Trinity is irreversible: the immanent constitutes the ontological ground for the economic.

³⁷ Several thinkers have rightly noted that Vatican II represented a "watershed" event in the history of the Church. See Miikka Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions According to the Second Vatican Council* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1992), 8. This is not to suggest that theological reflection on the relationship of Christianity to other religions did not exist prior to Vatican II. What is unique following Vatican II is the emergence of the "theology of religions" as a new theological discipline. For a discussion of the development of this new discipline, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003); Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2002); Gavin D'Costa, "Theology of Religions," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, 2d ed., ed. David F. Ford (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997), 626-44.

extent, if any, is the triune God active in non-Christian religions? What role, if any, do non-Christian religions play in salvation-history? To what end, and on what basis, should Christians enter into dialogue with adherents of other religions? Finally, to what extent can one incorporate non-Christian religious practices into the development of indigenous churches in missionary contexts? These questions cannot be avoided in the increasingly globalized world in which we live.³⁸

1.2.1 Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism

Debate regarding the relationship of Christianity to other religions has taken place under the rubric of the exclusivist-inclusivist-pluralist typology. “Exclusivism” is associated with the view that salvation can be found only through the person and work of Jesus Christ and that saving grace is not mediated through the teachings and practices of other religions.³⁹ “Inclusivism” generally refers to the view that salvation, in a

³⁸ This is not to suggest that an awareness of religious diversity is somehow novel in the history of the church. The early church proclaimed its *kerygma* in a syncretistic environment in which “many gods and many lords” were recognized. See Bruce W. Winter, “In Public and in Private: Early Christians and Religious Pluralism,” in *One God, One Lord: Christianity in a World of Religious Pluralism*, ed. Andrew D. Clarke and Bruce W. Winter (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 125-48. It is important to distinguish the fact of plurality (empirical pluralism) from “religious pluralism” as a philosophical interpretation of religion. When I am speaking of the former I will generally employ the phrase “religious diversity.”

³⁹ “Exclusivism” is sometimes confused with “restrictivism” (i.e., the view that only those who express *explicit* faith in Christ can be saved); however, as the term is used in the broader discussion of the relationship between Christianity and other religions, exclusivism does not necessarily entail a particular view regarding the fate of the unevangelized. For example, Alister McGrath, who holds an “exclusivist” (or, as he prefers, “particularist”) view, adopts an agnostic stance regarding the fate of the unevangelized. See Alister McGrath, “A Particularist View: A Post-Enlightenment Approach,” in *More Than One Way? Four Views of Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips (Grand Rapids:

Christian sense, extends beyond the visible boundaries of the church and that non-Christian religions *may* play some positive role in God's purposes for humanity.⁴⁰ Although they agree that salvation extends beyond the witness of the church, inclusivists are divided on the question of whether non-Christian religions, *qua* religions, constitute channels through which God's saving grace is mediated. In a variety of forms, inclusivism has gained momentum among Protestants and Catholics since Vatican II. As an interpretation of religion, "pluralism" denotes the viewpoint that all religions represent more or less equally valid means to "salvation" (which is construed in a variety of ways).⁴¹

Although the exclusivist-inclusivist-pluralist typology has framed debate regarding the relationship of Christianity to other religions for almost two decades,⁴² at least three limitations beset it. First, several proposals cannot be easily located under

Zondervan, 1995). 151-209. Paul Griffiths suggests that a failure to distinguish the *means* of salvation from *extent* of salvation leads to a confusion of "restrictivism" with "exclusivism." See Paul Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001), 138-69.

⁴⁰ Harold A. Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 52. While the precise boundary between exclusivism and inclusivism is difficult to discern for reasons I will outline below, one element that clearly distinguishes exclusivists from inclusivists is their perspective regarding the *role* of non-Christian religions within the economy of salvation.

⁴¹ This position is perhaps best exemplified in the writings of John Hick. See John Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and Philosophy of Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 139-182.

⁴² Alan Race is frequently credited for bringing this typology into prominence. See Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religion* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1982).

any of these positions.⁴³ Second, even among theologians who explicitly align themselves with one of the three positions outlined above, considerable diversity exists in the substance of their proposals. For example, Mark Heim claims that while Christians will experience “salvation” (in a Christian sense), adherents of other religions will experience other positive “ends” which are not “salvation.”⁴⁴ Jacques Dupuis claims that non-Christian religions constitute channels through which their adherents will experience Christian salvation.⁴⁵ Although he acknowledges the universal presence of the Spirit in non-Christian religions, Gavin D’Costa insists that saving grace is not mediated through non-Christian religions.⁴⁶ All three of these thinkers broadly identify themselves as “inclusivists,”⁴⁷ yet their constructive proposals differ significantly. Heim affirms multiple religious ends while Dupuis claims that only one positive end exists (i.e., communion with the triune God). Dupuis affirms that non-Christian religions mediate salvific grace while D’Costa rejects this claim. Differences such as these, among

⁴³ For example, Karl Barth is typically identified as an “exclusivist”; however, to the extent Barth may legitimately be characterized as a “universalist,” his position defies easy categorization.

⁴⁴ S. Mark Heim, “Salvations: A More Pluralistic Hypothesis,” *Modern Theology* 10 (1994): 343-60.

⁴⁵ Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997), 203-390.

⁴⁶ Gavin D’Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2000), 101-116.

⁴⁷ In fairness to Gavin D’Costa, it should be noted that while he previously identified himself as an “inclusivist,” he has recently distanced himself from this label—both because he rejects the typology upon which it is based and also because he believes that “inclusivism” has become increasingly associated with a position he rejects, namely that salvation is mediated through non-Christian religions. Compare Gavin D’Costa, “Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality,” in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D’Costa (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990), 26; with D’Costa, *The Meeting of Religions*, 99 and 116.

apparent adherents of the same “position,” suggest that explanatory power of the exclusivist-inclusivist-pluralist typology has become rather limited. Although some theologians believe that the exclusivist-inclusivist-pluralist typology is still useful,⁴⁸ others have attempted to develop alternative paradigms.⁴⁹ Finally, the labels employed in the exclusivist-inclusivist-pluralist typology obscure that fact that each of these positions is “exclusivist” in a fundamental sense. Gavin D’Costa advances this thesis as the basis for a penetrating critique of a pluralist account of religion. Drawing upon the work of John Milbank and Alasdair MacIntyre, D’Costa (rightly) argues that there is no such thing as a “non tradition-specific” account of religion and that pluralism “represents a tradition-specific approach that bears all the same features as

⁴⁸ In a recent book Paul Griffiths offers a number conceptual distinctions and clarifications that significantly extend the explanatory power of the exclusivist-inclusivist-pluralist typology. For example, because questions of “truth” and “salvation” are distinct, Griffiths suggests that two different exclusivist-inclusivist-pluralist typologies are needed: one which would address the question of “truth” in other religions and a second which would address the means of “salvation.” Griffiths himself holds an “inclusivist” view regarding *truth* outside the church and an “exclusivist” view (as he has carefully defined it) with regard to *salvation*. See Griffiths, *Problems of Religions Diversity*, 22-65, 138-69. Perry Schmidt-Leukel also defends the usefulness of the exclusivist-inclusivist-pluralist typology. See Perry Schmidt-Leukel, “Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology – Clarified and Reaffirmed,” in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2005), 13-27.

⁴⁹ One alternative typology which has gained prominence employs the categories of “ecclesiocentrism,” “Christocentrism” and “theocentrism.” Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, following Jacques Dupuis, endorses this typology. See Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*, 23-27, 165-73. The ecclesiocentric-Christocentric-theocentric typology does not, however, appear to offer any substantive improvement upon the exclusivism-inclusivism-pluralism typology. Insofar as one cannot be “in Christ” without also concomitantly being incorporated into Christ’s body (the church), the labels “ecclesiocentric” and “Christocentric” do not seem to offer an substantial improvement over the “inclusivist” and “exclusivist” labels.

exclusivism—except that it is western liberal modernity’s exclusivism.”⁵⁰ “Inclusivism” fares no better, according to D’Costa, because it too is “exclusivist” in that it offers a tradition-specific account of religious diversity.⁵¹

1.2.2 The Turn to the Trinity in the Theology of Religions

Raimundo Panikkar is frequently identified as the first contemporary theologian to employ a doctrine of the Trinity as constitutive ground for a Christian theology of religions.⁵² In 1968 Panikkar wrote an essay entitled “Toward an Ecumenical Theandric Spirituality,”⁵³ which was later developed into a book under the title *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*.⁵⁴ He suggests that the Trinity provides an integrating model for human spirituality in which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are identified with three

⁵⁰ D’Costa, *The Meeting of Religions*, 22.

⁵¹ According to D’Costa, inclusivism “collapses” into exclusivism in three important ways. First, inclusivists hold that their position is ontologically and epistemologically correct. Second, the claims of inclusivists are inseparably linked to Christ and the Church in ways that are similar to exclusivism. Finally, both exclusivists and inclusivists offer tradition-specific interpretations of religion and defend these interpretations against conflicting interpretations. D’Costa, *The Meeting of Religions*, 22.

⁵² Because the proposals of Raimundo Panikkar, Jacques Dupuis, Amos Yong and Mark Heim will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters, my exposition of their proposals in this section will be relatively brief in order to avoid unnecessary overlap. On the other hand, several proposals which will not be discussed in subsequent chapters will be presented in greater detail.

⁵³ Raymond Panikkar, “Toward an Ecumenical Theandric Spirituality,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 5 (1968): 507-34.

⁵⁴ Raimundo Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Person-Icon-Mystery* (New York. Orbis, 1973). Panikkar’s proposal will be discussed at greater length in chapter five.

distinct forms of religious experience (“iconolatry,” “personalism” and “mysticism”).⁵⁵

In 1970, Ewert Cousins wrote an essay entitled “The Trinity and World Religions”⁵⁶ in which he commends Panikkar’s proposal and attempts to build upon it by linking it to “three universalizing currents in the history of Trinitarian theology”: the medieval vestige doctrine, the trinitarian account of creation in the Greek theologians and the western doctrine of appropriation.⁵⁷ Cousins argues that when Panikkar’s proposal is situated within the context of these “universalizing currents,” his seemingly novel position can be seen to possess a legitimate basis in the history of Christian theology.⁵⁸

The following year (1971), in his address to the World Council of Churches Central Committee, Georges Khodr suggested that trinitarian pneumatology may provide a way forward in dealing with the relationship of Christianity to other religions.⁵⁹ Because “the Spirit operates and applies His energies in accordance with His own economy,” one could “regard the non-Christian religions as points where His inspiration is at work.”⁶⁰

Although it did not prove to be influential at the time, Khodr’s essay exerted an

⁵⁵ Panikkar uses the term “theandrisms” to “characterize the synthesis of the three spiritual attitudes described above and also the three spiritualities developing from them, called respectively the ways of the Father, the Son and the Spirit.” Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 71.

⁵⁶ Ewert Cousins, “The Trinity and World Religions,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 7 (1970): 476-98.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 484.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 492.

⁵⁹ Georges Khodr, “Christianity and the Pluralistic World—The Economy of the Holy Spirit,” *Ecumenical Review* 23 (1971): 125-26. At that time, Khodr was the Metropolitan of the Mount Lebanon Diocese of the Greek-Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch in Beirut, Lebanon.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

important influence upon the development of subsequent pneumatological approaches to the theology of religions.

Over the next twenty years little was written explicitly connecting the Trinity and the theology of religions. The wave of contemporary appeal to doctrine of the Trinity in the theology of religions began in 1990 with the publication of *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*.⁶¹ This book, which was edited by Gavin D'Costa, contains a collection of essays that were written in response to *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*.⁶² The first section of *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered* contains three essays under the heading "The Trinity and Religious Pluralism." In the first essay, "Trinity and Pluralism,"⁶³ Rowan Williams appreciatively—though not uncritically—explores Panikkar's attempt to employ the Trinity as the foundation for religious pluralism. Williams suggests that Panikkar's book *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* represents "one of the best and least read meditations on the Trinity in [the twentieth]

⁶¹Gavin D'Costa, ed., *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990). Contributors include Rowan Williams, Gavin D'Costa, Christoph Schwöbel, M. M. Thomas, Francis Clooney, John Cobb, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Monika Hellwig, Joseph DiNoia, Lesslie Newbigin, Jürgen Moltmann, Paul Griffiths, John Milbank and Kenneth Surin.

⁶²John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987). Contributors to the latter include Gordon Kaufman, John Hick, Langdon Gilkey, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Stanley Samartha, Raimundo Panikkar, Seiichi Yagi, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Marjorie Suchoki, Aloysius Pieris, Paul Knitter and Tom Driver.

⁶³Rowan Williams, "Trinity and Pluralism," in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth Of A Pluralistic Theology Of Religions*, ed. Gavin D'Costa (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 3-15.

century.”⁶⁴ Although Panikkar’s model “possess[es] a real consistency and plausibility,” it requires “some specific clarifications precisely in the area of its fundamental Trinitarian orientation.”⁶⁵ One area where greater clarification is needed concerns the relationship between *content* of Panikkar’s trinitarian doctrine and *history* by which this doctrinal content came to be recognized. Williams argues that the trinitarian formulas upon which Panikkar builds cannot easily be separated from the communities which gave birth to them. According to Williams, Panikkar helps Christians see that the doctrine of the Trinity need not be a stumbling block to dialogue but rather a resource.⁶⁶ In “Particularity, Universality, and the Religions,”⁶⁷ Christoph Schwöbel argues that neither exclusivism nor pluralism offer the proper foundation for dialogue because they both fail to provide an adequate account of “the complex relationship of particularity and universality in religions.”⁶⁸ Schwöbel suggests that a proper understanding of the relationship between the “universal” and “particular” is provided by the Christian

⁶⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁶⁶ “If Panikkar is right in seeing Trinitarian Christianity as the proper foundation for an interreligious engagement that is neither vacuous nor imperialist, the doctrines of Christian creedal orthodoxy are not, as is regularly supposed, insuperable obstacles to dialogue; the incarnation of the logos is not the ultimate assertion of privilege and exclusivity, but the center of that network of religions (implicit and explicit) in which a new humanity is to be created.” Williams, “Trinity and Pluralism,” 11.

⁶⁷ Christoph Schwöbel, “Particularity, Universality, and the Religions: Toward a Christian Theology of Religions,” in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D’Costa (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 30-48.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 33. The exclusivist position affirms “particularity” while denying “universality” while the pluralist position offers an account of “universality” that undermines “particularity.”

doctrine of the Trinity.⁶⁹ Trinitarian faith requires Christians not only to recognize the distinctive particularity of their own faith but to affirm also the distinctive particularity of other faiths.⁷⁰ Alongside this particularity, the Christian faith also possesses a universal dimension. This universality is grounded in the claim that the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ through the Spirit, is the “ground of all being, meaning and salvation.”⁷¹ Thus, the triune God is universally present and active “as creative, reconciling and saving love.”⁷² The latter reality must be taken into account in order to arrive at a proper understanding of other religions.⁷³ All religions represent “human responses to the universal creative and redeeming agency of God.”⁷⁴ Thus, although salvation may take place only through Christ, this does not mean one must be a member of a Christian church or accept Christian doctrine to experience it.⁷⁵ Perhaps the most

⁶⁹ “[A] Christian theology of religions based on the particularity of the self-disclosure of the Trinitarian God seems to be better able to preserve the independence and distinctive particularity of the partners in dialogue.” Schwöbel, “Particularity, Universality, and the Religions,” 43.

⁷⁰ “This recognition of the distinctiveness of religions seems to be a necessary correlate of the insistence on the distinctiveness of the perspective of Christian faith grounded in the particular and distinctive self-disclosure of the triune God.” Schwöbel, “Particularity, Universality, and the Religions,” 37.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 38.

⁷³ “It must, however, be emphasized that this understanding of the universality of God’s presence to his creation and of the universality of God’s reconciling and saving love for his creation is for Christian theology never independent of God’s self-disclosure in the particularity of the Christ even as the particular Trinitarian God—Father, Son, and Spirit.” Schwöbel, “Particularity, Universality, and the Religions,” 39.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷⁵ According to Schwöbel, wherever “salvation” occurs, it represents a “divine work” which “happens through Christ.” Schwöbel, “Particularity, Universality, and the Religions,” 41.

important essay in this book relating trinitarian doctrine to the Christian theology of religions is “Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality.”⁷⁶ In this essay Gavin D’Costa argues that the underlying concerns that drive the essays in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* are better addressed within a “trinitarian” framework. Within a trinitarian context, “the multiplicity of religions takes on a special theological significance that cannot be ignored by Christians who worship a Trinitarian God.”⁷⁷ According to D’Costa, the doctrine of the Trinity provides a key to understanding other religions because of the way it holds together “particularity” and “universality.”⁷⁸ On the one hand, this doctrine affirms that the triune God has been disclosed in the particularity of Jesus of Nazareth. On the other hand, it also affirms that God is continually revealing himself in human history through the presence and work of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁹ Because the work of the Spirit is not limited to institutional Christianity, trinitarian faith engenders an open attitude toward other religions: “The significance of this Trinitarian ecclesiology is that if we have good reasons to believe that the Spirit and Word are present and active in the religions of the world (in ways that cannot, a priori, be

⁷⁶ Gavin D’Costa, “Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality,” in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D’Costa (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 16-29.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷⁸ “A trinitarian Christology guards against exclusivism and pluralism by dialectically relating the universal and the particular.” D’Costa, “Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality,” 18.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

specified), then it is intrinsic to the vocation of the church to be attentive to the world religions.”⁸⁰

The following year (1991), Ninian Smart and Stephen Konstantine published a book entitled *Christian Systematic Theology in World Context* in which they argue that the triune God, specifically the “social” Trinity,⁸¹ is the ultimate divine reality which constitutes the ground of all religious experience.⁸² Differing forms of spirituality obtain from an experience of one of three “aspects of the divine life” of the triune God. The three aspects of the divine life they distinguish are “non-relational,” “relational” and “communal.” In other words, diversity in the divine life grounds diversity in religious experience.⁸³ Buddhists, for example, apprehend the “non-relational” dimension of the divine life while Christians experience the “relational” dimension. Smart and Konstantine contend that these three “aspects” of the divine life are generated by the complex nature of God as Trinity.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 23.

⁸¹ “Social” trinitarians view human community as a model for relations among the divine persons.

⁸² Ninian Smart and Stephen Konstantine, *Christian Systematic Theology in World Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991). Smart and Konstantine’s work deeply influenced Mark Heim.

⁸³ Smart and Konstantine, *Christian Systematic Theology in World Context*, 173-74. Their proposal differs from Panikkar’s in that they connect differing spiritualities with different dimensions of “divine life” of the triune God rather than with the persons of the Godhead as Panikkar does.

During the same year, Paul Knitter wrote an essay entitled “A New Pentecost? A Pneumatological Theology of Religions.”⁸⁴ In this essay, Knitter builds upon Georges Khodr’s earlier proposal by suggesting that non-Christian religions represent the independent domain of the Spirit:

If we can take the Spirit, and not the Word in Jesus Christ, as our starting point for a theology of religions, we can affirm the possibility that the religions are ‘an all-comprehensive phenomenon of grace’ — that is, an economy of grace that is genuinely different from that made known to us through the Word incarnate in Jesus (in whom, of course, the Spirit was also active). And in that sense, the economy of religions is ‘independent’ — that is, not to be submerged or engulfed or incorporated into the economy of the Word represented in the Christian churches.⁸⁵

Although Knitter did not further develop this trinitarian pneumatology, his proposal has been embraced by other theologians.⁸⁶

In 1994 Pan-Chiu Lai published a revision of his doctoral dissertation under the title *Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions*.⁸⁷ The point of departure for Lai’s investigation is the assumption that the two dominant positions in the theology of religions — “theocentrism” (pluralism) and “Christocentrism” (inclusivism) — are

⁸⁴ Paul F. Knitter, “A New Pentecost? A Pneumatological Theology of Religions.” *Current Dialogue* 19 (1991): 32-41.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁸⁶ One example would be the Pentecostal theologian, Amos Yong.

⁸⁷ Pan-Chiu Lai, *Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions: A Study in Paul Tillich’s Thought*, Studies in Philosophical Theology Series, vol. 8 (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1994). This book represents an abridged and revised version of Lai’s doctoral dissertation completed in 1991 at King’s College under Christoph Schwöbel.

inadequate.⁸⁸ Whereas the “theocentric” position downplays the centrality of the incarnation, the “Christocentric” position minimizes the role of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁹ Lai claims that a “trinitarian” approach provides a way to integrate and transcend “theocentrism” and “Christocentrism” and that the resources for developing such an approach can be found in the trinitarian theology of Paul Tillich.⁹⁰ According to Lai, an important shift in thought took place in Tillich’s thinking between the second and third volumes of his *Systematic Theology*.⁹¹ His early approach to non-Christian religions might aptly be described as “Christocentric” inasmuch as it assumes the superiority of Christianity; however, in the third volume of his *Systematic Theology* Tillich adopted a “pneumatological” approach to other religions primarily because he recognized that Logos doctrine did not offer an adequate basis for affirming the validity of other religions. Central to his new approach was the universal economy of the Spirit.

⁸⁸ Lai, *Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 31-41.

⁸⁹ Lai asserts that the tendency to view “Christocentric” and “theocentric” positions as opposing is rooted in an underlying problem in Western trinitarian theology—a minimizing of the role of the Holy Spirit as exemplified in affirmation of the *filioque*. In this theology, the Spirit becomes bound (subordinate) to the Word; thus, no salvation is possible apart from the gospel. If, however, the Spirit was set “free” from the Word, then it would be no problem to affirm the possibility of salvation apart from the gospel. See Lai, *Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 41.

⁹⁰ Although Tillich himself never explicitly developed such an approach to non-Christian religions, Lai believes that most of the elements are present in his thought: “Though Tillich himself has not formulated a detailed and satisfactory Trinitarian theology of religions, his doctrine of the Trinity has important significance for a theological basis for inter-religious dialogue. Tillich’s theory of the doctrine of the Trinity can provide a signpost for further attempts to construct a theological basis for inter-religious dialogue.” Lai, *Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 43.

⁹¹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63).

According to Tillich, “salvation” occurs anywhere men and women encounter the “healing power” of “Christ.”⁹² The Spirit represents the ultimate source of this healing power.⁹³ According to Lai, Tillich’s “theory of the Trinity” has three implications for inter-religious dialogue. First, his doctrine of the Trinity grounds the “possibility and autonomy of other ways of salvation”⁹⁴ by avoiding “an exclusively christocentric conception of the Trinity.”⁹⁵ Second, by affirming that “the three *personae* of the divine Trinity represent three different characters of the divine revelation—the abysmal, logical and spiritual,”⁹⁶ Tillich is able to integrate a wide variety of religious experiences.⁹⁷ Finally, the “participatory ontology” that undergirds Tillich’s understanding of the “Trinity” enables Christians to enter into dialogue based on the assumption that other traditions are “living religions” just like Christianity.⁹⁸

⁹² Lai, *Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 119. Although “Christ” represents the criterion for this healing, “saving power” is not limited to him. Only “God” is savior. “God” saves through “Christ.”

⁹³ “In *The Eternal Now and Systematic Theology Vol. 3*, as we will see in the next chapter, Tillich takes ‘God as Spirit’ as the actual savior and Christ as one of the instruments of salvation. According to this point of view, revelation or salvation ultimately comes from the Spirit; even the ‘final revelation’ is dependent on the power of the Spirit. . . . Thus the Christ event is ontologically dependent on the Spirit.” Lai, *Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 129.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 160.

⁹⁷ “The three persons of the divine Trinity represent different characters of Christian revelation, and these different characters of Christian revelation can contribute to a dialogical attitude toward other religions.” Lai, *Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 163. Lai suggests that parallels exist between Tillich and Panikkar on this point.

⁹⁸ “The participation in the divine life, as described in Tillich’s second dissertation on Schelling, is also the unbroken bond constituted by the cosmic Spirit. It is not dependent on the work of Jesus Christ.

In 1996, Jacques Dupuis outlined his “Christian theology of religious pluralism” which he grounds in trinitarian theology.⁹⁹ According to Dupuis, the “Christian vision of the Triune God” opens the door for a “positive evaluation of other religious traditions.”¹⁰⁰ It does so by providing an interpretive key: “[F]rom a Christian viewpoint the doctrine of the divine Trinity serves as the hermeneutical key for an interpretation of the experience of the Absolute Reality to which other religious traditions testify . . .”¹⁰¹ There are at least five ways in which Dupuis appeals to the Trinity in his proposal. First, the Trinity stands at the center of Dupuis’ ontology.¹⁰² Second, Dupuis claims that all religious experience possesses a trinitarian structure.¹⁰³ Third, the Trinity provides the “hermeneutical key” to relating the universality of God’s saving will to the particularity of Christ, enabling one to move beyond an “exclusivist” approach to non-Christian

Encountering the event Jesus as the Christ is not a prerequisite for participating in the divine life. Tillich’s theory of the Trinity can thus provide an ontological basis for an affirmation of the value of other living religions.” Lai, *Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 164-65.

⁹⁹ Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996). Dupuis’ proposal will be discussed at greater length in chapter four.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 313.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 264. Similarly, “It has been suggested above that a Trinitarian Christological model may serve as a useful hermeneutical key for an open Christian theology of religions” (*ibid.*, 276).

¹⁰² According to Dupuis, “mystery of the Triune God—Father, Son, Spirit—corresponds objectively to the inner reality of God, even though only analogically.” Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 259.

¹⁰³ “An effort has also been made to uncover a Trinitarian structure, no matter how inchoate and imperfect, in all human experience of the Divine. Following this cue, it may be said that the divine Trinity is experienced, though hiddenly and ‘anonymously,’ wherever human beings allow the Divine Reality that impinges upon them to enter into their life. In every authentic religious experience the Triune God of Christian revelation is present and operative.” Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 276-77.

religions without embracing a pluralist perspective. How does one affirm the universality of God's saving will while retaining the particularity of the Christ-event? Simply by recognizing that the "two hands" of God—the Word and the Spirit—are universally present and active in other religions.¹⁰⁴ Fourth, Dupuis reinterprets the centrality of Christ through an appeal to the Trinity in such a way that he is able to affirm other "saviors" who somehow participate in the mediation of Christ.¹⁰⁵ Finally, religious plurality, as an empirical phenomenon, finds its ultimate basis in the plurality of divine life of the Trinity: "The diversity and communion of persons in the Godhead offer the proper key—to be explored hereafter—for understanding the multiplicity of interrelated divine self-manifestations in the world and in history."¹⁰⁶

The following year a collection of ten essays from the Fifth Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference was published under the title *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*.¹⁰⁷ Kevin Vanhoozer explains that the purpose of the conference was to explore the implications of trinitarian thought for our present pluralistic context: "Our working hypothesis is straightforward, but its implications are immense: the doctrine of the Trinity, with its dual emphasis on oneness and threeness as equally ultimate, contains unexpected and

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 300.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 205-06.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 208.

¹⁰⁷ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

hitherto unexplored resources for dealing with the problems, and possibilities, of contemporary pluralism."¹⁰⁸ One distinctive feature of this collection of essays is the way several contributors raise concerns regarding the nature of contemporary appeal to the Trinity in the theology of religions.¹⁰⁹ Three examples will suffice. Although he praises the trinitarian revival that has taken place within western theology, Lesslie Newbigin expresses concern regarding a "possible danger" associated with this revival.¹¹⁰ In "The Trinity as Public Truth," he criticizes attempts on the part of key leaders in the ecumenical movement to present a "trinitarian" approach to mission as an alternative to and replacement for a "Christocentric" model that emphasizes the universal lordship of Christ.¹¹¹ Such a move represents a "grave mistake" according to Newbigin.¹¹² In an essay entitled "The Trinity and 'Other Religions,'"¹¹³ Stephen

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., x. The following questions provided the backdrop for the conference: What role does the Trinity play in a pluralistic context? Does the triune God have other names? Can trinitarian vestiges be found in other religions? Does the Trinity fit into a global theology? If the one true God is also triune, does this provide a nonrepressive way of preserving differences within overall unity?

¹⁰⁹ This is not to suggest that this collection of essays has a polemical focus. Many of them offer constructive proposals. For example, alongside the concerns he expresses, Vanhoozer argues that the Trinity represents "the transcendental condition for interreligious dialogue, the ontological condition that permits us to take the other in all seriousness, without fear, and without violence." Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Does the Trinity Belong in a Theology of Religions? On Angling in the Rubicon and the 'Identity' of God," in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 71.

¹¹⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, "The Trinity as Public Truth," in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 6.

¹¹¹ Newbigin, "The Trinity as Public Truth," 7.

¹¹² Ibid., 8.

¹¹³ Stephen Williams, "The Trinity and 'Other Religions,'" in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 26-40.

Williams raises an important methodological concern regarding the appeal to the Trinity in the works of Raimundo Panikkar (*The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*) as well as Ninian Smart and Stephen Konstantine (*Christian Systematic Theology in World Context*): “One striking feature of both of these contributions is the absence of any discussion of the question of criteria. The criteriological question that must be answered is this: what enables something to count as a formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity?”¹¹⁴ Although both Panikkar and Smart/Konstantine employ trinitarian terms and identify triadic patterns, neither of them answers, or even attempts to answer, this question according to Williams.¹¹⁵ Finally, in an essay entitled “Does the Trinity Belong in a Theology of Religions?”¹¹⁶ Kevin Vanhoozer explores several key trinitarian issues in the Christian theology of religions. One such issue concerns the relation of the Son and the Spirit in the economy of salvation. Vanhoozer expresses concern over the way many contemporary theologies treat the Spirit as a “universalizer.”¹¹⁷ If the Spirit’s activity truly is “universal,” one would not be able “to distinguish the divine from the demonic” nor would there be any good reason exist to limit the Spirit’s work to the

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 28.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 29.

¹¹⁶ Vanhoozer, “Does the Trinity Belong in a Theology of Religions?”, 41-71.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 62.

realm of “religion.”¹¹⁸ Vanhoozer suggests that problematic accounts of the Spirit’s “universal” work arise, at least in part, from a failure to consider how the Spirit relates to Christ: “Does not the narrative identification of the triune God present the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ—not simply the Logos, but the crucified and risen Christ?”¹¹⁹ Contemporary theologians would benefit from reconsidering Reformed teaching regarding the “inseparability of Word and Spirit, and in particular its doctrine of the testimony of the Spirit, for a theology of religions.”¹²⁰

In 2000, two important books were published relating the Trinity to the theology of religions: Gavin D’Costa’s *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*¹²¹ and Amos Yong’s *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to a Christian Theology of Religions*.¹²² In *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* D’Costa argues that pluralists like John Hick are really covert “exclusivists”¹²³ and that the concerns which drive pluralist interpretations of religion (e.g., openness, tolerance and equality) are better addressed within the framework of a Catholic trinitarian theology of religions. Central to D’Costa’s “trinitarian” theology of religions is the universal presence of the Holy Spirit.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 63.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 70.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 69.

¹²¹ Gavin D’Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2000).

¹²² Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to a Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

¹²³ D’Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 22.

Although he believes that the Spirit is universally present and active within non-Christian religions, D'Costa rejects the view that non-Christian religions, *qua* religions, constitute "vehicles of salvation" on the grounds that support for this view cannot be found in conciliar teaching.¹²⁴ D'Costa contends that that presence of the Spirit in non-Christian religions is "intrinsically trinitarian and ecclesiological."¹²⁵ As a result, the work of the Spirit outside the church must analogous to the Spirit's work inside the church. Furthermore, he argues that the presence of the Spirit cannot be severed from the presence of Christ, the Church and the kingdom.¹²⁶ Christian theologians, therefore, should avoid "abstract talk of the 'the Spirit in other religions.'"¹²⁷ Although he acknowledges that the universal presence of the Spirit has implications for non-Christian religions,¹²⁸ D'Costa's discussion focuses upon the implications of the Spirit's

¹²⁴ D'Costa argues that a proper reading of Vatican II and post-conciliar documents leads to the conclusion that non-Christian religions, as such, should not be viewed vehicles of salvation. D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 105.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹²⁷ D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 128. D'Costa claims that, in the process of constructing alternative theologies of religion, a number of Catholic thinkers—including Paul Knitter, Raimundo Panikkar and Jacques Dupuis—have severed "intrinsic relations" that obtain between the persons of the Trinity, the Church and the presence of God in the world. See D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 110.

¹²⁸ "First, there is the question as to what the claim that the Spirit is present in other religions or cultures means for the church and its task of trinitarian theologizing and practice. Second, there is question as to what the claim that the Spirit is present in other religions might mean for that religion. The latter can only follow the process of historical engagement and only retrospectively, and thus I cannot pursue this question further here." D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 116.

presence for the church.¹²⁹ First, it means that salvation is available to adherents of non-Christian religions. Second, it means that the Spirit produces the presence of the kingdom and the church in an “inchoate” form among other religions.¹³⁰ Third, it suggests that through engagement with adherents of other religions, the church may be lead more deeply into the life of God.¹³¹ Fourth, as a result of the Spirit’s universal presence, it is possible that Christians may observe “Christ-likeness” in adherents of other religions.¹³² Finally, because the Spirit inspires every “authentic prayer,” Christian participation in interreligious prayer may, in certain contexts, be appropriate.¹³³

As with D’Costa, the universal presence of the Spirit also plays a central role in the work of Amos Yong. Although a number of Christian theologians have proposed pneumatological approaches to non-Christian religions, *Discerning the Spirit(s)* represents the first book-length attempt to articulate a pneumatological theology of religions. In *Discerning the Spirit(s)* Yong argues on pneumatological grounds that the

¹²⁹ “The Spirit’s presence in other religions is also the source of promise and great joy to the church, for in being open and attentive to the Holy Spirit, it grows in its own relationship to God and those from other religions.” D’Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 130.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹³¹ The church, therefore, must be attentive to the possibility of God’s gift of himself through the prayers and practices of other religions., D’Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 115-16.

¹³² “It must be clear from this that other religions, in keeping with their own self-understanding, may generate profoundly Christ-like behavior.” D’Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 129. Although he is hesitant to refer to non-Christians as “saints,” D’Costa claims that recognition of “holy lives outside the church is extremely significant for the church” and can challenge the church (*ibid.*, 130).

¹³³ D’Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 152.

Holy Spirit is present and active among adherents of non-Christian religions and that Christians must learn to discern the Spirit's presence.¹³⁴ The trinitarian pneumatology he outlines in *Discerning the Spirit(s)* builds upon a distinction between an "economy" of the Word and the "economy" of the Spirit. Because the Spirit acts in an economy distinct from that of the Son, Christians should be able to identify aspects of the Spirit's work that are not constrained by the work of the Son. To this end, Yong outlines a process for discerning the "religious" activity of the Spirit among adherents of other religions that involves three elements (experiential, ethical and theological).

The most sophisticated attempt to date to ground a Christian theology of religions in trinitarian doctrine came in 2001 with the publication of S. Mark Heim's *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*.¹³⁵ Heim claims that the quest for a Christian theology of religions has proceeded from the unwarranted supposition that there can be only *one* religious end. In contrast, Heim argues for *multiple* religious ends. While Christians will experience "salvation" (i.e., communion with the triune God), adherents of other religions may experience other ends which must be distinguished from Christian salvation.¹³⁶ These alternate ends are rooted in the

¹³⁴ Yong's proposal will be discussed at length in chapter four.

¹³⁵ S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*, Sacra Doctrina Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). Heim's proposal will be discussed at length in chapter three.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

“complex” nature of the triune God. The divine life of the triune God is “complex” in that it is constituted by three “dimensions” (“impersonal,” “personal,” and “communion”). When a “relation” with God is pursued exclusively through one of the three “dimensions,” the result is a distinct “religious end” which cannot simply be subsumed under “salvation” (in the Christian sense).¹³⁷ Four kinds of human destiny may result from a relation with one of the trinitarian “dimensions”: Christian salvation, other religious ends, non-religious destinies, and the negation of the created self.

In 2003 Michael Ipgrave wrote a book entitled *Trinity and Inter Faith Dialogue* in which he presents the doctrine of the Trinity as a key “resource” for inter-faith dialogue.¹³⁸ This doctrine can be seen as a resource when one recognizes that the Trinity represents “a universal pattern traceable in all religions.”¹³⁹ Central to Ipgrave’s proposal is a distinction between “Trinity” and “trinity.” The former represents the Father, Son and Spirit of Christian revelation while the latter “serves as a generic name for any triadic account of divinity sharing to some recognizable extent in the patterns of Christian understanding of the Trinity.”¹⁴⁰ In short, Ipgrave proposes that one separate the “structural” or constitutive elements of the Trinity from confession that this

¹³⁷ Ibid., 167-68.

¹³⁸ Michael Ipgrave, *Trinity and Inter Faith Dialogue: Plenitude and Plurality*, Religions and Discourse Series, Vol. 14 (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 21.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 21.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 12. See note 2.

trinitarian God has been revealed in Jesus Christ.¹⁴¹ To this end, he identifies six foundational “trinitarian” elements as a basis for inter-faith engagement.¹⁴² According to Ipgrave, the key elements of successful dialogue (“openness,” “rationality” and affirming “religious experience”) are grounded, respectively, in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; thus, a trinitarian pattern shapes the dialogical process.¹⁴³ Moreover, through the six “trinitarian parameters,” this doctrine provides the key to discussing the divine reality toward which dialogue is directed.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ “Now, all these points are logically separable from a further distinctive characteristic of Christian faith: the confession that the Trinitarian identity of God is made known in Jesus of Nazareth. So it is theoretically possible to distinguish between a structural distinctiveness of the Trinity—telling *what kind* of God it is whom Christians affirm—and an evidential distinctiveness—telling *where* Christians affirm this kind of God to be found. The coherence of this separation is shown by the possibility in principle of imagining a religious faith which taught that God was an eternal and co-equal ‘trinity’, differentiated as three persons and undivided in one substance, yet which made no reference to the event of Jesus Christ.” Ipgrave, *Trinity and Inter Faith Dialogue*, 25 (italics original).

¹⁴² These include: “plurality” (divine reality involves differentiation), “personality” (realities constituted by this differentiation are, in some sense, persons), “threeness” (there are exactly three differentiated persons), “equality” (patterns of equality mark these relationships), “necessity” (any differentiation must be necessary rather than contingent) and “immanence” (differentiation must obtain at every ontological level). Ipgrave, *Trinity and Inter Faith Dialogue*, 27-31.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 325.

¹⁴⁴ These “trinitarian parameters” can be discerned and identified in other religious traditions: “My model of Trinitarian analogy in the reference of language about divine plenitude can therefore be summed up in the following way. Trinitarian doctrine makes a claim about the structure of the divine life: that the ultimate referent of religious language is in reality characterized by the patterns of Trinitarian diversity which mark the Christian understanding of God—patterns which I have identified in terms of six parameters. As this is so in reality, it is not unreasonable to expect some traces of this diversity to be found in the ways in which other religious traditions in turn speak of the divine plenitude. Such traces are grounded both in the given nature of God and concomitantly in human endeavours to express the dynamic of that nature; in those endeavours, people of different religious backgrounds are naturally moulded by the contours of their own developing traditions. Where aspects of a Trinitarian patterning are not present in the way in which a religious tradition speaks of divine plenitude, this absence too is grounded in the same nature of God, but

One final work merits notice. In 2004 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen wrote *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions*.¹⁴⁵ Kärkkäinen briefly explores nine recent attempts to relate trinitarian doctrine to a Christian theology of religions.¹⁴⁶ Four are Roman Catholic (Karl Rahner, Jacques Dupuis, Gavin D'Costa and Raimundo Panikkar) while five of them are Protestant (Karl Barth, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Clark Pinnock, S. Mark Heim and John Hick).¹⁴⁷ Following his analysis of these nine theologians, Kärkkäinen examines recent dialogue between Roman Catholics and Muslims in France as a test case for a "trinitarian" theology of religions. He concludes by identifying a number of issues which need to be addressed "on the way to a more coherent, satisfactory trinitarian theology of religions."¹⁴⁸ Kärkkäinen argues that Christian trinitarian faith is incompatible with any form of "normative" pluralism (e.g., the pluralism of John Hick) and that the issue of "truth" must be taken seriously because Christian truth-claims possess a universal intent.¹⁴⁹ In addition, he argues that greater attention must be paid to the question of what

mediated by differing human endeavours to express that nature." Ipgrave, *Trinity and Inter Faith Dialogue*, 336-37.

¹⁴⁵ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2004).

¹⁴⁶ It should be noted that not all the theologians Kärkkäinen analyzes *explicitly* employ a doctrine of the Trinity as constitutive ground for a Christian theology of religions.

¹⁴⁷ Kärkkäinen groups these proposals under three headings which broadly parallel the "exclusivist," "inclusivist" and "pluralist" positions.

¹⁴⁸ Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism*, 164.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 165-66.

constitutes a legitimate doctrine of the Trinity in the theology of religions.¹⁵⁰ Recent formulations need to be assessed in light of salvation history and the classic creeds.¹⁵¹ Along the way, Kärkkäinen surfaces several problems that arise in recent proposals including severed links between Trinity and Christology, Trinity and salvation-history, Trinity and church and even among the divine persons. He concludes his investigation by identifying several questions that must be answered on the way to an adequate trinitarian theology of religions. These include the following: What relationship exists between the Son and the Spirit *ad extra*? Should “pneumatological” approaches to the theology of religions replace “Christological” approaches? Among current approaches, which are adequate from a biblical and theological standpoint? Finally, what criteria might be employed to evaluate the adequacy of various proposals?¹⁵²

1.3 Does a Doctrine of the Trinity Hold the Key to a Theology of Religions?

Although important differences exist among the proposals outlined above, they share one feature in common: an assumption that the doctrine of the Trinity (or, more

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 169-71.

¹⁵¹ “For classical Christian theology, biblical salvation history and creedal tradition has served as a fence between what was considered a legitimate contextualization and what is not.” Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism*, 170.

¹⁵² Ibid., 182. Many of these requirements and questions will be addressed—on the basis of independent research and reflection—in the present writing.

precisely, a particular construal of this doctrine)¹⁵³ constitutes the basis for a positive interpretation of religious diversity from the standpoint of Christian theology.¹⁵⁴ It is my contention that this assumption merits careful scrutiny. Increasing appeal to trinitarian doctrine in the Christian theology of religions raises a host of questions: Does the doctrine of the Trinity provide a roadmap for inter-religious dialogue? Can “vestiges” of the triune God be found in non-Christian religious experience? Is it legitimate to

¹⁵³ By referring to “the” doctrine of the Trinity I am not implying that there is one particular systematic understanding of the triune God upon which all Christians agree. In this sense, it would be more accurate to speak about “a” doctrine of the Trinity. By speaking of “the” doctrine of the Trinity I have in mind trinitarian doctrine in contrast to other categories of Christian doctrine (e.g., soteriology, anthropology, etc.). Of course, the classic trinitarian *faith* of the Church is confessed in the ancient ecumenical creeds.

¹⁵⁴ In addition to the works discussed above, a number of other theologians also commend (often quite briefly) the doctrine of the Trinity as an important resource for understanding religious diversity. See Daniel P. Sheridan, “Grounded in the Trinity: Suggestions for a Theology of Relationship to Other Religions,” *Thomist* 50 (1986): 260-78; Anthony Kelly, *The Trinity of Love: A Theology of the Christian God*, New Theology Series (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1989), 228-48; Michael Barnes, *Christian Identity & Religious Pluralism: Religions in Conversation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 143; M. Darrol Bryant, “Interfaith Encounter and Dialogue in a Trinitarian Perspective,” in *Christianity and the Wider Ecumenism*, ed. Peter C. Phan (New York: Paragon House, 1990), 3-20; Luco J. van den Brom, “God, Gödel and Trinity: A Contribution to the Theology of Religions,” in *Christian Faith and Philosophical Theology: Essays in Honour of Vincent Brümmer Presented on the Occasion of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of his Professorship in the Philosophy of Religion in the University of Utrecht*, ed. Gijsbert van den Brink, Luco J. van den Brom and Marcel Sarot (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1992), 56-75; Reinhold Bernhardt, “Trinitätstheologie als Matrix einer Theologie der Religionen,” *Ökumenische Rundschau* 49 (2000): 287-301; Hans-Martin Barth, *Dogmatik: evangelischer Glaube im Kontext der Weltreligionen: ein Lehrbuch* (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, 2001); Christoph Schwöbel, *Christlicher Glaube im Pluralismus: Studien zu einer Theologie der Kultur* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Anne Hunt, *Trinity: Nexus of the Mysteries of Christian Faith*, Theology in Global Perspective Series (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2005), 139-64; Reinhold Bernhardt, “The Real and the Trinitarian God,” in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2005), 194-210; Peter C. Hodgson, “The Spirit and Religious Pluralism,” in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2005), 135-50; Harvey G. Cox, Jr., “Make Way for the Spirit,” in *God’s Life in Trinity*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 93-100; Daniel L. Migliore, “The Trinity and the Theology of Religions,” in *God’s Life in Trinity*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 101-117; and Norbert Scholl, *Das Geheimnis der Drei: Kleine Kulturgeschichte der Trinität* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006), 190-94.

appeal to “complexity” in the Trinity as a basis for multiple religious ends? To what extent can one affirm the presence of conflicting economic manifestations of the triune God in other religions without undermining the unity of the economic Trinity with the immanent Trinity? In light of the fact that the divine persons act with one will in the economy of salvation, to what extent—if any—is it appropriate to speak of an “independent” economy of the Spirit?

Not only are the preceding questions important on their own merit, but they are also related to a broader question of how the doctrine of the Trinity should function in contemporary theology. In a review article entitled “The Trinity: A New Wave?” Karen Kilby points out that as interest in trinitarian doctrine has grown, theologians have not paid adequate attention to the question of how this doctrine should function in contemporary theology.¹⁵⁵ Should it regulate the way Christians talk about God, the way they read Scripture and the way they worship, or should it serve as a “launching pad for useful ideas” such as “relatedness” (or, in the case of this investigation, religious diversity)?¹⁵⁶ Kilby’s question is crucial. At the broadest level, my investigation is driven by the question of how the doctrine of the Trinity should function in

¹⁵⁵ Karen Kilby, “The Trinity: A New Wave?” *Reviews in Religion and Theology* 7 (2000): 378-81.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 381.

contemporary theology. I hope to offer a partial answer to Kilby's question by examining the role of trinitarian doctrine in the Christian theology of religions.

The primary subject of this investigation is the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Thus, purpose of this study is *not* to develop a new Christian theology of religions but to evaluate recent appropriation of trinitarian doctrine in the Christian theology of religions. To this end, I will critically assess the trinitarian doctrine in several of the most significant proposals mentioned in preceding narrative. These will include: Mark Heim's trinitarian theology of religious ends; Amos Yong's pneumatological theology of religions; Jacques Dupuis' Christian theology of religious pluralism; and Raimundo Panikkar's trinitarian account of spirituality (along with Ewert Cousins' efforts to link Panikkar's proposal to the vestige tradition). Various factors shaped my selection of these proposals. First, I chose to limit my investigation to proposals in which a doctrine of the Trinity plays an *explicit* constitutive role.¹⁵⁷ Second, I wanted to focus upon proposals that attempt to operate broadly within the context of historic trinitarian orthodoxy. Finally, I wanted to select proposals which would provide a representative cross-section of the kind of appeal to trinitarian doctrine one encounters in the Christian theology of religions. The proposals outlined above offer just such a cross-section. Mark

¹⁵⁷ Obviously trinitarian assumptions play an *implicit* role in every proposal in the Christian theology of religions. The selected proposals are distinctive because of the *explicit* role that trinitarian doctrine plays in each of them.

Heim's trinitarian theology of religious ends merits investigation because it represents one of the most sophisticated attempts (to date) to employ a doctrine of the Trinity as constitutive ground for a Christian theology of religions. Among pneumatologically orientated proposals (e.g., Khodr, D'Costa, Knitter, Lai and Yong), Amos Yong's pneumatological theology of religions represents the most developed version. Whereas many contemporary proposals emphasize pneumatology (over and against Christology), trinitarian Christology plays a crucial role in Jacques Dupuis' Christian theology of religious pluralism. Dupuis' proposal merits investigation both because it represents one of the most sophisticated attempts to argue that non-Christian religions play a salvific role in the economy of salvation and because of the unique role that trinitarian Christology plays in his project. Among proposals that treat non-Christian religions (or religious experience) as reflecting the *triunity* of God (e.g., Panikkar, Cousins, Smart/Konstantine and Heim), Raimundo Panikkar's trinitarian account of spirituality represents the clearest exemplar of a proposal that appeals implicitly to the logic of the vestige tradition.

Several theologians have rightly asserted that one of the pressing issues in the theology of religions concerns criteria by which by which one might assess the adequacy

of recent “trinitarian” proposals.¹⁵⁸ I will argue that with regard to the trinitarian theology they employ, criteria for evaluation are implicitly provided by the most influential trinitarian tradition in the West—namely, the Augustinian trinitarian tradition. In a number of popular narratives of the trinitarian revival, Augustine is blamed not only for the marginalization of Trinitarian doctrine but also for many of the contemporary problems in western society (e.g., individualism).¹⁵⁹ Criticisms notwithstanding, there are good reasons to employ Augustine’s trinitarian theology as a basis for evaluating use of the Trinity in the theology of religions. First, a strong case can be made that popular criticisms of Augustine depend only upon a fundamental misunderstanding of his trinitarian theology.¹⁶⁰ Second, Augustine’s trinitarian theology represents the most influential trinitarian tradition in the West. Thus, in turning to Augustine, one draws upon a tradition which, synchronically and diachronically, constitutes the most representative version of trinitarian doctrine in the history of the church among Catholics and Protestants. Finally, despite popular portrayals to the

¹⁵⁸ See Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism*, 182; and Williams, “The Trinity and ‘Other Religions,’” 28-30.

¹⁵⁹ According to critics, Augustine’s theology “begins” with a unity of divine substance which he allegedly “prioritizes” over the divine persons, his trinitarian reflection is over-determined by Neoplatonic philosophy, his psychological analogy of the Trinity tends toward modalism, and he severs the life of the triune God from the economy of salvation (by focusing on the immanent Trinity). These criticisms can be found in Colin E. Gunton, “Augustine, the Trinity and the Theological Crisis of the West,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43 (1990): 33-58; and Catherine M. LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991).

¹⁶⁰ I will argue this point in chapter two.

contrary, Augustine's trinitarian doctrine shares much in common with the Greek-speaking theologians of the East (e.g., the Cappadocians).¹⁶¹

My investigation is structured around an Augustinian assessment of three central issues that arise from attempts to employ a doctrine of the Trinity as constitutive ground for a Christian theology of religions: (1) the relationship of the economic and the immanent Trinity, (2) the relations among the divine persons (both *ad intra* and *ad extra*) and (3) the *vestigia trinitatis*.¹⁶² That these indeed are crucial issues in the Christian theology of religions will be argued in the chapters that follow. Before I can commence my Augustinian evaluation, however, criticisms of Augustine need to be addressed. These criticisms will be examined in chapter two. Few contemporary theologians have been more critical of Augustine's trinitarian doctrine than Colin Gunton. Thus, Gunton's criticisms will constitute the primary focus of this chapter. Building upon the work of Lewis Ayres and Michael Barnes, I will demonstrate that Gunton's manifold criticisms are rooted in untenable readings of Augustine's trinitarian theology. After

¹⁶¹ This is not to deny the existence of substantive differences between the trinitarian theology of Augustine and that of the Cappadocians. The problem has with how these differences are construed in contemporary theology such that Augustine and the Cappadocians are presented as representing two fundamentally different forms of theology that operate on contrary logics. See chapter two.

¹⁶² My purpose is to offer an Augustinian critique of the trinitarian theology employed in the Christian theology of religions and not an Augustinian critique of contemporary interpretations of religious diversity (i.e., exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism). This represents a crucial point. I am not asking, "What would Augustine think of Jacques Dupuis' Christian theology of pluralism?" but rather, "How adequate is the trinitarian theology which supports Dupuis' Christian theology of pluralism?"

addressing criticisms of Augustine, I will introduce my primary source for Augustine's trinitarian theology—*De Trinitate*.¹⁶³

Arguably, the relationship between the economic and the immanent Trinity represents a key point of debate in contemporary trinitarian theology. In chapter three I will explore the implications of this debate for the Christian theology of religions. Here my primary interlocutor will be Mark Heim. On the basis of an Augustinian account of the relationship of the economic and the immanent Trinity, I will argue that Heim's "trinitarian theology of religious ends" ultimately severs the economic and the immanent Trinity.

Aspects of the divine relations also play an important role in a number of recent proposals in the Christian theology of religions. In chapter four I will explore the relations among the divine persons in Jacques Dupuis' Christian theology of religious pluralism and Amos Yong's pneumatological theology of religions. On the basis of an Augustinian grammar of relations, I will critically evaluate the proposals of Yong and Dupuis arguing that they offer inadequate accounts of the divine relations.

A number of Christian theologians have suggested that trinitarian structures can be discerned in non-Christian religious experience and that this reality bears witness to

¹⁶³ All English citations of *De Trinitate* will be taken from Edmund Hill's translation: Saint Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991). References will be put in the following format "Augustine, *De Trin.* I.7, 69" where "I.7" names the book and paragraph while "69" names the page number in Hill's translation. References to Hill's notes will be put in the following format: "Hill, *The Trinity*, 25."

the validity of non-Christian religions. In chapter five I will examine this assumption in the work of Raimundo Panikkar and Ewert Cousins. On the basis of an Augustinian grammar of the *vestigia trinitatis*, I will critically evaluate the trinitarian grammar that grounds Panikkar's theology of religious experience arguing that Cousins unwittingly exposes the problems with Panikkar's proposal by explicitly linking it to the vestige tradition.

In chapter six I will consider the implications of this entire investigation both for the Christian theology of religions as well as the "use" of trinitarian doctrine in contemporary theology. In conversation with Augustine, I will argue that there is good reason to question the assertion that the "Trinity" represents the key to a new understanding of religious diversity, and that current "use" of trinitarian theology in the Christian theology of religions appears to be having a deleterious effect upon the doctrine. Moreover, I will demonstrate that the trinitarian problems that arise in the theology of religions can also be seen in attempts to relate the doctrine of the Trinity to a variety of other issues (e.g., personhood, ecclesiology, society, politics, science, etc.). These problems arise from a problematic understanding of what it means for a doctrine of the Trinity to be "relevant." I will close by considering how Augustine challenges us to rethink the "relevancy" of the Trinity.

2. Reclaiming the Augustinian Trinitarian Tradition

Although virtually everyone would agree that the Augustinian trinitarian tradition has exerted a dominant influence for many centuries in the West, not everyone views Augustine's influence as positive. In many narratives of the twentieth-century trinitarian revival, Augustine is scapegoated as responsible for severing the life of the triune God from the economy of salvation, marginalizing the doctrine of the Trinity and contributing to a number of the problems that plague modern culture. Viewed in this light, appropriating Augustine's trinitarian doctrine may seem about as prudent as boarding a sinking ocean-liner after most of the passengers have wisely abandoned ship. Indeed, any appeal to Augustine may, in the minds of some readers, serve to solidify the impression that this entire project should be viewed with suspicion. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to reclaim the fountainhead of this tradition by demonstrating that contemporary criticisms of Augustine depend upon problematic readings of his trinitarian theology. The bulk of this chapter will be devoted to identifying and responding to these criticisms. At the end of the chapter, I will offer a brief introduction to *De Trinitate* which will provide the basis for the reading of Augustine to be developed subsequently.

2.1 Contemporary Criticisms of Augustine

Few contemporary theologians have been more critical of Augustine's trinitarian doctrine than Colin Gunton. In *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* Gunton offers a wide-ranging critique of Augustine's trinitarian theology.¹ Because the vast majority of the contemporary criticisms of Augustine can be found in Gunton's work, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* will represent the focal point for my analysis. According to Gunton, the single greatest influence upon Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity was not the teaching of Scripture and the church teaching but rather "neo-Platonism."² The negative influence of Neoplatonic thought can be seen in the way Augustine prioritizes the divine substance over the persons, in his fear of the material world, in his search for trinitarian analogies and in his doctrine of the Spirit. After outlining Gunton's criticisms, I will offer a point by point response.

¹ Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991). Similar criticisms can also be found in idem, *The One, the Three, and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

² See Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 38-39. A more subtle version of this criticism can also be found in the work of Cornelius Plantinga. Plantinga suggests that two sources feed Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity and that this reality leads to a paradoxical and ultimately incoherent understanding of the triune God. While Scripture moves Augustine toward a social understanding of Father, Son and Spirit, Neoplatonism pushes him in a different direction: "In sum, Augustine has biblical materials that lead him to talk as if Father, Son and Spirit are distinct persons. He also has Neoplatonic convictions that lead him to assert claims from which it seems to follow that *Father, Son and Spirit* are, in effect, three names for the divine essence conceived of as self-related according to paternity, filiation, and procession. How these two tendencies in Augustine cohere is remarkably hard to see." Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., "Social Trinity and Tritheism," in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays*, ed. Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 33 (italics original). Similar criticisms can also be found in Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., "The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity," *Calvin Theological Journal* 23 (1988): 37-53.

2.1.1 Substance and Person

According to Gunton, Augustine failed to understand the conceptual “revolution” brought about by the Cappadocians.³ More specifically, he failed to comprehend the ontological implications of the distinction the Cappadocians drew between *hypostasis* and *ousia*. By distinguishing *hypostasis* and *ousia*, the Cappadocians not only provided a grammar for distinguishing the oneness and threeness of God but also developed a radically new ontology in which the being of God (*ousia*) was understood to be *constituted* by a communion of persons. In this context, there is no “substance” which the persons share apart from the “dynamic of persons in relation.”⁴ Gunton believes that the Cappadocians were fully aware of the conceptual revolution they ushered in—a revolution which “stood in opposition to all Greek ontology.”⁵

“[B]ecause he failed to appropriate the ontological achievement of his Eastern colleagues,” Augustine “allowed the insidious return of Hellenism in which being is not communion, but something underlying it.”⁶ As proof of the latter, Gunton cites a text in which Augustine acknowledges that he does not understand the nature of the

³ Gunton’s reading of the Cappadocians draws heavily upon the work of John Zizioulas. See John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), 27-65.

⁴ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 10.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

distinction that the “Greeks” draw between *hypostasis* and *ousia*.⁷ Although Augustine realizes that different concepts are required to express the reality that God is both one and three, his “adoption of the correct Latin equivalents does not enable him to get the point,” says Gunton, because later in the same section of Book V Augustine acknowledges that he uses the term *tres personae* only so that he is not reduced to silence.⁸ Further evidence that Augustine did not understand the “Cappadocian revolution” can be seen in the way he explains the divine relations. Augustine’s discussion is driven by a different question than the Cappadocians. According to Gunton, he is not asking “What kind of being is this, that God is to be found in the relations of Father, Son and Spirit? but, What kind of sense can be made of the apparent logical oddity of the threeness of the one God in terms of Aristotelian subject-predicate logic?”⁹ Beginning, as he does, with the one God as “substance,” Augustine has a difficult time fitting in the three persons. “Relation” (which must be distinguished both from substance and accident) merely provides Augustine with a *theoretical* basis for

⁷ “The Greeks also have another word, *hypostasis*, but they make a distinction that is rather obscure to me between *ousia* and *hypostasis*, so that most of our people who treat of these matters in Greek are accustomed to say *mia ousia, treis hypostaseis*, which is literally one being, three substances.” Augustine, *De Trin.* V.10, 196.

⁸ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 40. The text from *De Trinitate* to which Gunton refers is the following: “Yet when you ask ‘Three what?’ human speech labors under a great dearth of words. So we say three persons, not in order to say that precisely, but in order not to be reduced to silence.” Augustine, *De Trin.* V.10, 196.

⁹ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 40.

plurality in God.¹⁰ Augustine is simply “unable to break out of the stranglehold of the dualistic ontology which underlies the logic.”¹¹ As a result, the relations do not qualify the persons *ontologically*.¹² This represents “a clear step back” from the teaching of the Cappadocians:

For them, the three persons are what they are in their relations, and therefore the relations qualify them ontologically, in terms of what they are. Because Augustine continues to use relation as a logical rather than an ontological predicate, he is precluded from being able to make claims about the being of the *particular* persons, who, because they lack distinguishable identity, tend to disappear into the all-embracing oneness of God.¹³

It is for this reason, asserts Gunton, that Augustine’s trinitarian theology (as well as the western theology that follows him) tends to be “modalist.”¹⁴ Unlike the Cappadocians

¹⁰ This move then paves the way for “the later, and fateful, *definition* of the person as a *relation*.” Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 40 (italics original).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹² According to Gunton, evidence that this is the case can be seen in Augustine’s insistence that the relations do not modify the substance. “Begotten” for Augustine does not modify the essence but simply names a relation.

¹³ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 41-42 (italics original). Gunton echoes this same criticism later when he says that “Augustine’s own attempts to come to terms with the matter [concept of person] are marked by an extreme woodenness in the use of logical categories, so that *relation* remains a concept owing more to Aristotelian logic than to attention to concrete and personal realities” (*ibid.*, 96-97).

¹⁴ “Let me introduce the topic by noting a contrast between the Cappadocian and Augustinian conceptions of the Trinity. The latter is modalist in direction, if not actually modalist, in the sense that the three persons of the Trinity tend to be conceived as posterior to an underlying *deitas* or being of which they are, so to speak, outcrops. By contrast, the Cappadocian development, which Augustine so signally failed to appreciate, is that there is no being anterior to that of the persons. The being of God is the persons in relation to each other.” Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 74.

who view the being of God as the “unfolding” of the three persons, Augustine views the true being of God as somehow “underlying” the threeness of the persons.¹⁵

2.1.2 Materiality and the Incarnation

A second example of the negative influence of Neoplatonism can be seen in Augustine’s attitude toward the material world: “It is well known that Augustine was suspicious of the material world.”¹⁶ Along with other “Platonists,” he found it difficult to believe that the material realm could be a real vehicle of genuine knowledge. Although the incarnation plays an important role in his theology, it is clear that “the doctrine of the divinity of Christ is more important to Augustine than that of the humanity.”¹⁷ As a result, his Christology possesses a “docetic” character.¹⁸ Although “anti-Arian zeal” may be partially responsible for this lacuna, this problem is so pervasive that other factors must also be involved—particularly “neoplatonic assumptions of the material order’s incapacity to be really and truly the bearer of divinity.”¹⁹ Gunton claims that “anti-incarnational platonism” can be seen in

¹⁵ Ibid., 42.

¹⁶ Ibid., 33.

¹⁷ Ibid., 34.

¹⁸ Ibid., 34.

¹⁹ Ibid., 35.

Augustine's discussion of the Old Testament theophanies.²⁰ Augustine appears to be "embarrassed by too close an involvement of God in matter."²¹ In Augustine's theology, angels replace the Son as mediators of God's relation with the world. Not only does this reflect his tendency to spiritualize, but, "by losing the mediatorship of the Word," Augustine also "distances God from the creation and flattens out the distinctions between the persons of the Trinity."²² By making these moves, Augustine breaks with a tradition that can be traced to Irenaeus in which the Father relates *directly* to the world through the Son and Spirit. Augustine replaces this tradition with an "unknown God working through angels."²³

A second example of "anti-incarnational platonism" can be found in Augustine's discussion of the baptism of Jesus in which he does not give "due weight" to Jesus' humanity.²⁴ As evidence of the latter, Gunton cites a passage in Book XV in which Augustine explains that the Spirit was already upon Jesus prior to his baptism.²⁵ Had Augustine given due weight to the humanity of Jesus, he should have recognized that

²⁰ Ibid., 35.

²¹ Ibid., 35.

²² Ibid., 36.

²³ Ibid., 37.

²⁴ Ibid., 37.

²⁵ "It would be the height of absurdity to believe that he only received the Holy Spirit when he was already thirty years old—that was the age at which he was baptized by John; no, we must believe that just as he came to that baptism without any sin, so he came to it not without the Holy Spirit." Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.46, 431.

Jesus “entered a new form of relationship with the Spirit” at his baptism.²⁶ Augustine, however, “appears to treat the Spirit, in anticipation of a long tradition of Western thought, substantially rather than personally and relationally: as if the Spirit was a substantial presence, given in the womb and, so to speak, preprogramming Jesus’ life, rather than the means by which his humanity was realized in relationship to the Father.”²⁷ Although these may seem like relatively minor points, Gunton assures his readers they are part of a larger negative pattern in Augustine’s theology.

One final example of Augustine’s fear of the material world can be seen in his unwillingness to search for analogies of the Trinity in the *material* realm. Gunton insists that the doctrine of the incarnation should lead us to view the material world as possessing “theological meaning.”²⁸ If God is present in the human form in Jesus Christ, then the world must also possess special theological meaning; however, Augustine does not really believe that God is fully present in the humanity of Christ. If he did believe this, he would not view the material world as the “least adequate source” for analogies of the Trinity.²⁹

²⁶ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 37.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

2.1.3 Trinitarian Analogies

Gunton rejects the claim that Augustine's "analogies are merely illustrative of the church's dogma, a penetration into its inner logic."³⁰ On the contrary, his analogies "impose upon the doctrine of the Trinity a conception of the divine threeness which owes more to Neoplatonic philosophy than to the triune economy, and that the outcome is, again, a view of an unknown substance *supporting* the three persons rather than being *constituted* by their relatedness."³¹ The foundation for Augustine's trinitarian doctrine is not the economy of salvation but a particular "conception of a threefold mind."³² One of the odd features about *De Trinitate* is the fact that Augustine spends very little time explaining what the doctrine of the Trinity actually is. Instead he only offers a few brief summaries. This reinforces the perception that Augustine does not want to "explain" the teaching of the church but rather to "illustrate" it with reference to something external.

Two features characterize Augustine's search for trinitarian analogies according to Gunton: individualism and intellectualism. Evidence of the former can be seen in the fact that, unlike Richard of St. Victor, Augustine does not search for analogies of the Trinity in human *community* but rather in the individual *person*. Evidence of the latter

³⁰ Ibid., 42.

³¹ Ibid., 42-43 (italics original).

³² Ibid., 43.

can be seen in Augustine's decision to treat the human mind as the best "analogy" for the Trinity. His individualism serves to reinforce the "oneness" of God while his intellectualism treats God as a kind of "supermind."³³

Gunton also contests Augustine's assertion that his most important triad is not memory, understanding and will *in itself* but the mind as it remembers, understands and loves God: "I believe, against all this, that the triad of memory, understanding and will is determinative for Augustine's conception of the Trinity."³⁴ A definitive piece of evidence includes the following: when Augustine attempts to distinguish the Son and the Spirit in Book XV, he ultimately appeals to memory, understanding and will (in itself). Thus, "*The crucial analogy for Augustine is between the inner structure of the human mind and the inner being of God, because it is in the former than the latter is made known, this side of eternity at any rate, more really than in the 'outer' economy of grace.*"³⁵ That this is this case simply reflects Augustine's dependence upon "a platonizing doctrine of knowledge as recollection."³⁶ The Father (likened to memory) becomes the storehouse of knowledge while the Word (likened to understanding) becomes part of the content of the divine mind. The Spirit, in this context, is simply likened to will. No justification exists for the

³³ Ibid., 44.

³⁴ Ibid., 45.

³⁵ Ibid., 45 (italics original).

³⁶ Ibid., 45.

latter in the economy of salvation. Thus, Augustine's choice to associate the Spirit with the will can only be explained in terms of the negative influence of Neoplatonic thought. Augustine's stress upon the mind as image of the Trinity led to "fateful consequences" in western theology by directing attention away from the economy of salvation toward the mind as the source of divine knowledge.

2.1.4 Doctrine of the Spirit

Gunton claims that Augustine's conception of the Holy Spirit represents "the Achilles' heel" of his trinitarian theology. Although he attempts to marshal biblical support for his conception of the Spirit, his doctrine of the Spirit is deeply shaped "by his need to have a third person corresponding to the will in the threefold mind."³⁷ Although he acknowledges that *some* biblical warrant exists for speaking of Spirit as "gift," Gunton insists, nonetheless, that "gift" does not provide an adequate basis for distinguishing the Spirit from the Son (particularly in light of the fact that Scripture also uses gift language to describe the sacrifice of the Son). Similar problems also arise in Augustine's attempt to posit "love" as a distinguishing characteristic of the Spirit. No scriptural warrant exists for attributing "love" exclusively to the Spirit. These problems

³⁷ Ibid., 48.

simply reflect Augustine's "single-minded" desire to fit the Spirit into a pre-determined conceptual framework that bypasses the economy of salvation.

By operating in a dualistic framework which limits the work of the Spirit to connecting *individuals* to God, Augustine misses the biblical emphasis upon the "eschatological dimension" of the Spirit's work as well as the role of the Spirit in creating community.³⁸ This leads him to conceptualize the church as an "institution mediating grace to the individual rather than [as] the community formed on the analogy of the Trinity's *interpersonal* relationships."³⁹ Because his doctrine of the Spirit largely brackets the economy of salvation, Augustine is unable "to give personal distinctiveness to the being of the Spirit in the inner Trinity."⁴⁰

In his discussion of Augustine's teaching on the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son, Gunton dismisses the claim that important continuities exist between Augustine's notion of double procession and the Eastern view that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *through* the Son. In light of the fact that "major differences" exist between Augustine and the Cappadocians on other points, significant differences must exist on this point as well.⁴¹ Although the dual-procession of the Spirit certainly

³⁸ Ibid., 50.

³⁹ Ibid., 51 (*italics original*).

⁴⁰ Ibid., 51.

⁴¹ Ibid., 52.

provides a conceptual apparatus for distinguishing the Son and Spirit, readers must ask whether Augustine “is able to handle the ontological revolution that is required by a theology of the Trinity.”⁴² Gunton insists that the answer to this question is no. By failing to comprehend the Cappadocian revolution (i.e., that God’s being consists in communion), Augustine locates the ultimate principle of being somewhere else. What is ultimately real about the Trinity for Augustine, therefore, is not a community constituted by Father, Son and Holy Spirit but the “divine substance.”⁴³

2.1.5 The Abysmal Legacy of Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology

In addition to the problems that plague the *content* of Augustine’s trinitarian theology, Gunton identifies several negative effects of Augustine’s *legacy*: “Augustine’s work is so brilliant that it blinded generations of theologians to its damaging weaknesses.”⁴⁴ First, by severing the life of the triune God from the economy of salvation,⁴⁵ Augustine paved the way for the marginalization of the doctrine of the

⁴² Ibid., 53.

⁴³ In this context, Gunton approvingly cites Wolfson’s claim that while Tertullian, Nicaea and Basil identify the Father as the *substratum* of God, Augustine teaches that the Son and Spirit “derive only their existence, not their divinity,” from the Father. See H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 397. This leads to the conclusion that the “divine substance” displaces the Father as the “basis of the being of God.” Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 54.

⁴⁴ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 39.

⁴⁵ “[B]y seeking for pattern of threeness apart from the economy of salvation—what actually happens in Christ and with the Spirit—Augustine introduces a tendency to draw apart the being of God—what he is eternally—and his act—what he does in time.” Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 3.

Trinity.⁴⁶ Under the influence of Augustine's legacy, the Trinity became "dogma to be believed rather than as the living focus of life and thought,"⁴⁷ as well as a problem to be solved rather than a summary of the gospel.⁴⁸

Second, Augustine's trinitarian theology is responsible for the individualism that plagues contemporary western culture. A direct link can be seen between Augustine and Descartes. Descartes treats the human person as a "thinking thing, the intellectual reality to which all other human experiences ultimately reduce."⁴⁹ By identifying the human person with the mind (and only to a more limited degree with the body), Descartes reinforces "a strongly individualist and dualist view of what we are."⁵⁰ By "flattening out" the distinctiveness of the divine persons, failing to understand the Cappadocian account of *hypostasis* and seeking analogues of the Trinity in an individual

⁴⁶ Catherine LaCugna offers a similar criticism: "[T]he sharpened distinction between the triune God of salvation history and the Trinity of persons within God drastically transformed, under the influence of Augustine, the direction and substance of future Christian theology in the West. The doctrine of the Trinity gradually would be understood to be the exposition of the relations of God *in se*, with scarce reference to God's acts in salvation history." Catherine M. LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 81.

⁴⁷ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

human mind, Augustine paved the way for modern individualism.⁵¹ Thus, a “direct link” can be seen between Augustine and Descartes:

Again and again in the *De Trinitate* the godlikeness of the human person is located in the mind, and there is in this respect a direct link between Augustine and modern tradition stemming from Descartes. Christopher Kaiser’s judgment must therefore be deemed fundamentally correct that in Augustine ‘the complete dissociation of (the) eternal intra-trinitarian relations from ordinary human relations forced him into a rather static concept of deity, on the one hand, and an individualistic concept of humanity, on the other.’⁵²

By way of contrast, a relational understanding of the human person can be traced to the Cappadocians (especially Basil of Caesarea): “By giving priority to the concept of person in their doctrine of God, they transform at once the meaning of both concepts. The being of God is not now understood in the way characteristic of Greek metaphysics, but in terms of communion.”⁵³ Gunton cites Basil as describing the triune God as a kind of “indivisible community.”⁵⁴ God’s being is therefore constituted by “the community of *hypostaseis* who give and receive their reality to and from one another.”⁵⁵

⁵¹ Gunton claims that these moves also represent an important departure from the earlier western trinitarian theologies of Tertullian and Hilary. By stressing the monarchy of the Father and distinctiveness of the persons, these theologians avoid the individualism into which Augustine falls: “The general point to be made is that there is in these thinkers a movement towards a relational concept of the persons in God which maintains their distinctiveness in a way that is absent from Augustine.” Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 95.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 95.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

Finally, Augustine's trinitarian theology leads ineluctably to a deficient ecclesiology. Although one cannot draw a straight line from the immanent Trinity to ecclesial practice,⁵⁶ Gunton believes that there is an important sense in which the being of the church indirectly "echoes" the relations of the divine persons.⁵⁷ In such a context, the trinitarian theologies of Augustine and the Cappadocians (which might be respectively characterized as modalist and relational) lead to "correspondingly different ecclesiologies."⁵⁸ Read in terms of ecclesiology, Augustine's trinitarian theology "conceives of the being of the church as in some sense anterior to the concrete historical relationships of the visible community."⁵⁹ This ecclesiology involves a "Platonized" view of the church in which the "invisible church" (and, hence, the "real church") exists "ontologically prior" to and apart from the historical community.⁶⁰ In contrast, Cappadocian trinitarian thought leads to a very different (and clearly preferable)

⁵⁶ Ibid., 73-74.

⁵⁷ "If there is [an analogy between the Trinity and the church], it should be an indirect kind, in which the church is seen as called to be a, so to speak, finite echo or bodying forth of the divine personal dynamics." Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 74. Gunton also claims that "the church is what it is by virtue of being called to be a temporal echo of the eternal community that God is" (ibid., 79).

⁵⁸ Ibid., 74.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 74-75.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 75.

understanding of the church as a “visible” community which echoes the “perichoretic interrelation” of the three divine persons.⁶¹

2.2 Rereading Augustine

In the discussion that follows I will argue that Gunton’s criticisms rest upon multiple misunderstandings of Augustine’s trinitarian theology; however, before we examine Gunton’s criticisms, it is important first to consider *why* Augustine is frequently misread.⁶² At least four factors drive contemporary misreadings of Augustine’s theology.⁶³ First, most contemporary readings of Augustine’s trinitarian theology are held captive to the “de Régnon paradigm.” As Michel Barnes notes, “[N]othing is more common in contemporary systematics than the inability to read Augustine outside of de Régnon’s paradigm.”⁶⁴ Théodore de Régnon (1831-1893) was a French Jesuit who wrote a multi-volume history of trinitarian doctrine entitled *Études de théologie positive sur la*

⁶¹ Ibid., 83. Gunton claims that the seventeenth century Puritan, John Owen, was the first to develop “an ontology of the church as a community” (ibid., 75). Owen’s description of the church (especially his use of “person,” “cause” and “relation”) echoes the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocians: “The being of the church consists in the relations of the persons to each other” (ibid., 76). Gunton further argues that the “free relations” which Owens claims should mark the church echo “the Cappadocian teaching that God is what he is in virtue of what the Father, Son and Spirit give to and receive from each other” (ibid., 76). Thus, Owen’s description of the church as “a community of freely relating persons must be accepted for what it is: an ecclesiology which echoes God’s eternal being in relation” (ibid., 77).

⁶² It will become clear as this discussion proceeds that I am deeply indebted to the work of Michel Barnes and Lewis Ayres.

⁶³ Although I know of no single essay in which Michel Barnes explicitly groups these four points, they represent a synthetic summary of the problems he identifies in various contexts.

⁶⁴ Michel R. Barnes, “Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology,” *Theological Studies* 56 (1995): 239.

Sainte Trinité.⁶⁵ Ironically, de Régnon is both “the most influential and yet least known of Catholic historians of doctrine.”⁶⁶ The extent of de Régnon’s influence can be seen in the widespread endorsement of his characterization of the theologies of Augustine and the Cappadocians while his obscurity is rooted in the fact that his paradigm is frequently cited in the English-speaking world without any explicit reference to its progenitor. De Régnon believed that doctrinal history could be divided into specific eras which are marked by particular “doctrinal paradigms” (Barnes’ term).⁶⁷ De Régnon drew a distinction between “patristic” and “scholastic” paradigms. In the “patristic” paradigm (exemplified by the Cappadocians), “the divine is always encountered in or as person” while in the “scholastic” paradigm (exemplified by Augustine), “divinity is always understood in or as a nature.”⁶⁸ It is de Régnon’s paradigm, therefore, that stands behind the claim that Augustine prioritized the divine nature over the persons (while the Cappadocians prioritized the persons over the divine nature).⁶⁹ Interestingly,

⁶⁵ Théodore de Régnon, *Études de théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité* (Paris: Victor Retaux et fils, 1892, 1898).

⁶⁶ Michel R. Barnes, “De Régnon Reconsidered,” *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995): 51.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 54. Unlike contemporary theologians, de Régnon does not limit the “patristic” paradigm to the Cappadocians: “De Régnon does maintain that the patristic doctrinal paradigm of the Trinity finds its most developed expression in Cappadocian theology, but he never limits the emphasis upon person over nature to Greek theology. Although later scholars often identify this doctrinal paradigm with Cappadocian or Greek theology, de Régnon himself never made this identification, and indeed this kind of identification contradicts his overall point. De Régnon never reads pre-Augustinian Latins out of this patristic emphasis on the individual persons” (*ibid.*, 54).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

belief in a “Greek” versus “Latin” paradigm represents a modern phenomenon: “only theologians of the last one hundred years have ever thought it was true,” according to Barnes.⁷⁰ Although numerous works arrange their history of trinitarian theology around this paradigm, “[n]one of them shows any awareness that the paradigm needs to be demonstrated, or that it has a history.”⁷¹ Contemporary theologians are attracted to de Régnon’s paradigm because of their preference for “architectonic” narratives which understand doctrinal development “in terms of the internal logic of an idea.”⁷²

Another factor that drives contemporary misreadings is a tendency to read Augustine’s trinitarian theology in isolated pieces combined with a failure to contextualize his thought.⁷³ The former practice began in the medieval period when portions of *De Trinitate* (e.g., Books V-VII) circulated independent of the whole. In more

⁷⁰ Barnes, “Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology,” 238.

⁷¹ Ibid., 238. While much English-language scholarship uncritically assimilated de Régnon’s paradigm, the reaction of French scholarship has been different: “French scholarship, on the other hand, has had a lively running argument over whether de Régnon was right about his paradigm . . .” Barnes, “De Régnon Reconsidered,” 55. Although there are problems with the French critique of de Régnon, at least “French Augustinians understand that, from the hermeneutical point of view, de Régnon’s paradigm represents a moment in Catholic scholastic trinitarian theology, an understanding that is largely lost among English language scholars . . .” (ibid., 56).

⁷² Barnes continues, “What seems to me to be distinctive about the systematicians’ quest for comprehensiveness is that way in which it is tied to understanding change in a cultural form, that is to say in a doctrine, in terms of the logic of an idea.” Barnes, “Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology,” 242-43. In such a context, there is a danger that the relationship between systematic and historical theology parallels “a conversation between a ventriloquist and her or his prop” (ibid., 244).

⁷³ Michel R. Barnes, “Rereading Augustine’s Theology of the Trinity,” in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, Gerald O’Collins, (New York : Oxford, 1999), 147.

subtle ways this practice continues in contemporary theology. Augustine's trinitarian theology is frequently mediated through a handful of dismembered citations. Moreover, even when all his trinitarian writings are read as a whole, they are frequently read out of context. Barnes suggests that four contexts are crucial for understanding Augustine: (1) the context of Augustine's complete trinitarian writings, (2) the context of other contemporary Latin trinitarian writings in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, (3) the context of contemporary Latin polemical writings during the same period and, finally, (4) the context of prior authoritative trinitarian teaching from the second and third centuries.⁷⁴ Although one might imagine that numerous studies have been done that attempt to locate Augustine's trinitarian theology in the above contexts, in reality "there is no variety of such studies; indeed, studies of this sort can hardly be found at all."⁷⁵ One is hard pressed, for example, to find detailed studies chronicling Augustine's debt to Latin Christian predecessors such as Tertullian.⁷⁶ On the contrary, most efforts at "contextualizing" Augustine's trinitarian theology have focused almost exclusively upon his debt to Neoplatonism (in the context of the de Régnon paradigm). This

⁷⁴ Ibid., 147.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 151.

⁷⁶ "Such discussions as there are reduce Augustine to Tertullian, or position this debt in terms of de Régnon's paradigm: e.g., how does Augustine's theory of relations differ from that of Gregory of Nazianzus? We are brought to the odd position that, according to many systematic theologians, the influence of philosophy in religious doctrine is fundamental, while the influence of prior expositions of religious doctrines is not." Barnes, "Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology," 244.

“contextualization” leads to the conclusion that Augustine’s *emphasis* upon divine unity is the result of Neoplatonic influence.⁷⁷ Although exploration of the “Neoplatonic” character of Augustine’s theology may once have served to contextualize his theology in terms of its doctrinal development, it no longer functions that way. Rather than opening possibilities for understanding Augustine, thinking of him as a Neoplatonist “has shut down possibilities for reading him.”⁷⁸

A third factor that influences misreadings of Augustine’s trinitarian theology is a failure to distinguish between the teaching of Augustine and later “Augustinian” developments. These later “developments” often constitute the basis for (unjustified) criticisms of Augustine. Augustine, for example, is frequently criticized for his

⁷⁷ The latter claim is dependent upon the work of Oliver du Roy: “For many theologians writing about Augustine’s trinitarian theology, the larger ‘external’ narrative is simply de Régnon’s grand scheme of ‘western trinitarian theology *begins with* (in the sense of ‘presumes’ and ‘is ultimately concerned with’) divine unity (i.e., the essence) while eastern trinitarian theology *begins with* divine diversity (i.e., the persons)’. The narrative provided by de Régnon’s paradigm is filled in, as it were, with [Oliver] du Roy’s work to provide the following ‘historical context’: ‘the emphasis in Augustine’s trinitarian theology on divine unity is indebted to the influence of neoplatonism’.” Barnes, “Rereading Augustine’s Theology of the Trinity,” 152 (italics original). See also idem, “Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology,” 244.

⁷⁸ Michel R. Barnes, “The Logic of Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology,” Unpublished paper presented at the “Aquinas the Augustinian Conference” (February 4, 2005), 2. According to Barnes, there are three problems with reading Augustine’s theology as an expression of Latin Neoplatonism. First, the view of Neoplatonism presumed in this narrative is no longer tenable. Second, the secondary work that supposedly supports this reading (particularly du Roy’s work) does not in fact support this reading. Finally, this approach is unable to account for the *doctrinal* content it allegedly purports to explain. Barnes, “Rereading Augustine’s Theology of the Trinity,” 153. Rather than understanding Neoplatonism as the defining context for Augustine’s trinitarian theology, Barnes argues that a “more credible historical context” represents “Latin ‘catholic’ theology of the late fourth and early fifth centuries (‘catholic’ meaning Latin theology which looked to the reception of Nicaea as normative).” Barnes, “Rereading Augustine’s Theology of the Trinity,” 174.

“psychological analogy” of the Trinity. This criticism wrongly assumes that Augustine’s “psychological analogy” plays a dominant role in his theology. In an essay exploring the core elements of Augustine’s trinitarian theology, Michel Barnes argues that triad of memory, understanding and will should *not* be numbered among the core elements of his thought.⁷⁹ Although this mental triad plays an important role in *de Trinitate*, there are “many significant discussions by Augustine of the Trinity in which the triad makes no appearance whatsoever.”⁸⁰ Augustine’s use of this triad is merely “opportunistic, not fundamental and necessary.”⁸¹ This reality stands in contrast with later medieval trinitarian thought in which the mental triad clearly plays a dominant role. To read Augustine’s psychological analogy as a core element of his trinitarian thought is to

⁷⁹ See Barnes, “The Logic of Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology,” 7-11. Barnes identifies three core elements in Augustine’s trinitarian theology: (1) the doctrine of God’s immaterial nature, (2) doctrine of common operations of the divine persons and (3) doctrine that theological language is meant to purify our thoughts about God.

⁸⁰ Barnes, “The Logic of Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology,” 11.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 9. “In short, we may contrast the recurring expressions of Thomas’ core doctrines on the Trinity with the occasional employment by Augustine of a noetic triad as compared to other aspects of Augustine’s discussions of the Trinity that do appear with great regularity. It is not only possible but common for Augustine to treat Trinitarian theology without invoking the noetic triad of memory, intelligence and will, or any sort of ‘psychological analogy.’ The appearance of the triad in a given work is determined not by the requirements of articulating an orthodox Trinitarian theology, but for some other reason or reasons. In most cases the “other reason or reasons” are announced by Augustine as being some combination of the three concepts I have judged to be foundational for Augustine’s Trinitarian theology, namely, the reality of God’s immaterial nature shaping our discourse about Him, the reality of perfect inseparable operations in the Trinity, and the necessity that theological language elevate our mind and heart from physical notions of God to spiritual realities.” Barnes, “The Logic of Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology,” 11.

transform Augustine into a medieval figure.⁸² The tendency to read Augustine through the lens of Thomas Aquinas and other medieval theologians is quite prevalent.⁸³

Another instance of reading later developments into Augustine's thought can be seen in Karl Rahner's famous essay on the Trinity. Rahner claims that the marginalization of the Trinity in contemporary theology is attributable, at least in part, to the practice of treating the doctrine of God under two headings in theology manuals: (1) *De Deo Uno* and (2) *De Deo Trino*. Although Rahner acknowledges that this practice did not *explicitly* arise until the medieval period, he appears to trace its origin back to Augustine.⁸⁴ In so doing, he reads de Régnon's paradigm back into Augustine.⁸⁵ Augustine, however, makes no distinction between "God" and "the Trinity."⁸⁶

⁸² This is precisely what de Régnon's typology does when it locates Augustine as an exemplar of a "scholastic" era over and against the Cappadocians who represent the "patristic" era.

⁸³ Barnes criticizes Edmund Hill for presenting Augustine's account of subsistent relations from the standpoint of the "improvements" of Thomas Aquinas. See Barnes, "The Logic of Augustine's Trinitarian Theology," 4.

⁸⁴ "This separation of the two treatises and the sequence in which they are explained probably derives from the Augustinian-Western conception of the Trinity, as contrasted with the Greek conception, even though the Augustinian conception had not, in the High Middle Ages, developed the kind of monopoly it would later enjoy. It begins with the one God, the one divine essence as a whole, and only *afterwards* does it see God as three in persons. . . . On the other hand, if one starts from the basic Augustinian-Western conception, an a-trinitarian treatise 'on the one God' comes as a matter of course before the treatise on the Trinity." Rahner, *The Trinity*, 17 (italics original).

⁸⁵ See Edmund Hill, "Karl Rahner's 'Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise *De Trinitate* and St. Augustine,'" *Augustinian Studies* 2 (1971): 68-69.

⁸⁶ "Separating discussion of 'God' in Augustine's work from discussion of 'The Trinity' is highly problematic. Augustine simply did not separate the two discussions. Even in those passages where he describes the part that reading neoplatonic texts played in his return to Christian faith, Augustine claims to have found there, in all but name, discussion not simply of 'God,' but of the Father and of the Word (*conf.*

A final factor that influences misreadings of Augustine's trinitarian theology is a failure to engage contemporary Augustinian scholarship. Ironically, at the same time many contemporary theologians have been vilifying Augustine, many Augustine scholars have been criticizing and revising the standard depictions of his thought. "Unfortunately," as Lewis Ayres notes, "the critiques of Augustine's trinitarianism found in much modern theological writing do not occur actively *against* this trend in Augustinian scholarship—engaging directly and in detail with original texts and attempting to refute these new scholarly arguments—but largely in *ignorance* of it."⁸⁷ Thus, the description of Augustine's trinitarian theology in many popular theological works repeats old accounts that are simply no longer tenable. Progress will be made only when modern writers engage in a close reading of Augustine's writings in their proper historical context bracketing the larger narrative.⁸⁸

Gunton's reading of Augustine exhibits all four of the problems outlined above. Although he nowhere cites Theodore de Régnon, it is clear that he employs de Régnon's paradigm as a cookie-cutter on the dough of Augustine's writings (as well as the

7.9.13-7.9.15)." Allan D. Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), s.v. "God," by Michel R. Barnes and Lewis Ayres.

⁸⁷ Lewis Ayres, "The Fundamental Grammar of Augustine's Trinitarian Theology," in *Augustine and his Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner*, ed. Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 51.

⁸⁸ "Only through such careful reading can we hope to discuss these texts fruitfully, and begin to assess the wider story that has remained untested for the last few decades." Ayres, "The Fundamental Grammar of Augustine's Trinitarian Theology," 52.

writings of the Cappadocians).⁸⁹ In addition, Gunton makes no effort to contextualize Augustine with reference to Latin trinitarian writings either prior to or contemporary with Augustine. On the contrary, he asserts that everything that is significant about Augustine's trinitarian theology can be understood with reference to "Neoplatonism." Furthermore, Gunton fails to distinguish Augustine's trinitarian teaching from later "Augustinian" developments. This can be seen in the way he draws a straight line from Augustine to modern individualism through Descartes. Finally, Gunton's reading of Augustine fails to engage contemporary Augustinian scholarship which would challenge most of his conclusions about the character of Augustine's thought. With this context in mind, we will examine Gunton's criticisms in detail.

2.2.1 Substance and Person: Misreading the Cappadocians

At the root of Gunton's criticism of Augustine is the assumption that significant differences exist between Augustine's trinitarian ontology (in which the divine nature somehow *underlies* the persons) and the ontology of the Cappadocians (in which the being of God is constituted by a community of divine persons). In addition to its problematic dependence upon de Régnon's paradigm, the latter claim involves a misreading both of Augustine and of the Cappadocians. Since most of Gunton's

⁸⁹ To paraphrase Barnes, we might say that Gunton offers an "architectonic narrative" which reduces individual trinitarian texts (Augustinian or Cappadocian) to instances of the de Régnon paradigm.

criticisms of Augustine regarding the relationship of “substance” and “person” are dependent upon a problematic reading of the Cappadocians, we will first consider Gunton’s reading of the Cappadocians.

Nowhere does Gunton offer any exposition of individual trinitarian texts of Basil, Gregory of Nyssa or Gregory of Nazianzus in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*. He simply recycles a reading of “the” Cappadocians that can be found in John Zizioulas *Being in Communion*.⁹⁰ A detailed analysis of the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocians is outside the scope of our present investigation; however, a brief examination of recent scholarship on Gregory of Nyssa will suffice to illustrate some of the problems that plague the Gunton/Zizioulas reading.⁹¹

In 2002 an entire issue of the journal *Modern Theology* was devoted to a discussion of the trinitarian theology of Gregory of Nyssa. Contributors included Sarah Coakley, David Hart, Lewis Ayres and Michel Barnes.⁹² Several important themes emerge in

⁹⁰ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985).

⁹¹ Among the Cappadocians, it is Gregory of Nyssa who is regularly heralded as the prototypical “social” trinitarian.

⁹² Sarah Coakley, “Re-thinking Gregory of Nyssa: Introduction—Gender, Trinitarian Analogies, and the Pedagogy of The Song,” *Modern Theology* 18 (2002): 431-443; David B. Hart, “The Mirror of the Infinite: Gregory of Nyssa on the *Vestigia Trinitatis*,” *Modern Theology* 18 (2002): 541-61; Lewis Ayres, “On Not Three People: The Fundamental Themes of Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Theology as seen in ‘To Ablabius: On Not Three Gods’,” *Modern Theology* 18 (2002): 445-474; Michel R. Barnes, “Divine Unity and the Divided Self: Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Theology in its Psychological Context,” *Modern Theology* 18 (2002): 475-496; Lucian Turcescu, “‘Person’ versus ‘Individual’, and Other Modern Misreadings of Gregory of Nyssa,” *Modern Theology* 18 (2002): 527-539. Brian Daley and Martin Laird also contributed essays to this volume.

these essays. First, these scholars are in unanimous agreement that the de Régnon paradigm must be rejected and that popular misreadings of Gregory's theology owe much to the negative influence of this paradigm.⁹³ According to David Hart, the idea that, from the early centuries, the trinitarian theologies of the East and West operate on "contrary logics" is "a particularly tedious, persistent and pernicious falsehood."⁹⁴ Although it will eventually "fade away from want of documentary evidence," at the present time "it serves too many interests for theological scholarship to dispense with it too casually."⁹⁵

Second, these scholars collectively argue that Gregory's approach to the Trinity should not be characterized as "social" either in the sense that Gregory "begins" with the three persons or in the sense that he "prioritizes" the persons over the divine essence.⁹⁶ Although "social" readings frequently appeal to a "three men" analogy which appears in *Ad Ablabium* as proof of Gregory's "social" orientation, Lewis Ayres points out that these readings fail to take into account the polemical context of *Ad Ablabium*: "Gregory's opponents are alleging that the relationship between substance and person

⁹³ See Coakley, "Re-thinking Gregory of Nyssa," 431-34; Hart, "The Mirror of the Infinite," 541-42; Ayres, "Fundamental Themes of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology," 445-46; Turcescu, "'Person' versus 'Individual'," 527.

⁹⁴ Hart, "The Mirror of the Infinite," 541.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 541.

⁹⁶ See Coakley, "Re-thinking Gregory of Nyssa," 434; Hart, "The Mirror of the Infinite," 542; Ayres, "Fundamental Themes of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology," 446-47; Turcescu, "'Person' versus 'Individual'," 527-37; Barnes, "Divine Unity and the Divided Self," 475-76.

deployed by the Cappadocians is susceptible to the logic that applies to the case of three people."⁹⁷ In this context, Gregory wants to lead the reader *away* from a "social" analogy and toward an answer to this criticism through a complex analysis of "divine power."⁹⁸

Third, although it is true that the Cappadocians draw an important distinction between *hypostasis* and *ousia*, this distinction does not represent one of the fundamental themes in Gregory's theology. Ayres argues that the core of Gregory's trinitarian theology can be found in his notion of "divine power."⁹⁹ It is through the latter that Gregory approaches the problem of relating unity and diversity of God: "Gregory's theology of the infinite and simple divine power is the context within which he can articulate the possibility of eternally distinct *hypostases* within one divine power."¹⁰⁰ It is

⁹⁷ Ayres continues, "If so, their charge runs, just as the degree of individuation involved permits us to speak of three 'men', the same logic shows us that the Cappadocians are teaching that there are three Gods. It does not seem that Ablabius is himself sympathetic towards the accusation, rather he seems to have been unable to answer their charge to his own satisfaction and has requested help." Ayres, "Fundamental Themes of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology," 447.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 446.

⁹⁹ "I will argue that we should not attempt to understand Gregory by reference primarily to the development of particular terminological formulations (such as one *ousia*, three *hypostases*). Nor should we attempt to understand Gregory by reading his thought against the background of a division of pro-Nicene theologians into general 'eastern' and 'western' groups according to their supposed preference for 'beginning from' unity or diversity in the Godhead. I will suggest that Gregory's Trinitarian theology is best approached by focusing on the ways in which he makes a particular contribution to the emergence of a pro-Nicene 'grammar' of divinity though developing his complex account of divine power." Ayres, "Fundamental Themes of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology," 445-46. For a detailed analysis of "power" in Gregory's theology, see Michel R. Barnes, *The Power of God: Δύναμις in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁰ Ayres, "Fundamental Themes of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology," 467. Ayres argues that the dispute between pro-Nicene and anti-Nicene theologians centered on the nature (or grammar) of "divinity." Anti-Nicene theologians acknowledged various degrees of divinity while the pro-Nicenes insisted "that

through an analysis of divine power that Gregory offers a response to critics who assert that the way pro-Nicene theologians distinguish the divine persons is susceptible to the logic of differentiation involved in the case of three people. In *Ad Ablabium* Gregory argues that affirming three *hypostases* does not imply three Gods because the nature of divinity is such that it cannot be divided. That divinity cannot be divided is established through a complex analysis of divine action. Gregory's argument builds on the assumption that natures and their inherent powers are known through the operation of these powers.¹⁰¹ Since divine operations are always seen to be one, the divine power (and nature) which gives rise to these operations must also be one.¹⁰² Gregory anticipates a problem that arises from his line of argumentation. What about the case of three *separate* orators (i.e., three natures) who speak at the same time (i.e., one action)? To address this problem Gregory must establish a stronger link between divine causality

divinity *by definition* is unique and indivisible" (ibid., 450, italics original). Furthermore, the pro-Nicenes insisted the Creator/creature distinction was absolute. On the one hand, the "commonality of existence between the Father and Son" could be understood "to indicate the sharing of unique, simple and indivisible divinity" (ibid., 450). On the other hand, the hypostases were distinguished through causal relations of origin. Ayres explains that the Cappadocians advanced the cause of pro-Nicene theology not only by maintaining that "the persons have 'real' existence as individual hypostases," but also by affirming "that the grammar of simple and indivisible divinity is the context for all talk of differentiation" (ibid., 450).

¹⁰¹ Gregory maintains that we cannot speak directly of the divine nature. We can only speak indirectly of the divine nature through its effects (operations). This represents one of the key points of difference between Eunomius and the Gregory. Theological language can only describe "that which is 'around' the divine nature, that is, the divine nature's power which gives rise to divine activity in the world." Thus, "we may grow in knowledge of the divine power through its operations even while the divine nature remains unknown." Ayres, "Fundamental Themes of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology," 458.

¹⁰² Ibid., 452.

and operation *ad extra*.¹⁰³ To this end, he distinguishes the “inseparable union of the divine persons in their activity” from the “accidental or coincidental activity of human persons undertaking some common project or business.”¹⁰⁴ The divine persons do not merely work together like three humans performing the same task; rather, “they function inseparably to constitute any and every divine activity toward the creation.”¹⁰⁵ Every action issues *from* the Father passes *through* the Son and is brought to perfection *by* the Spirit. Ayres points out that many have misunderstood Gregory on this point, interpreting his description of divine action as an example of the “personal” character of Gregory’s theology (as if the divine persons simply cooperated, under the Father’s direction, in bringing about various actions). Although Gregory in no way denies the hypostatic distinction that exists between the persons, he does not present the three “as possessing distinct actions toward a common goal, but as together constituting *just one distinct action* (because they are one power).”¹⁰⁶ When we examine God’s work in the world (as narrated by Scripture), we see that a single power acting “by a unitary causal sequenced activity of the three persons.”¹⁰⁷ We cannot, therefore, speak of three Gods

¹⁰³ Ibid., 461.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 461.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 461.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 461 (italics original).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 462.

because we do not see three distinct operations. The divine power is one yet the persons are distinct.

Finally, these authors argue that Gregory's trinitarian theology does not possess the kind of "personal" or "social" character that is ascribed to it by Gunton, Zizioulas and others. In an essay exploring the relationship between Gregory's psychology and his trinitarian thought, Barnes points out that many contemporary scholars read Gregory's trinitarian writings through the lens of certain psychological concerns and conclude that Gregory understands the Trinity in terms of "personal relationship" or that he locates "consciousness(es)" within the Trinity—without ever consulting Gregory's psychology to see how psychological concerns may (or may not) have influenced his trinitarian theology.¹⁰⁸ An examination of Gregory's psychology clearly reveals "that *personal relationship* or *consciousness* are not the important, substantial psychological concepts for Gregory."¹⁰⁹ Moreover, Barnes also insists that Gregory's use of *hypostasis* does not mean "person" in the modern sense of a conscious subject.¹¹⁰ His understanding of *hypostasis* must be derived from the broader context of his trinitarian theology. Whereas Athanasius uses a doctrine of divine generation to ground the

¹⁰⁸ Barnes, "Divine Unity and the Divided Self," 476.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 476 (italics original).

¹¹⁰ "Gregory uses *hypostasis* to mean an existent with real and separate existence, and he does not use the term to refer to or to name a subject of cognition or volition." Barnes, "Divine Unity and the Divided Self," 482. Barnes points out that *hypostasis* denotes an individual specifically when it is set in contrast with *ousia*.

common nature of the Father and Son (on the assumption that like begets like), Gregory uses a doctrine of generation to ground the *distinction* between the Father and Son.¹¹¹

Barnes explains that the difference in existence between the Father and the Son is expressed by Gregory in language of “causality” (i.e., the Father is *Cause* [αἰτίος] and the Son is *of the Cause* [ἐκ τοῦ αἰτιου]) and the reality of this difference is expressed using the term *hypostasis*.¹¹²

Returning to Gregory’s psychology, one of the most important links between his psychology and his trinitarian theology can be seen in his account of the will. The divided nature of the human will represents one of his key psychological concerns. For Gregory, “the will is ineffective in its attachment to the good; this lack of effectiveness is

¹¹¹ “In Gregory’s Trinitarian Theology, the generation of the Son by the Father is the basis of his doctrine of the reality of the distinct existences of those Two. The Father-Son relationship is not the basis for his arguing for a common nature or essence between the Two. At times Gregory seems to pare that relationship down to its simplest terms—namely, Cause and Caused—and he has taken some criticism from moderns for this move. I think that such a criticism comes out of the expectation that psychological entities (‘persons’) really are fundamentally to Gregory’s exposition of the Trinity, when they are not, and in this way modern problems with Gregory’s casual language are related to the equally modern idea that hypostasis means ‘person.’” Barnes, “Divine Unity and the Divided Self,” 483-84.

¹¹² Ibid., 484. What distinguishes Gregory’s “causal” language from that of Eunomius is that Gregory applies the language of cause exclusively to the relations of the persons and never to the divine nature: “When we speak of a cause (αἴτιον) and that which depends on it (ἐξ αἰτίου), we do not, by these words, refer to nature (φύσιν). For no one would hold that cause (αἰτία) and nature (φύσεως) are identical. Rather we indicate a different manner of existence (τὴν κατὰ τὸ πῶς εἶναι διαφορὰν). For in saying the one is cause and other uncaused, we do not divide the nature by the principle of causality (τὴν φύσιν τῷ κατὰ τὸ αἴτιον λόγῳ διεχωρίσαμεν), but only explain that the Son does not exist without generation, nor the Father by generation.” Gregory of Nyssa, “An Answer to Ablabius: That We Should Not Think of Saying There Are Three Gods,” in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, Library of Christian Classics, ed. Edward R. Hardy (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1954), 266. Greek from Fridericus Mueller, *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, vol. 3.1, *Opera dogmatica minora* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), paragraph 56.

due to what is experienced as a conflict in the will; and this conflict suggests divisions in the will, i.e., the will is not meaningfully—as a moral agent—one with itself.”¹¹³ Not surprisingly, the efficacy of *divine* will plays an important role in his trinitarian thought: “The integrity and effectiveness of the wills of the Son and Spirit stands in direct contrast to the state of our human wills. Our will is not one, or rather, we do not have only one will: we have many, and the conflict among them sabotages our own decisions.”¹¹⁴ Perfect unity of will (both among wills and within a will) is possible only for will with a divine nature.¹¹⁵ Although Gregory believes that Father, Son and Spirit each possess a will (and the faculty that enacts it), “we must be careful not to impose the implications of a later concept of ‘person’ (e.g., Boethian or Cartesian) upon Gregory” and draw false conclusions.¹¹⁶ For Gregory, the wills of the Father, Son and Spirit are not three *separate* wills.¹¹⁷ It would be better to understand them as “Three Individuals, but One Will throughout the Three, or, as Gregory puts it, ‘the motion of the divine will

¹¹³ Barnes, “Divine Unity and the Divided Self,” 480.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 488.

¹¹⁵ “Perfect unity among wills, like unity within a will (‘freedom’), is true only of wills with a divine nature—if this were otherwise then Gregory’s argument that *unity of operations reveals unity of nature* would have no standing.” Barnes, “Divine Unity and the Divided Self,” 489 (italics original).

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 489.

¹¹⁷ In other words, the limits of “cognitive volition” are not coextensive with the limits of “real individuality.” Barnes, “Divine Unity and the Divided Self,” 489.

from the Father, through the Son, to the Spirit’.”¹¹⁸ In light of the preceding analysis, it appears that Gunton ultimately criticizes Augustine for failing to comprehend something which the Cappadocians (at least as represented by Gregory of Nyssa) simply do not affirm.

2.2.2 Substance and Person: Misreading Augustine

The problems with Gunton’s reading of Augustine regarding the relationship of “substance” and “person” will become clear in chapter four when we explore Augustine’s teaching on the divine relations. For the purposes of our present discussion, the following should be noted. First, Augustine does not “begin” with the divine substance (as opposed to “beginning” with the persons). His “starting point”—if one must even speak in such unhelpful terms—is neither the divine substance nor the persons; it is the Scriptural teaching of the Catholic Church on the triune God.¹¹⁹ This

¹¹⁸ Barnes, “Divine Unity and the Divided Self,” 489. Barnes points out that this reality can be seen clearly in Gregory of Nazianzus’ explanation of Christ’s claim that he came not to do his own will but the will of the one who sent him (John 6:38): “But since, as this is the language of him who assumed our nature (for he it was who came down), and not of the nature which he assumed, we must meet the objection in this way, that the passage does not mean that the Son has a special will of his own, besides that of the Father, but that he has not; so that the meaning would be, ‘not to do mine own will, for there is none of mine apart from, but that which is common to, me and thee; for as we have one godhead, so we have one will.’” Gregory of Nazianzus, “The Fourth Theological Oration,” para. 12 in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, Library of Christian Classics, ed. Edward R. Hardy (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1954), 185.

¹¹⁹ See Neil Ormerod, *The Trinity: Retrieving the Western Tradition* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2005), 35-36.

can be seen in Book I of *De Trinitate* when Augustine “begins” his discussion of the Trinity with a brief summary of “Catholic” teaching on the Trinity.¹²⁰

Next, Gunton misinterprets Augustine’s discussion of the Greek terms *hypostasis* and *ousia*. Gunton reads Augustine’s acknowledged difficulty in understanding the distinction between *hypostasis* and *ousia* as evidence that he failed to understand the conceptual “revolution” ushered in by the Cappadocians. It is important to recognize, however, that Augustine’s difficulty was not *conceptual* but *linguistic*. The formal Latin equivalents to the Greek terms *hypostasis* and *ousia* are *substantia* (“substance”) and *essentia* (“being”). But because *substantia* and *essentia* possess virtually synonymous meaning in Latin, they are not suitable for expressing, among Latin speakers, the distinctions that exist among the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹²¹ Latin speaking pro-Nicene Christians preferred to express this conceptual distinction in terms of one being (*essentia*) or substance (*substantia*) and three persons (*persona*). Augustine’s linguistic confusion, therefore, is completely understandable. No warrant exists for inferring

¹²⁰ See Augustine, *De Trin.* I.7, 69-70. This passage will be discussed in chapter four.

¹²¹ “But because we have grown accustomed in our usage to meaning the same thing by ‘being’ (*essentiam*) as by ‘substance’ (*substantiam*), we do not dare say one being, three substances (*unam essentiam, tres substantias*). Rather, one being or substance (*unam essentiam, vel substantiam*), three persons (*tres autem personas*) is what many Latin authors, whose authority carries weight, have said when treating of these matters, being able to find no more suitable way of expressing in words what they understood without words.” Augustine, *De Trin.* V.10, 196. Augustine sees himself as affirming conceptually the same thing as the “Greeks” through a distinction between *substantia* (or *essentia*) and *persona*. The language Augustine employs to speak about unity and distinction in triune God (i.e., *una substantia, tres persona*) can be traced back to Tertullian.

conceptual confusion from Augustine's justifiable linguistic confusion regarding the use of *hypostasis* and *ousia*.

Furthermore, Gunton misunderstands Augustine's ambivalence regarding the term "person" (*persona*). From Augustine's reserve, one should not infer that he somehow failed to affirm *real* distinctions between the Father, Son and Spirit. At least two factors play an important role in Augustine's ambivalence regarding *persona*: his distinction between "faith" and "understanding" and the creator/creature distinction. Notice how these two factors are intertwined in Augustine's discussion of *persona* in Book VII:

That there are three is declared by the true faith, when it says that the Father is not the Son, and the Holy Spirit which is the gift of God is neither the Father nor the Son. So when the question is asked 'Three what?' we apply ourselves to finding some name of species or genus which will comprise these three, and no such name occurs to our minds, because the total transcendence of the godhead quite surpasses the capacity of ordinary speech. God can be thought about more truly than he can be talked about, and he is more truly than he can be thought about.¹²²

¹²² Augustine, *De Trin.* V.7, 224. The same themes can be seen in the following statement: "What are we left with then? Perhaps we just have to admit that these various usages were developed by the sheer necessity of saying something, when the fullest possible argument was called for against the traps or the errors of the heretics. Human inadequacy was trying by speech to bring to the notice of men what it held about the Lord God its creator, according to its capacity, in the inner sanctum of the mind, whether this was held by devout faith or by the least amount of understanding. It was afraid of saying three beings (*tres essentias*), in case it should be taken as meaning any diversity in that supreme and ultimate equality. On the other hand it could not say that there are not three somethings, because Sabellius fell into heresy by saying precisely that. For it is known with complete certainty from the scriptures and is thus to be devoutly believed, and the mind's eye can also achieve a faint but undoubted glimpse of the truth, that the Father is and the Son is and the Holy Spirit is, and that the Son is not the same as the Father is, nor is the Holy Spirit the same as the Father or the Son. So human inadequacy searched for a word to express three what, and it said substances or

“Faith” (i.e., the Scriptures read by the Church) requires one to affirm that the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father.¹²³ A problem, however, arises in how to express to one’s “understanding” what “faith” requires one to affirm (i.e., that the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father). The latter problem is further compounded by creator/creature distinction. As Augustine notes, “the total transcendence of the godhead quite surpasses the capacity of ordinary speech.” As a result, any human term one chooses to express the reality that the Father is not the Son and that the Son is not the Father will always fall short.¹²⁴ Thus, one should not interpret Augustine’s ambivalence regarding *persona* as undermining the real distinctions that exist between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Augustine grounds real distinctions between the divine persons in relations of origin: the Son is distinct from the Father by virtue of his generation while the Spirit is distinct from the Father (and the Son) by virtue of his procession from the Father and the Son (as from one principle).¹²⁵

persons (*substantias sive personas*). By these names it did not wish to give any idea of diversity, but it wished to avoid any idea of singleness; so that as well as understanding unity in God, whereby there is said to be one being (*una essentia*), we might also understand trinity, whereby there are also said to be three substances or persons (*tres substantiae vel personae*)." Augustine, *De Trin.* VII.9, 227. Here the Latin *substantia* is being used in the same sense as the Greek term *hypostasis*.

¹²³ It is important to note that Augustine’s summary of Catholic teaching on the Trinity does not use the term *persona* but simply affirms that the Father is not the Son because the Father begot the Son and the Son is not the Father because the Son is begotten by the Father. See Augustine, *De Trin.* I.7, 69-70.

¹²⁴ “Person” can never be used univocally of humans and God. One of the questions to be raised regarding Gunton’s notion of divine “person” is whether it adequately addresses the creator/creature distinction.

¹²⁵ Although differences exist between Augustine and the Cappadocians, it is important to recognize that the Cappadocians also root distinctions between the persons in casual relations that obtain in the immanent life

Gunton also fails to recognize the *polemical* context of Augustine's discussion of *persona* in Books V-VII. Unlike the Cappadocians who supposedly developed a "relational" ontology by carefully reflecting on the being of God, Gunton insists that Augustine's discussion of person is driven by the "apparent logical oddity of the threeness of the one God" which Augustine expresses "in terms of Aristotelian subject-predicate logic."¹²⁶ Contra Gunton, Augustine is not (in a "speculative" moment) wrestling with an "apparent logical oddity" of imputing "threeness" to the one God. On the contrary, Augustine is answering the criticisms of Latin Homoian theologians (whom Augustine calls "Arians").¹²⁷ These Homoians argued that since there can be no "accidents" (*accedentia*) in God, all divine predicates must be "substantial." Since, as predicates, unbegotten (*ingenitum*) and begotten (*genitum*) ostensibly name different substances, these Homoians asserted that substance of the Father must be different

of God. According to Gregory of Nazianzus, "Father" does not denote an *ousia* but a relationship; the Father is the "cause" of the Son; thus, the Father is "superior" to the Son only in terms of "cause" —not in terms of "essence." Gregory of Nyssa says something quite similar: "In regard to essence He is one, wherefore the Lord ordained that we should look to one Name: but in regard to the attributes indicative of the Persons, our belief in Him is distinguished (διήρηται) into belief in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; He is divided without separation (ἀδιαστάτως τε μεριζόμενον); united without confusion (ἀσυγχύτως ἐνούμενον). For when we hear the title 'Father' we apprehend the meaning of this, that the name is not understood with reference to itself alone, but also but its special signification indicates a relation to the Son. For the term 'Father' would have no meaning apart by itself, if 'Son' were not connoted by the utterance of the word 'Father.'" Gregory of Nyssa, "Against Eunomius" II.2 in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, vol. V, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 102. Greek from Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 45:469B.

¹²⁶ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 40.

¹²⁷ See Michel R. Barnes, "The Arians of Book V, and the Genre of 'de Trinitate,'" *Journal of Theological Studies* 44 (1993): 185-95.

(*diversa*) from the substance of the Son.¹²⁸ Augustine answers this criticism by pointing out that while God can have no “accidents,” it does not follow that every statement about God must be a “substance” statement. Some predications (e.g., “begotten” and “unbegotten”) indicate a “relation” (*relatiuum*).¹²⁹ “So although begotten (*genitus*) differs from unbegotten (*ingenitus*), it does not indicate a different substance, because just as son refers to father, and not son to not father, so begotten must refer to begetter, and not begotten to not begetter.”¹³⁰ In short, Augustine is offering a *philosophical* solution to a *philosophical* problem. The Cappadocians faced a comparable challenge (most notably from Eunomius) and offered a similar conceptual solution (namely, that “Father” and “Son” names relations that do not modify the essence of God).¹³¹

¹²⁸ “Now among the many objections which the Arians are in the habit of leveling against the Catholic faith, the most cunning and ingenious device they think they can bring to bear is the following argument: ‘Whatever is said or understood about God is said substance-wise, not modification-wise. Therefore the Father is unbegotten substance-wise, and the Son is begotten substance-wise. But being unbegotten is different from being begotten; therefore the Father’s substance is different from the Son’s.’” Augustine, *De Trin.* V.4, 191. Notice how Augustine uses the label “Arians” to describe these Homoian theologians.

¹²⁹ “With God, though, nothing is said modification-wise, because there is nothing changeable with him. And yet not everything that is said of him is said substance-wise. Some things are said with reference to something else, like Father with reference to Son and Son with reference to Father; and this is not said modification-wise, because the one is always Father and the other always Son—not ‘always’ in the sense that he is Son from the moment he is born or that the Father does not cease to be Father from the moment the Son does not cease to be Son, but in the sense that the Son is always born and never began to be Son.” Augustine, *De Trin.* V.5, 192.

¹³⁰ Augustine, *De Trin.* V.8, 194.

¹³¹ Eunomius insisted that “ingenerateness” (*agennesia*) constituted the essence of God. In response, the Cappadocians insisted that the essence of God is, in principle, unknowable. In his “Second Theological Oration,” Gregory of Nazianzus writes, “What God is in nature and essence, no man ever yet has discovered or can discover.” Gregory of Nazianzus, “The Second Theological Oration,” in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, Library of Christian Classics, ed. Edward R. Hardy (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press,

Finally, Gunton misunderstands the role of the Father in Augustine’s trinitarian theology. He claims that for Augustine the “true being of God” somehow “underlies” the persons. On this reading, the divine substance—rather than the Father—constitutes the “substratum” of God. This, in turn, constitutes the basis for his claim that Augustine’s trinitarian theology is “modalist.” In response, it must be recognized that, for Augustine, the divine substance does not represent a fourth thing alongside the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the Trinity is none other than the three persons.¹³² Although he speaks unequivocally about Father, Son and Spirit as a unity of substance, Augustine also affirms clearly that the Father is the source (*principium*) of deity.¹³³

1954), 147. In response to Eunomius, the Cappadocians argued that “ingenerateness” (*agennesia*) signifies the Father in relation to the Son. The Son is distinct from the Father by virtue of his generation by the Father. The Spirit is distinct from the Father by virtue of his procession from the Father. Gregory of Nazianzus identified three distinct properties that distinguish the persons: “For the Father is not the Son, and yet this is not due to either deficiency or subjection of essence (κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν ὑφέσεως); but the very fact of being unbegotten (μὴ γεγενῆσθαι), or begotten (τὸ γεγενῆσθαι), or proceeding (τὸ ἐκπορεύεσθαι), has given the name of Father to the first, of the Son to the second, and to the third, him of whom we are speaking, of the Holy Ghost, that the distinction (τὸ ἀσύγχυτον) of the three persons may be preserved in the one nature (μὴ φύσει) and dignity of the Godhead (ἄξιόν τῆς θεότητος). For neither is the Son Father, for the Father is one, but he is what the Father is; nor is the Spirit Son because he is from God, for the only-begotten is one, but he is what the Son is. The three are one in Godhead (ἐν τὰ τρία τῇ θεότητι), and the one three in properties (ἐν τρία ταῖς ιδιότησιν); so that neither is the unity a Sabellian one, nor does the Trinity countenance the present evil distinction (τῆς πονηρᾶς νῦν διαίρεσεως).” Gregory of Nazianzus, “The Fifth Theological Oration—On the Spirit,” in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, Library of Christian Classics, ed. Edward R. Hardy (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1954), 199. Greek from Joseph Barbel, *Gregor von Nazianz. Die fünf theologischen Reden: Text und Übersetzung mit Einleitung und Kommentar* (Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1963), 232.

¹³² Moreover, Neil Ormerod points that “the notion of substratum is not Augustinian; so in that regard the question of what constitutes the ‘substratum’ would not make much sense to Augustine.” Ormerod, *The Trinity*, 42.

¹³³ See Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.29, 174. Augustine’s account of the Father as *principium* will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

2.2.3 Materiality and the Incarnation

Gunton claims that Augustine is afraid of the material world and that this fear (reflecting the negative influence of Neoplatonism) leads him toward an “anti-incarnational” and “docetic” Christology which fails to give full weight to the humanity of Christ. Contra Gunton, this claim *cannot* be established simply by an appeal to “guilt by association” (i.e., since all Neoplatonists were afraid of the material world and Augustine was a Neoplatonist, he must have been fearful of the material world). Gunton’s claim can only be established through a close reading of Augustine’s writings in their historical context. Read in proper context, the examples Gunton cites simply do not support his claim.

In order to understand why Gunton’s assessment of Augustine is wrong, we must first understand the role that “divine immateriality” plays in Augustine’s trinitarian theology. Not only does the doctrine of God’s immaterial nature represent one of the “foundational features” of Augustine’s trinitarian theology, but the role that this doctrine plays in his thought is also, as Barnes points out, “without antecedents in Latin or Greek Christianity” deriving from Augustine’s unique intellectual development.¹³⁴ Augustine’s doctrine of divine immateriality serves as a way of articulating a central concern of pro-Nicene theologians—namely, protecting the

¹³⁴ Barnes, “The Logic of Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology,” 6.

Creator/creature distinction.¹³⁵ Pro-Nicene theologians wanted to establish a clear distinction between “divine nature” and all other natures (i.e., created natures). They, therefore, ruled out the possibility of any kind of “middle” nature(s).¹³⁶ What is distinctive about Augustine, therefore, is the way he employs divine immateriality “to emphasize the distinction between uncreated and created natures.”¹³⁷ Augustine’s emphasis upon divine immateriality, therefore, should not be seen as reflecting a fear of the material world but rather as grounding the distinction between God and the world.¹³⁸ With this in mind, we will consider Gunton’s evidence.

First, Gunton’s assertion that Augustine’s discussion of the Old Testament theophanies represents an instance of “anti-incarnational platonism” is unsustainable.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 6. Barnes points out that divine immateriality for Augustine is roughly synonymous with the notion of divine “simplicity.”

¹³⁶ “The goal of clearly delineating the difference between the divine nature and all other natures is something that Augustine shares with all other pro-Nicene Trinitarian theologians. Indeed, one accomplishment of Nicene theologies was to establish that the distinction between ‘divine nature and all other natures’ was nothing else than the distinction between ‘divine nature and created nature’ – that there was no intermediate or middle, ‘third kind’ of nature. What is distinctive to Augustine’s theology, compared to the theologies of other pro-Nicenes, is the strength of the use he makes of divine immateriality to emphasize the distinction between uncreated and created natures.” Barnes, “The Logic of Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology,” 6.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 6. Early in Book I Augustine points out that many problems arise from the tendency of fallen humans to think about God in “material” terms: “The reader of these reflections of mine on the Trinity should bear in mind that my pen is on the watch against the sophistries of those who scorn the starting-point of faith, and allow themselves to be deceived through an unseasonable and misguided love of reason. Some of them try to transfer what they have observed about bodily things to incorporeal and spiritual things, which they would measure by the standard of what they experience through the senses of the body or learn by natural human intelligence, lively application, and technical skill.” Augustine, *De Trin.*, I.1, 65.

¹³⁸ Divine immateriality also provides Augustine with a grammar by which to articulate the Pro-Nicene emphasis upon the common operation of the divine persons. See Barnes, “The Logic of Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology,” 6.

Gunton reasons that if Augustine really believed in the incarnation, one would be able to see antecedents of this in his explanation of Old Testament theophanies. Instead, Augustine allegedly limits all divine appearances to the work of angels in order to avoid associating God with matter. Although it is true that Augustine believes that the divine appearances in the Old Testament are mediated by angels, it is wrong to conclude that this reflects negatively on his understanding of the incarnation. Precisely the opposite is the case: in Books II to IV of *De Trinitate*, Augustine wants to establish that the Son was not “sent” until the New Testament. For this reason, he clearly distinguishes the appearance of the incarnate Son from earlier divine manifestations. In making this move, Augustine breaks with an earlier theological tradition which interpreted all Old Testament theophanies as christophanies both because he does not believe clear exegetical warrant exists for this position and because he believes that identifying the Son as the uniquely “visible” person of the Trinity implies a subordinationist understanding of the Son that is incompatible with New Testament teaching regarding the equality of the Son with the Father.¹³⁹

Second, the claim that Augustine’s account of the baptism of Jesus represents a second instance of “anti-incarnational platonism” is also untenable. According to

¹³⁹ On a related note Augustine does not, contra Gunton, lose the mediatorship of the Word in his account of the theophanies. On the contrary, “mediation” plays a central role in Augustine’s discussion of the mission of the Son in Book IV.

Gunton, Augustine cannot accept the *obvious* implication of this narrative that Jesus entered into a new relationship with the Spirit following his baptism. Gunton, however, appears to have misunderstood Augustine's point. Augustine's explanation of this story (specifically his claim that "It would be the height of absurdity to believe that he only received the Holy Spirit when he was already thirty years old")¹⁴⁰ does not reflect "anti-incarnational platonism." Rather, the "supposition that Augustine rejects [here] as the height of absurdity was in fact made by the Adoptionist heresy, which declared that Jesus (a mere human being) was *adopted* as Son of God at his baptism, when the Holy Spirit came upon him."¹⁴¹

Third, Gunton is mistaken in his claim that Augustine undermines the value of the material realm as a bearer of theological meaning by locating the divine image in the mind (*mens*).¹⁴² Gunton appears to have failed to understand the purpose of the second half of *De Trinitate*. Augustine believes that traces of the Trinity (*vestigia trinitatis*) can be found throughout creation. In this sense, Augustine affirms precisely what Gunton wishes he would affirm—namely, that the created world possesses theological meaning; however, in the second half of *De Trinitate* Augustine is neither looking for *vestigia* of the

¹⁴⁰ Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.46, 431.

¹⁴¹ Hill, *The Trinity*, 442, note 125.

¹⁴² According to Gunton, a proper understanding of the incarnation should lead to viewing the world as a bearer of divine meaning.

triune God nor is he searching for “analogies” of the Trinity. His interest lies with the divine image which he believes has been created in the image of the Trinity. More specifically, he wants to “contemplate” the triune God through the divine image in the *mens*. He believes he has Scriptural warrant (especially in Paul) for locating the image in the *mens*. To insist that by locating the divine image in the *mens* Augustine undermines the value of the material realm is, therefore, without warrant.¹⁴³

Finally, it is one thing to say that Augustine, through his polemical engagement with Latin Homoian theologians, pays greater attention to Christ’s deity than to his humanity. It is quite another to insist as Gunton does that Augustine somehow denies, or does not fully affirm, the humanity of Jesus Christ. Although he does not articulate the relation between the two natures of Christ in the precise technical language of later creedal developments (e.g., Chalcedon), Augustine clearly teaches that Christ possesses

¹⁴³ Moreover, Gunton’s claim that the material world does not bear theological meaning cannot be reconciled with Augustine’s rich account of *sacramentum*. For Augustine, *sacramenta* are material realities which constitute sacred signs pointing to deeper realities. Augustine does not limit *sacramenta* to baptism and Eucharist but also includes numerous Old Testament events, places and objects (e.g., Sabbath, circumcision, altars, etc.) as well as key elements of New Testament faith (e.g., Easter, Pentecost, sign of the cross, feasts, garments, etc.). It is important to note that these elements are not merely “signs” for Augustine but *sacramenta* which correspond to a deeper spiritual realities. Although these material realities have no intrinsic power, they mediate the power of the Word of God. “From these responses of Augustine a sacramental principle comes to clarification: sacraments are the visible word of God to be received in faith. The sacrament is composed of both the material element and the word of God. The power of the sacrament comes from the word of God articulated in and through the church.” Allan D. Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), s.v., “Sacraments,” by Emmanuel J. Cutrone.

two natures (divine and human) and that these two natures are united in one subject.¹⁴⁴

On the one hand, Augustine draws a careful distinction between the Son in the “form of a servant” (*forma servi*) and the Son in the “form of God” (*forma dei*) insisting that neither of these natures was “turned or changed.”¹⁴⁵ On the other hand, he insists that these two forms exist in one person and that their unity is of such a nature that it is appropriate even to speak of “God” being crucified.¹⁴⁶

2.2.4 Trinitarian Analogies

Gunton claims that in his search for trinitarian “analogies,” Augustine imposes a Neoplatonic conception of divine unity on the Trinity with the result that an unknown “substance” underlies the persons. In so doing, Augustine purportedly abandons the economy of salvation and turns God into a kind of “supermind.” Moreover, by searching for trinitarian “analogies” in the mind, Augustine supposedly paves the way for individualism and intellectualism. At the core of these criticisms is a recycled

¹⁴⁴ “Augustine insists throughout his career that the humanity of Jesus, even though united to and possessed by the Word of God, remains complete in both its corporeal and its psychological dimensions.” Allan D. Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), s.v. “Christology,” by Brian E. Daley. Daley suggests that four emphases can be discerned in Augustine’s writings about Christ: (1) emphasis on the integrity of the humanity of Christ, (2) emphasis on the divine person of the Word as the source of unity between the natures, (3) emphasis upon Christ as mediator and (4) Christ’s mediation as an expression of God’s unmerited grace.

¹⁴⁵ “In conclusion then, because the form of God took on the form of a servant, each is God and each is man, but each is God because of God taking on, and each is man because of man taken on. Neither of them was turned or changed into the other by that ‘take-over’; neither godhead changed into creature and ceasing to be godhead, nor creature changed into godhead and ceasing to be creature.” Augustine, *De Trin.* I.14, 75.

¹⁴⁶ See Augustine, *De Trin.* I.28, 86. This passage will be discussed in chapter four.

version of Gunton's claim that Augustine possesses an ontology that differs radically from the Cappadocians. I have already demonstrated that this claim (which is parasitic upon de Régnon's paradigm) is unsustainable. In addition, we must recognize that "analogy" (*analogia*) is the wrong term to describe what Augustine is doing in the second half of *De Trinitate*. Lewis Ayres points out that some scholars have somewhat imprecisely used the term "analogy" to describe the likenesses for which Augustine searches in Books VIII to XV of *De Trinitate*.¹⁴⁷ Although Augustine sometimes searches for "analogies" (*analogia*) of the inseparable *operation* of the persons, "Augustine *never* directly uses *analogia* or *proportio* to describe the relationship between God and any aspect of the creation (and interestingly neither term even appears in *trin*)."¹⁴⁸ Instead Augustine employs the term *similitudo* ("likeness") to describe the relationship that obtains between God and creation. With this context in mind, we will critically examine the evidence Gunton adduces in support of his interpretation of Augustine's Trinitarian "analogies."

First, in his search for the divine image in the *mens*, Augustine does *not* impose a foreign concept of divine threeness upon the Trinity. Not only does his reading of

¹⁴⁷ Lewis Ayres, "'Remember That You Are Catholic' (Serm 52.2): Augustine on the Unity of the Triune God," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8 (2000): 59.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 61. In Sermon 52 (c. 410) the triad of *memoria*, *intellegentia* and *voluntas* serve as a "likeness" to the inseparable economic activity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and not their eternal relations.

Scripture prompt him to see the “image of God” in the human soul as a reflection of the Trinity, but it is also scriptural teaching about the Trinity (as outlined in the first half of *De Trinitate*) that provides the blueprint for the trinitarian image in the *mens* and the basis for evaluating the viability of trinitaries he identifies. Moreover, Augustine is not unique in locating the divine image in the *mens*. David Hart points out that important similarities exist between Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine in seeing the individual human soul as the locus of the divine image: “One should also note, at the outset, that for Gregory, no less than for Augustine, the divine image is first and foremost the possession of each individual soul, in the mystery of her simultaneous unity of essence and diversity of acts.”¹⁴⁹

Second, Augustine does not abandon the economy of salvation in his search for reflections of the Trinity in the divine image in the *mens*.¹⁵⁰ On the contrary, Augustine is engaged in a vital search to know and understand the God in whom he believes. The redemptive work of Christ plays a crucial role in this search. Augustine focuses upon the image in the *mens* not out of a desire to liken God to a “supermind” but because the divine image represents the locus of God’s redemptive work. The centrality of the economy of salvation can be seen in Books XII-XIV in which Augustine chronicles the

¹⁴⁹ Hart, “The Mirror of the Infinite: Gregory of Nyssa on the *Vestigia Trinitatis*,” 543.

¹⁵⁰ This point will be argued in chapter three.

effacement of the divine image by sin, its restoration and future perfection through the work of Christ.¹⁵¹

Third, Gunton's critique falsely assumes that Augustine's mental triad represents an independent source of knowledge about God's triunity. This seems to be implied when Gunton asserts that the "inner structure of the human mind" is for Augustine a more important source for the knowledge of the triune God than the "economy of grace."¹⁵² Scriptural teaching, however, constitutes the sole source for human knowledge of the *triunity* of God in Augustine's thought.¹⁵³ Furthermore, Gunton's criticism fails to take into account Augustine's distinction between "knowledge" and "understanding."¹⁵⁴

Fourth, Gunton's critique fails to recognize the continuity that exists between Augustine and the Cappadocians in their search for psychological "likenesses" to the

¹⁵¹ On a related note, Gunton is simply wrong when he asserts that the crucial "analogy" for Augustine is not the soul remembering, understanding and loving God but simply memory, understanding and will *as such*. This claim reflects a fundamental misunderstanding Augustine's purpose to draw the reader into the life of the triune God.

¹⁵² Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 45.

¹⁵³ "Augustine would never dream of suggesting that the psychological analogies he develops provide a distinct source of knowledge of the Trinity, or that the inner being of God is made known through the structures of the mind. As Augustine repeatedly stresses, our knowledge of the Trinity derives solely from Scripture, mediated through the tradition of the Church (e.g. DT 1.7, 2.2)." Ormerod, *The Trinity*, 44.

¹⁵⁴ As Ormerod explains, "What he offers by way of analogy is not knowledge but understanding. For Augustine knowledge is derived from the assent of the mind to the contents of the Church's faith. This is a true knowledge but the mind, while it may understand the words that give expression to our faith, does not understand the realities to which they refer. Such an understanding is difficult to attain, at best analogous, and is only the product of a long and pious search. It cannot claim the status of knowledge but remains hypothetical." Ormerod, *The Trinity*, 44.

Trinity.¹⁵⁵ Gregory of Nyssa sometimes applies “psychological categories to the Trinity” and when he does so, “we often find him happily doing so with reference to the Godhead as analogous to *one* person, the Father’s constitution of the Triune Godhead being treated as analogous to one who speaks an intelligible word on his breath or spirit (*Catechetical Oration* 1-2 is paradigmatic here).”¹⁵⁶ In the text to which Ayres refers, Gregory is attempting to explicate the distinction of divine persons in their unity. Notice, in this text, how Gregory explicates the unity and distinction of the Father and Son by likening the generation of the Son to the production of a mental word:

In our own case we say that a spoken word comes from the mind, and is neither entirely identical with it nor altogether different. For by being derived from something else, it is different and not identical with it. Yet, since it reflects the mind, it can no longer be thought to be different from it, but is one with it in nature, though distinct as a subject. So the Word of God, by having its own subsistence (τῷ μὲν ὑφ’ἑστάναι καθ’ ἑαυτὸν), is distinct from him from whom it derives its subsistence (διήρηται πρὸς ἐκεῖνον παρ’ οὗ τὴν ὑπόστασιν ἔχει). On the other hand, by manifesting in itself the attributes to be seen in God, it is identical in nature with Him who is recognized by the same characteristics.¹⁵⁷

Remarkable similarities, therefore, exist between Augustine and Gregory in their application of psychological categories to the Trinity. Hence, if the presence of

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 44.

¹⁵⁶ Ayres, “On Not Three People: The Fundamental Themes of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology,” 447.

¹⁵⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, “Address on Religious Instruction,” in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, Library of Christian Classics, ed. Edward R. Hardy (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1954), 272. The Greek is from Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 45:16C. In the following section, Gregory also explains his methodology: “Our knowledge of the Word comes from applying, in a raised degree, our own attributes to the transcendent nature.” Gregory of Nyssa, “Address on Religious Instruction,” 272.

trinitarian likenesses to the mind constitutes a reason to reject Augustine's trinitarian theology, then it would also seem to represent a reason to reject that of the Cappadocians as well.

2.2.5 Doctrine of the Spirit

There are at least four problems with Gunton's analysis of the Holy Spirit in Augustine's trinitarian theology. First, Gunton is wrong when he claims that "Augustine has given us little reason to believe that God is to be known as *he is* from his manifestation in the economy."¹⁵⁸ In chapter three I will argue that an important continuity exists for Augustine between what, in modern theological terms, is called the "economic" and the "immanent" Trinity. The economy of salvation does, contra Gunton, play a crucial role in the development of Augustine's doctrine of the Spirit. One of Augustine's most important contributions to the western tradition is his notion that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son* (as from one principle). It is from the bestowal of the Spirit by the Son *in the economy of salvation* that Augustine is led to infer that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son* at the intra-trinitarian level. The logic of this is quite clear: if sending reveals procession and if the Son sent the Spirit, then the Spirit must proceed from the Son (as well as from the Father). Moreover,

¹⁵⁸ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 53.

Augustine sees biblical warrant for the procession of the Spirit from the Son in the way that Scripture speaks of the Holy Spirit as the “Spirit of the Father and the Son.”¹⁵⁹ Thus, Gunton’s claim that Augustine’s doctrine of the Spirit is “strongly affected by his need to have a third person corresponding to the will in the threefold mind” is untenable.¹⁶⁰

Second, Gunton is also mistaken when he claims that Augustine does not give full hypostatic weight to the Spirit.¹⁶¹ As evidence of inadequate “hypostatic weight,” Gunton cites Augustine’s description of the Spirit as “gift” and “love.” According to Gunton, these two concepts simply lack biblical support. Moreover, from a trinitarian perspective, they do not provide an adequate basis for distinguishing the Son from the Spirit. In response, it must be noted that the hypostatic distinction between the Son and Spirit in Augustine’s trinitarian theology does not ultimately depend upon his analysis of “gift” and “love.” Augustine grounds the real distinctions between the divine persons in causal relations that obtain between the persons in the immanent Trinity.

The Son is distinct from the Father by virtue of his *generation* while the Spirit is distinct

¹⁵⁹ This is not to deny that other factors play an important role in shaping Augustine’s understanding of the procession of the Spirit. Although it would be incorrect to say that his understanding of the Spirit is driven by a need to fit the Spirit within the triad of memory, understanding and will, it would be correct to say the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son is, in a certain sense, necessitated by his understanding of casual relations. Without the dual procession of the Spirit, there is no substantive way to differentiate the procession of the Spirit from the generation of the Son.

¹⁶⁰ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 48.

¹⁶¹ “The overall result is that because the doctrine of the Spirit has inadequate economic hypostatic weight in Augustine, the father of Western theology also lacks the means to give personal distinctiveness to the being of the Spirit in the inner Trinity.” Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 51.

from the Father and the Son by virtue of *procession* from the Father and the Son as from one principle. “Gift” and “love” represent a speculative attempt, on Augustine’s part, to describe the casual relationships that obtain at an intra-trinitarian level by drawing inferences from the activity of the Spirit in the economy. Thus, even if one were to acknowledge with Gunton that these concepts, as employed by Augustine, lack adequate biblical support,¹⁶² it does not follow Augustine fails to give adequate hypostatic weight to the Spirit.

Third, we must recognize that Gunton’s critique of Augustine’s pneumatology is dependent upon his misreading of the Cappadocians. This misreading leads Gunton to dismiss the claim made by the editors of the Library of Christian Classics edition of *De Trinitate* that much continuity exists between Augustine’s understanding of procession and the doctrine of the Eastern church that the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son.¹⁶³ According to Gunton, “We have already seen, however, that there are major differences all along the line between Augustine and the Cappadocians Fathers. There

¹⁶² From an economic perspective, there does seem to be a unique sense in which the New Testament speaks of the Holy Spirit as “gift” (δωρεά)—especially in the preaching of the gospel in Acts (Acts 2:38; 8:20; 10:45; 11:17). Moreover, although Paul applies the language of gift (δωρεά) to salvation in Christ (Rom 5:15; 2 Cor. 9:15), he expresses the concept of the gift of the Spirit in terms the language of promise (ἐπαγγελία). See Galatians 3:14 and Ephesians 1:13. Interestingly, Luke also uses promise (ἐπαγγελία) in relation to the Spirit in Acts as well (Acts 1:4; 2:33; 2:39).

¹⁶³ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 52.

are bound to be differences here also.”¹⁶⁴ Aside from reminding his readers of the “ontological revolution” ushered in by the Cappadocians, Gunton offers no exposition of the “Cappadocian” doctrine of the Spirit; nor does he explain how this doctrine differs from Augustine. Against Gunton, it should be noted that significant continuity exists between Augustine and the Cappadocians in the sense that both use “generation” and “procession” as the basis for *distinguishing* the Son and the Spirit from the Father.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, both acknowledge the Father as the *ultimate* source of the Son and the Spirit. The Cappadocians express this reality through the language of *monarchia* while Augustine expresses it through the language of *principium*. Although he believes that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*, Augustine is equally insistent that the Holy Spirit proceeds “principally” from the Father because the Father is the source of deity (*principium deitatis*).¹⁶⁶ Having acknowledged these points of continuity, we must

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 52.

¹⁶⁵ Unlike later Western trinitarian theology (e.g., Thomas Aquinas), Augustine never speaks in terms of “two processions.” “Procession” (*processio*) is used exclusively in *De Trinitate* in reference to the Spirit.

¹⁶⁶ “By saying then, *Whom I will send you from the Father* (Jn 15:26), the Lord showed that the Spirit is both the Father's and the Son's. Elsewhere too, when he said, *whom the Father will send*, he added, *in my name* (Jn 14:26). He did not however say, ‘whom the Father will send from me’ as he had said *whom I will send from the Father* (Jn 15:26), and thereby he indicated that the source (*principium*) of all godhead (*divinitas*), or if you prefer it, of all deity (*deitas*), is the Father. So the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son is traced back, on both counts, to him of whom the Son is born.” Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.29, 174. Although Gunton seems to be aware of this feature in Augustine’s doctrine of the Spirit, he responds not by criticizing Augustine’s specific formulation but by appealing to later developments as the basis for his criticism: “We cannot escape the history of the matter, and that is that although Augustine was aware of the need to qualify the *Filioque* with a *principaliter*, the tradition which built upon his work eventually developed a doctrine of God which was materially different from that of its Eastern colleagues.” Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian*

recognize an important point of *discontinuity* between Augustine and the Cappadocians. Although the Cappadocians recognized that the procession of the Spirit clearly differed from the generation of the Son (such that it would be inappropriate to speak of the Spirit as a second “Son”), they were largely at a loss to offer a rationale for this distinction.¹⁶⁷

For example, although Gregory of Nazianzus clearly wants to distinguish “procession”

Theology, 53. It is difficult to see how later trinitarian developments (which Gunton does not spell out) constitute a reason for rejecting Augustine’s doctrine of the Spirit.

¹⁶⁷ Neil Ormerod suggests that a precursor to the dual procession of the Spirit can be seen Gregory of Nyssa. See Ormerod, *The Trinity*, 46. Ormerod cites the a text from *Ad Ablabium* in which Gregory seems to describe the Son as, in some way, “mediating” the procession of the Spirit: “There is that which depends upon the first cause [Son] and that which is derived from what immediately depends upon the first cause [Spirit]. Thus the attribute of being only-begotten without doubt remains with the Son, and we do not question that the Spirit is derived from the Father. For the mediation of the Son, while it guards his prerogative of being only-begotten, does not exclude the relation which the Spirit has by nature to the Father.” Gregory of Nyssa, “An Answer to Ablabius,” 266. Ormerod’s judgment, however, may be somewhat hasty. Although Gregory may employ language in this text which suggests a mediatorial role for the Son in the procession of the Spirit, one can only establish such a judgment on the basis of a careful examination of *all* Gregory’s trinitarian writings. Notice in another text how Gregory expresses the distinctiveness of the Spirit simply in terms of neither being ungenerate or only-begotten: “[T]he Father, for instance, is uncreate (ἄκτιστος) and ungenerate (ἀγέννητος) as well: He was never generated (γενένηται) any more than he was created (ἔκτισται). While this uncreatedness (ἄκτιστον) is common to Him and the Son, and the Spirit, He is ungenerate (ἀγέννητος) as well as Father. This is particular (ἰδιόν) and uncommunicable (ἀκοινωνητον), not being seen in the other Persons. The Son in His uncreatedness (ἄκτιστον) touches the Father and the Spirit, but as the Son and the Only-Begotten (μονογενής) He has a character which is not that of the Almighty or the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit by the uncreatedness of his nature has contact with the Son and Father, but is distinguished from them by His own tokens. *His most peculiar characteristic is that He is neither of those things which we contemplate in the Father and Son respectively. His is simply, neither as ungenerate (ἀγεννήτως), nor as only-begotten (μονογενώς): this it is that constitutes His chief particularity.* Joined to the Father by uncreatedness, He is disjoined from Him again by not being ‘Father.’ United to the Son by the bond of uncreatedness, and of deriving His existence from the Supreme, He is parted again from Him by the characteristic of being not the being the Only-begotten of the Father, and having been manifested by means of the Son Himself.” Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* I.22, 61 (italics mine). Greek from Werner W. Jaeger, *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, vol. 1.1, *Contra Eunomium libros I-II continens* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), paragraph 278.

and “generation,” he is unable to offer any explanation of how they differ or why the

Holy Spirit is not a second son:

What, then, is procession (ἐκπόρευσις)? Do you tell me what is the unbegottenness of the Father (τὴν ἀγεννησίαν τοῦ πατρὸς), and I will explain to you the physiology of the generation of the Son (τὴν γέννησιν τοῦ υἱοῦ) and the procession of the Spirit (τὴν ἐκπόρευσιν τοῦ πνεύματος), and we shall both of us be frenzy-stricken for prying into the mystery of God. And who are we to do these things, we who cannot even see what lies at our feet, or number the sand of the sea, or the drops of rain, or the days of eternity, much less enter into the depths of God, and supply an account of that nature which is so unspeakable and transcending all words?¹⁶⁸

Augustine provided an answer by suggesting that the Holy Spirit proceeds jointly from the Father and the Son *as from one principle*.

What remains of Gunton’s claim that Augustine’s trinitarian theology is responsible for the many of the contemporary problems that plague both western culture (e.g., individualism) and the church (e.g., deficient ecclesiology)? Gunton’s analysis of the legacy of Augustine’s thought is marked by least three weaknesses. First, as we have already seen, it rests on a deficient understanding of Augustine’s trinitarian theology. Second, his analysis employs a reductionist (genealogical) view of history. All phenomena of interest (e.g., ecclesiology and anthropology) are said to depend genetically two differing concepts of the Trinity. Finally, I will argue in chapter six that Gunton’s appeal to and use of trinitarian doctrine in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*

¹⁶⁸ Gregory of Nazianzus, “The Fifth Theological Oration” 8, 198-99. Greek from Barbel, *Die fünf theologischen Reden*, 232.

exemplifies many of the methodological problems that mark contemporary trinitarian theology. In sum, we have seen that Gunton's criticisms of Augustine's trinitarian theology are without merit. Having addressed these misunderstandings, we are now in a position to introduce Augustine's trinitarian thought—especially as outlined in *De Trinitate*.

2.3 Introduction to De Trinitate

Although the precise contours of my reading of *De Trinitate* will emerge through exposition of key passages in chapters three to five, I will offer a brief introduction to this work drawing together several themes that are implicit in my critique of Gunton. *De Trinitate* was composed over a period of twenty years (roughly 400-420).¹⁶⁹ It can be divided two sections: Books I-VII and Books VIII-XV.¹⁷⁰ In the first half of *De Trinitate*, Augustine defends a Latin pro-Nicene understanding of trinitarian doctrine from the standpoints of Scripture (Books I-IV) and logic (Books V-VII). In the second half of *De*

¹⁶⁹ The lengthy period of composition was the result of the work being pirated prior to its completion. In his prefatory letter to Aurelius, Bishop of Carthage, Augustine offers the following explanation: "I was a young man when I began these books on the Trinity which the one true God is, and I am now an old man as I publish them. I stopped working on the project when I discovered they had been lifted from my possession, and prematurely at that since I had not completed them, nor revised and polished them as I had planned to do. It had been my intention to publish them all together and not one by one, because the inquiry proceeds in a closely-knit development from the first of them to the last." Augustine, *De Trin.* Prologue, 63. Augustine was in the process of writing Book XI when it was pirated. Work stopped for a number of years. As a result of the prompting of others, Augustine eventually completed *De Trinitate* around 420.

¹⁷⁰ For a helpful overview of the contents of *De Trinitate* see Allan D. Fitzgerald, ed. *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), s.v. "De Trinitate," by Rowan Williams.

Trinitate (Books VIII-XV) Augustine searches for reflections of the trinitarian processions in the highest functions of the human soul. Books VIII-XV possess a highly experimental character.¹⁷¹ Although a number of proposals have been offered regarding the overarching structure of *De Trinitate*,¹⁷² it is perhaps best to see the unity of *De Trinitate* not in terms of some key *structural* feature which unites all the books (e.g., a *chiasmus*, as Edmund Hill proposes) but rather in terms of recurring and developing themes.¹⁷³ Although *De Trinitate* later tended to circulate in discrete sections (e.g., Books V-VII or Books VIII-XV), it is clear that Augustine intended this work to be read understood as a whole.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ By “experimental,” I do not mean “speculative” in the sense that Gunton and others have used to characterize *De Trinitate* (i.e., dependent on neo-Platonic thought). Rather by “experimental” I mean the reality that Augustine’s thought develops as he writes.

¹⁷² For proposals regarding the structure of *De Trinitate* see Ormerod, *The Trinity*, 55-77; Hill, *The Trinity*, 21-26; Johannes Brachtendorf, “...prius esse cogitare quam credere’ A Natural Understanding of ‘Trinity’ in St. Augustine?” *Augustinian Studies* 29 (1998): 40-46; John C. Cavadini, “The Structure and Intention of Augustine’s *De Trinitate*,” *Augustinian Studies* 23 (1992): 103-23; idem, “The Quest for Truth in Augustine’s *De Trinitate*,” *Theological Studies* 58 (1997): 429-440; D. Juvenal Merriell, *To the Image of the Trinity: A Study in the Development of Aquinas’ Teaching* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 13-35. These scholars agree that *De Trinitate* is not structured around a distinction between “faith” (Books I-VII) and “reason” (Books VIII-XV).

¹⁷³ I am indebted to Lewis Ayres for this observation.

¹⁷⁴ Commenting on the pirating of his work before it was complete, Augustine explains, “It had been my intention to publish them all together and not one by one, because the inquiry proceeds in a closely-knit development from the first of them to the last.” Augustine, *De Trin.*, Prologue, 63.

De Trinitate is shaped by a “spiritual quest” to know and understand the God in whom Augustine believes.¹⁷⁵ Psalm 105:3-4, with its exhortation to seek God’s face, provides the motivation for Augustine’s search.¹⁷⁶ He invites his readers to join him in his quest to seek the face of God. This quest might further be characterized as “faith seeking understanding.” Scriptural teaching about the triune God constitutes the starting point for this quest. Moreover, the redemptive work of Christ plays a crucial role in this quest. Although it would be an overstatement to describe the primary purpose of *De Trinitate* as offering a polemic against the possibility of a Neoplatonic ascent to God,¹⁷⁷ Augustine is clear that one can experience purification in order to contemplate God only through the mediatorial work of Christ.¹⁷⁸ The work of Christ not only plays a key role in Augustine’s discussion of “mission” (Books II-IV) but also in the

¹⁷⁵ John Cooper argues that one of the most basic notions in Augustine’s thought is that of a “spiritual quest”: “After a close study of the eight works in question here, the following thesis is now offered concerning the most basic notions of Augustine’s entire thought-world: *That Augustine’s basic philosophical-theological notion is a universalization of the particular spiritual journey which he himself experienced.* Stated in his own words this ‘elephantine’ idea is: ‘Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless ‘til they rest in thee.’ (*Conf.* I, 1, 5.) Thus, Augustine’s basic notion is the concept of the spiritual quest, of the finite seeking the infinite, of the lover seeking the beloved (only it is the loved-one being sought by the Divine lover for Augustine), of the philosopher seeking wisdom, the everlasting motion of the soul upward for *mehr Licht.*” John Cooper, “The Basic Philosophical and Theological Notions of Saint Augustine,” *Augustinian Studies* 15 (1984): 94 (italics original).

¹⁷⁶ Edmund Hill rightly describes this biblical text as a “theme-setting text for the whole book.” Hill, *The Trinity*, 91, note 11. Augustine’s use of this text will be discussed in chapter five.

¹⁷⁷ Contra Cavadini, “The Structure and Intention of Augustine’s *De Trinitate*,” 103-23.

¹⁷⁸ See Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.20, 167.

second half of *De Trinitate* where he describes the effacement and restoration of the image (Books XII-XIV).

De Trinitate is driven by exegetical and polemical concerns.¹⁷⁹ This judgment runs counter to a tendency in modern scholarship to read *De Trinitate* as driven by speculative and metaphysical concerns. Although Augustine refers at various points to “Arian” opponents, some scholars have concluded that these references simply constitute a literary device based on the assumption that “Augustine’s knowledge of Homoian theology was unsubstantial, formal, or secondhand in character . . .” and that his first genuine encounter with Latin Homoian theology did not emerge until 419 (when he had virtually finished writing *De Trinitate*).¹⁸⁰ Against this trend, Barnes demonstrates that Augustine is engaged in polemic against Latin Homoian theologians in the earliest strata of *De Trinitate*.¹⁸¹ For example, when Augustine refers in Book I to “Those who have affirmed that our Lord Jesus Christ is not God, or is not true God, or is not with the Father the one and only God, or is not truly immortal because he is subject to change,”¹⁸² Barnes argues that Augustine is referring to the views of Homoian

¹⁷⁹ This represents one of the key elements of Barnes’ “new canon” reading of Augustine.

¹⁸⁰ See Michel R. Barnes, “Exegesis and Polemic in Augustine’s *De Trinitate* I,” *Augustinian Studies* 30 (1999): 43. On a related note, some scholars have wrongly concluded that Augustine is responding to the theology of Eunomius in Book V. See Barnes, “The Arians of Book V, and the Genre of ‘*de Trinitate*,’” 185-95.

¹⁸¹ See Barnes, “Exegesis and Polemic in Augustine’s *De Trinitate* I,” 43-52.

¹⁸² Augustine, *De Trin.* I.9, 70-71.

theologians such as Palladius.¹⁸³ Moreover, his theology develops through his engagement with these theologians.¹⁸⁴ At the center of this debate was how rightly to read and interpret Scripture.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, Scriptural concerns play a central role in *De Trinitate*.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ "The three doctrines that Augustine cites at *de Trinitate* I.9 as representative of his opponents are each attested to in Latin Homoian literature, and fit within the overall Latin Homoian emphasis on the Father as 'true God' due to his unique or exclusive status as *ingenerate*—a theology which has too often been misrecognized as Eunomian. This summary at *de Trinitate* I.9 by Augustine of his opponents' beliefs resembles a large body of polemical literature which contains similar summaries of both Arian and Homoian doctrines. The oldest such summary, and the most widely distributed one among Latin Nicenes, is Arius's *Letter to Alexander*, which from the late 350s on was well known in the West." Barnes, "Exegesis and Polemic in Augustine's *De Trinitate* I," 45-46. Later in the same essay Barnes also explains, "The Homoian theology Augustine describes in the first books of *de Trinitate* cannot be reduced simply to the theology opposed by Hilary, much less to the theology of Arius. Augustine's opponents represent a change, indeed perhaps a development, in anti-Nicene theology from the theology of Hilary's opponents, and a major development from the theology of Arius. In Book I of Augustine's *de Trinitate* we are dealing with a third generation of anti-Nicene theology, and a second generation of Latin Homoian theology" (*ibid.*, 48). The first generation would represent the teachings of Arius. The second generation of anti-Nicene theology differs from the first in that the former treats the visibility and materiality of the Son (in contrast to the invisibility and immateriality of the Father) as the basis for distinguishing the real divinity of the Father (who is "true God") from the Son. Hilary responds to these second generation anti-Nicenes in his writings. Augustine's opponents represent a third generation of Latin-speaking anti-Nicenes who grounded the visibility and materiality of the Son not in the incarnation but in the Old Testament theophanies. Representatives of third generation anti-Nicene theology include Palladius and Bishop Maximinus. For further discussion of Augustine's Homoian opponents, see Allan D. Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), s.v. "Anti-Arian Works," by Michel R. Barnes.

¹⁸⁴ "In other words, Augustine's engagement with Homoian theology can be seen to be a moment in which the heart of Augustine's own trinitarian theology is at stake. Augustine's trinitarian theology is at its most distinctive and fundamental level a response to the specific challenge posed by developing Homoian theology." Barnes, "Exegesis and Polemic in Augustine's *De Trinitate* I" 52.

¹⁸⁵ Homoian exegesis of texts like John 14:28 provided part of the challenge to which Augustine responds.

¹⁸⁶ This point will be argued at length in chapter three.

The primary point of reference for the development of Augustine's trinitarian theology in *De Trinitate* is the Latin pro-Nicene tradition.¹⁸⁷ Augustine's indebtedness to this tradition can be seen early in Book I where he summarizes "Catholic" teaching on the triune God.¹⁸⁸ Augustine builds upon the works of Hilary of Poitiers, Marius Victorinus and Ambrose of Milan. The pro-Nicene faith on which Augustine is dependent centers on "common nature, common power, common operations."¹⁸⁹ One of the most basic axioms of the Latin pro-Nicene tradition is the "inseparable operation" of the divine persons—an axiom which plays a central role in *De Trinitate*.¹⁹⁰

Finally, *De Trinitate* is neither Augustine's *only* word about the Trinity nor his *final* word about the Trinity. Awareness of his other trinitarian writings is important for determining the relative significance of themes one encounters in *De Trinitate*. By attending exclusively to *De Trinitate*, some scholars have misinterpreted the significance

¹⁸⁷ Barnes argues that when Augustine's trinitarian theology is read as a whole in its proper context, one will recognize (as one might expect of a Latin theologian writing on the Trinity at this time) that "Augustine's basic frame of reference for understanding the Trinity is the appropriation of Nicaea. That appropriation takes place with a polemical context, and, moreover, involves rearticulating the creed of Nicaea in terms which were not originally part of that text." Barnes, "Rereading Augustine on the Trinity," 154. For a discussion of the influence of "Platonism" on the development of Augustine's trinitarian theology see Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford, 2004), 364-83.

¹⁸⁸ See Augustine, *De Trin.* I.7, 69. This text will be discussed in chapter four.

¹⁸⁹ Barnes, "Augustine 'Old Canon' and 'New Canon' Reading," 2.

¹⁹⁰ "Augustine inherited from his immediate predecessors the doctrine of the inseparable operation of the three irreducible persons. Further, he took this principle as his point of departure for considering the divine unity throughout his career." Ayres, "Augustine on the Unity of the Triune God," 80. Inasmuch as inseparable operations constitutes a core axiom of pro-Nicene theology in general and of Augustine in particular, the fundamental categories of Augustine's trinitarian theology are "dynamic"—not "static."

of elements of Augustine's theology. For example, despite the prominent role played by the triad of "memory, understanding and will" in *De Trinitate*, Lewis Ayres argues on the basis of an examination of Augustine's other trinitarian writings that this triad is *not* a central feature of Augustine's trinitarian thought.¹⁹¹ Similarly, Barnes argues that the most important themes in Augustine's trinitarian theology include (1) the doctrine of God's immaterial nature, (2) common operations and (3) the notion that theological language is designed to purify our ideas about God.¹⁹² It is also important to recognize that *De Trinitate* does not represent Augustine's final word on the Trinity. His trinitarian theology develops over time.¹⁹³ For example, Augustine's *Twentieth Tractate on John* presents a more developed account of unity of operation than one encounters in *De*

¹⁹¹ "Including some variations on the third term found in Book XV of the *De trinitate* Augustine uses the triads *memoria, intellegentia, voluntas* and *memoria, intellectus, voluntas* around 35 times in his corpus. This rather vague figure stems from the difficulty of assessing passages where the triad and its constituent terms are discussed over a number of complex sentences. Even with such imprecise figures it is striking that over 20 of these uses occur in the *De trinitate*. Indeed, the triad is used in directly Trinitarian contexts outside this work in just three texts. And so, from all the homilies on John and 1 John where Trinitarian topics frequently occur, from the *Confessions*, from his extensive expositions of the Psalms, as well as from the vast majority of his sermons and letters this triad it is simply absent as a basic tool for illustrating Trinitarian doctrine. The triad is not then a standard feature of Augustine's Trinitarian theology. Equally importantly, the triad is not a standard feature of Augustine's description of the human soul. Its absence from Augustine's discussions of the soul in his early works being only one important indicator. Reflection on the will and on memory is of course a central thread in Augustine's corpus, but this particular triad is not." Lewis Ayres, *Augustine's Trinitarian Theology* (forthcoming), chapter six.

¹⁹² Barnes, "The Logic of Augustine's Trinitarian Theology," 5. Barnes concurs with the judgment of Ayres that the triad of memory, understanding and will is not a central feature of Augustine's trinitarian theology.

¹⁹³ Development can even be seen within *De Trinitate* (being composed as it was over a period of 20 years).

Trinitate.¹⁹⁴ Rowan Williams rightly notes that “The genius of *De Trinitate* is its fusion of speculation and prayer, its presentation of trinitarian theology as, ultimately, nothing other than a teasing out of what it is to be converted and to come to live in Christ.”¹⁹⁵

If the preceding defense of Augustine’s trinitarian theology against his contemporary critics obtains, as I hold it does, then his theology of the Trinity indeed stands as the unchallenged western tradition,¹⁹⁶ a tradition whose fountainhead does not stand in a sharp opposition to the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian Fathers. It is on the basis of the depth and vitality of Augustine’s theology that I will offer an Augustinian assessment of the role of trinitarian doctrine in the Christian theology of religions in the chapters that follow. In the process of evaluating these proposals and discerning proper use(s) for the doctrine of the Trinity I will explore several key themes in Augustine’s theology including the relationship between God *in se* and God *pro nobis*, the relations among the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (both intra-trinitarian and economic) as well as Augustine’s search for reflections of the triune God in the human mind.

¹⁹⁴ Barnes, “The Logic of Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology,” 5. For other examples of development in Augustine’s trinitarian theology, see Ayres, “Augustine on the Unity of the Triune God,” 39-82.

¹⁹⁵ Allan D. Fitzgerald, ed. *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), s.v. “*De Trinitate*,” by Rowan Williams.

¹⁹⁶ This is not to suggest that critical developments do not take place within the Augustinian tradition. Such developments do indeed take place. Someone like Thomas Aquinas not only receives Augustine’s trinitarian theology but also crucially builds upon it. However, in pointing out earlier in this chapter that misreadings of Augustine sometimes arise from a failure to distinguish Augustine’s trinitarian theology from later developments, I did not intend to communicate that later developments (e.g., Thomas Aquinas) somehow contradict Augustine’s basic trinitarian grammar.

3. The “Economic” and the “Immanent” Trinity in the Theology of Religions

Since the patristic period, Christian theologians have drawn an important distinction between God *in se* and God *pro nobis*. For patristic theologians this distinction was framed in terms of *theologia* and *oikonomia*.¹ In contemporary theology a distinction between God *in se* and God *pro nobis* has been framed in terms of the “immanent” and the “economic” Trinity.² The latter denotes God’s self-revelation through the economy of salvation while the former refers to the intra-trinitarian life of the three divine persons.³ Karl Rahner’s famous axiom, “The ‘economic’ Trinity is the ‘immanent’ Trinity and the ‘immanent’ Trinity is the ‘economic’ Trinity,”⁴ constitutes the

¹ *Theologia* was used to denote to the mystery of God while *oikonomia* (“economy”) was used to describe God’s salvific plan. Although the term *oikonomia* plays a relatively minor role in the New Testament (cf. Eph. 1:10; 3:2; Col.1:25), it became a key term in patristic thought. *Oikonomia* and its Latin equivalents are used in a complex variety of ways in patristic theology.

² Wolfhart Pannenberg claims that a “distinction between an economic and an essential Trinity” can be traced to an eighteenth century theologian named Johann August Urlsperger. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol 1, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), note 111, 291.

³ One of the disadvantages of speaking of the “economic Trinity” and the “immanent Trinity” is that such language may offer the mistaken impression that there are two trinities; however, one must bear in mind that “economic” and “immanent” simply represent two different ways of conceptualizing the triune God; this language is not meant to suggest two trinities. Although it might be more accurate to speak of the “the Triune God from the standpoint of the economy” or the “Triune God from an immanent perspective,” such language is awkward and cumbersome. Despite its limitations, I will retain the language of the “immanent” and the “economic” Trinity.

⁴ Rahner, *The Trinity*, 22.

point of departure for much contemporary trinitarian discussion.⁵ Broadly speaking Rahner's axiom has evoked two responses. One group of Christian theologians (including Catherine LaCugna, Jürgen Moltmann, Robert Jenson, Eberhard Jüngel and Wolfhart Pannenberg) follows Rahner in emphasizing the "identity" of the economic and the immanent Trinity (in some cases pushing this "identity" to the point that latter is collapsed into the former). A second group (including Paul Molnar, Walter Kasper, Thomas Weinandy, David Coffey and Hans Urs von Balthasar) claims that Rahner's axiom does not maintain an adequate distinction between the economic and the immanent Trinity. These theologians are willing to affirm, at least in a qualified way, the first half of Rahner's axiom ("the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity") but often reject, or significantly qualify, the second half ("the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity") in order to protect the freedom and transcendence of God. Although much of the current debate over the economic and the immanent Trinity centers on the

⁵ For a detailed discussion of the Rahner's axiom and its implications for contemporary theology, see Fred Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity: Rahner's Rule and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, Issues in Systematic Theology Series, vol. 12 (New York: Peter Lang, 2005); Dennis W. Jowers, *Karl Rahner's Trinitarian Axiom: "The Economic Trinity is the Immanent Trinity and Vice Versa"* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006).

God/world relationship,⁶ assumptions about the relationship of the economic and the immanent Trinity also play an important role in a Christian theology of religions.

The purpose of this chapter is to offer an Augustinian evaluation of the relationship between the economic and the immanent Trinity in Mark Heim's trinitarian theology of religious ends. First, I will briefly outline Heim's proposal. Then, drawing principally upon Books I-IV of *De Trinitate*, I will develop an Augustinian "grammar" for understanding the relationship between the economic and the immanent Trinity. Finally, I will evaluate Heim's proposal on the basis of this grammar arguing that his trinitarian theology of religious ends gains traction only by radically severing the economic and the immanent Trinity.

3.1 A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends

In his book *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*, S. Mark Heim, a Baptist theologian, suggests that the debate over the theology of religions proceeds on "a largely undefended assumption that there is and can only be one religious end, one actual religious fulfillment."⁷ Heim suggests that a more fruitful approach to religious diversity involves recognizing the possibility of *multiple* religious

⁶ See Fred Sanders, "Entangled in the Trinity: Economic and Immanent Trinity in Recent Theology," *Dialog* 40 (2001): 175-182; and Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002).

⁷ S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*, Sacra Doctrina Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 17.

ends. According to Heim, religious ends are defined by a set of concepts, stories, and practices that provide “material for a thorough pattern of life.”⁸ An intrinsic relationship exists between the pattern of life and the religious goal sought by a particular community. The only way to Hindu religious fulfillment is through the Hindu path. The only way to Jewish fulfillment is through the Jewish path. This logic would seem to favor the exclusivist position; however, it need not if one recognizes the possibility of multiple ends: “There is no cogent reason to assume that all of us—the vast majority against their prior condition and desires—will experience only one among these religious ends or some undefined condition beyond any of them.”⁹ Christian salvation—involving a relation of communion with God—constitutes only one possible religious end. Other ends exist and, while they are not “salvation,” they are, nevertheless, quite real: “As a Christian, it appears to me to make perfectly good sense to say two kinds of things. First, we may say that another religion is a true and valid path to the religious fulfillment it seeks. . . . Second, we may say what the book of Acts says of Jesus Christ, that ‘there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved’ (Acts 4:12).”¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁹ Ibid., 26.

¹⁰ Ibid., 31-32.

One might ask, "If the notion of multiple ends is so plausible, why has it not been widely embraced?" The possibility of multiple religious ends is frequently dismissed because of its perceived association with "polytheism." Although an affirmation of multiple religious referents may have seemed plausible in past contexts (e.g., the first-century Graeco-Roman world), it is no longer plausible today. Our contemporary world is shaped by a "monotheistic consciousness" which inclines us to believe that there can be only one religious ultimate.¹¹ One "ultimate" seems to imply only one "end." This "monotheistic consciousness," however, need not rule out the possibility of multiple ends: "There is no logical reason why a universe with a single religious ultimate might not also encompass a variety of religious ends. The variety could follow because some people establish a primary religious relationship to something other than the religious ultimate, or because there are distinctly different ways to relate to that ultimate or for both reasons."¹²

Although he offers several arguments in support of his proposal, Heim's notion of multiple religious ends is ultimately rooted in a particular understanding of the Trinity. He claims that the complex nature of the triune God makes possible a variety of

¹¹ Ibid., 33. Presumably, when Heim refers to contemporary cultural assumptions, he is referring to "Western" cultural assumptions; there are many parts of the world that have not been shaped by a "monotheistic consciousness" and, consequently, have no problem believing in a multiplicity of divine realities.

¹² Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 34.

relations with God leading to multiple religious ends. Three terms play a critical role in Heim's proposal: "dimensions," "relations" and "ends." The key to understanding his proposal is apprehending the interrelationships that exist between these terms. Notice the way these three terms are linked in the following summary: "The distinctive religious *ends* of various traditions correspond to *relations* with God constituted by limitation or intensification within a particular *dimension* of the trinitarian life. This provides the basis both to affirm the reality of these religious *ends* and to distinguish them from salvation."¹³ With this overview in mind, I will outline Heim's proposal in greater detail.

3.1.1 Three Dimensions of the Divine Life

Drawing upon the work of the Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas, Heim claims that God exists in a "communion" of persons. Together, these persons constitute God's nature: "God's substance does not precede the three divine persons, as if they are 'made up' of the divine essence or are divisions of it. Being is not prior to personhood in God."¹⁴ In other words, God is not a generic being with personhood merely tacked on; a communion of persons constitutes God's being.¹⁵ "We have pressed this exploration of

¹³ Ibid., 167-68 (italics mine).

¹⁴ Ibid., 171.

¹⁵ "There is no more basic source of the divine being than person and communion. On such a view, the unity of the Trinity is not to be understood in terms of the persons all being composed of the same 'stuff.' It

trinitarian thought, and particularly the meaning of 'person,' for a specific purpose. The *complex* nature of God holds out the possibility of a variety of distinct *relations* with God. That variety is the basis for truly different religious *ends*."¹⁶ One may wonder what Heim has in mind when he refers to the "complex nature of God." This brings us to the heart of his attempt to relate the Trinity and religious ends. Building upon the work of Ninian Smart and Steven Konstantine,¹⁷ Heim claims that the divine life of the triune God is characterized by three dimensions: "impersonal," "personal," and "communion." The impersonal dimension represents the infinite divine life as it circulates among the persons.¹⁸ Divine impersonality can be perceived in two ways. First, the exchange among persons can be experienced as a kind of "flux." This would give rise to the perception that "all is changing and impermanent: all is arising. . . . The only thing that could be more fundamental would be the cessation of such arising: something like what Buddhism calls *nirvana*."¹⁹ Heim refers to this as the experience of "no self." Second, divine impersonality can be perceived as "self without relation."²⁰ "If there were but

became common in the West to locate the principle of all unity in a single divine substance or essence. But in Eastern Christianity the principle of unity was associated with the first person, the Father." Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 172.

¹⁶ Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 179 (italics mine).

¹⁷ Ninian Smart and Stephen Konstantine, *Christian Systematic Theology in World Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

¹⁸ Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 185.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 187.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 189.

one absolute self, then the flux and impermanence humans perceive as a dimension of the divine presence could be taken as the natural inner reality of that self.”²¹ This would correspond most closely to Advaita Vedanta Hindu thought. A second dimension involves God’s personal involvement in the world. Through this dimension humans “seek God’s presence, hear God’s word, see God’s acts, obey or disobey God’s commandments, and offer praise or petition.”²² This “personal” dimension is characteristic not only of Christianity but also of Judaism and Islam. A third dimension involves “communion.” Heim claims that encountering other “persons” is not the same as experiencing “communion” with them. Communion involves a “mutual indwelling, in which the distinct persons are not confused or identified but are enriched by their participation in each other’s inner life.”²³ These three dimensions of divine life constitute a “seamless unity in the communion of the three persons” and relations arising from them are “irreducible.”²⁴ Furthermore, through any of them one encounters all three persons of the Trinity—not merely one of the divine persons.

²¹ Ibid., 189.

²² Ibid., 192-93.

²³ Ibid., 196.

²⁴ Ibid., 197.

3.1.2 Three Relations and Multiple Religious Ends

Corresponding to these three dimensions of divine life are three types of relations with God: (1) “impersonal identity,” (2) “iconographic encounter” and (3) “personal communion.” Impersonal identity involves a relation with the “impersonal” dimension of God’s nature and exists in two forms. The first variation, being apophatic, “is grounded in the emptiness by which each of the divine persons makes space for the others.”²⁵ The second variation, which is unitive, “is grounded in the coinherence or complete immanence of each of the divine persons in the others.”²⁶ In terms of God’s “economic” interaction with creation, the first variation involves God’s withdrawal or transcendence from creation. This withdrawal enables creation to possess its own reality. In economic terms, the second variation involves God’s immanence in the form of his sustaining presence: “This constant divine activity reveals a universal immanence of God in every creature. It reflects the impersonal mutual indwelling of the three triune persons.”²⁷ The “iconographic encounter” is grounded in the interpersonal encounter among the three persons of the Trinity. Each encounters the other as a unique character. In a parallel way, humans encounter God as a “distinct other.” As in the first relation, two variations exist. In the first variation, one encounters the divine life as a “law, an

²⁵ Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 210.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 210.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 210.

order or structure.”²⁸ An example of this would be the Buddhist *dharma*. A second variation centers upon God as a personal being. Here one experiences an “I-thou” relation with God. This is characteristic of Christianity. The third relation, “personal communion,” derives from the “*perichoresis* or mutual communion of the three divine persons.”²⁹ Each of these dimensions, and their corresponding relations, possesses its own integrity and might be described as “co-equal” in trinitarian terms.³⁰

When a relation with God is pursued “consistently and exclusively” through one of the three dimensions, the result is a “distinctive religious end.” Four types of human destiny are possible: (1) salvation (communion with the triune God), (2) alternative religious ends (which arise in response to an economic manifestation of an immanent dimension of the triune life), (3) non-religious human destinies (which result from fixation on some created good) and (4) negation of the created self. Alternative religious ends are rooted in “authentic revelation of the triune God, but not revelation of God *as* triune.”³¹ Furthermore, they depend upon God’s grace: “The triune God is party to the realization of alternate religious ends. They are not simply the actualization of innate

²⁸ Ibid., 211.

²⁹ Ibid., 211.

³⁰ Ibid., 167.

³¹ Ibid., 275 (*italics original*).

human capacities; they are distinct relations with aspects of the triune life. A particular grace of God is operative within them.”³²

3.1.3 Plenitude and Multiple Religious Ends

In response to his proposal, one might ask, “Why would God *want* multiple ends?” Anticipating this question, Heim offers a final argument for multiple religious ends that draws upon the notion of divine “plenitude.” Plenitude, according to Heim, “is a qualitative description of the divine life as triune.”³³ Economically, this fullness is expressed in everything God has created: “The diversity and communion of the triune life have given rise to the plenitude of relations *among* creatures and to the plenitude of relations between creatures and creator.”³⁴ Multiple religious ends can be viewed as an expression of divine plenitude within creation: “A plenitude of religious ends is a reflection of the goodness and the saving will of God, applied in relation to free persons who seek something other than communion with the triune God. Every relation with God that is sought is fulfilled. Everything is offered. Nothing is denied.”³⁵

³² Ibid., 275.

³³ Ibid., 253.

³⁴ Ibid., 253 (*italics original*).

³⁵ Ibid., 255-56.

3.2 The Economic and the Immanent Trinity in De Trinitate

Having surveyed Heim's proposal, we will now turn to *De Trinitate* in order to consider how Augustine relates the economic and the immanent Trinity.³⁶ We will begin by examining Augustine's discussion of the epistemic foundation for human knowledge of the triune God.³⁷ Augustine makes it clear that Scripture constitutes the authoritative basis for human knowledge of the triune God. Whatever else may have been involved, one thing is clear: the fifth-century battle over the doctrine of God was a battle about how rightly to interpret Scripture. In this context, Augustine wants to contend "for the rightness of saying, believing, understanding that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are of one and the same substance or essence (*unius eiusdemque substantiae vel essentiae*)."³⁸ Hence, his first priority is to "establish by the authority of the holy scriptures whether the faith is in fact like that."³⁹ In his effort to demonstrate the essential unity and equality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Augustine discusses numerous biblical texts.⁴⁰ The scriptural index to *De Trinitate* in volume 50a of *Corpus*

³⁶ Although it may appear anachronistic to consider how Augustine relates the "economic" and the "immanent" Trinity, it will become clear that a distinction between God *in se* and God *pro nobis* plays a significant role in his trinitarian theology.

³⁷ I will argue below that there is good reason to question the identification of the "economic" Trinity with the teaching of Scripture while the "immanent" Trinity is identified with speculative reflection about God.

³⁸ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.4, 67.

³⁹ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.4, 67.

⁴⁰ Augustine explains that Scriptural references to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit can be grouped into three categories. One group of texts (e.g., John 1:1; John 10:30; Phil 2:6) affirms the unity and equality of the

Christianorum Series Latina contains over 6800 biblical citations and allusions.⁴¹ In addition to almost thirty Old Testament books,⁴² citations can be found from every New Testament book except Philemon. Not only does Scripture play a central role in his understanding of the triunity of God, but Augustine is also clear humans possess no knowledge of the triunity of God apart from Scripture.⁴³ With this context in mind, we will explore the distinction Augustine makes between God *in se* and God *pro nobis*.

Augustine draws an important distinction between the eternal generation/procession of the divine persons (immanent Trinity) and their temporal

Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A second group of texts (e.g., John 14:28; I Cor. 15:28) affirms that the Son is somehow “less” than the Father. These texts are often misread because of a failure to distinguish Christ in his *humanity* from Christ in his *deity*. Drawing upon Paul’s distinction in Phil. 2:6 between the Son in the “form of God” and the “form of a servant”, Augustine suggests that in the “form of God,” the Son is the Father’s equal in every way; however, in the “form of a servant” (i.e., in his humanity), he is inferior to the Father. A third group of texts (e.g. John 5:26; 16:28) describes the Son neither as “equal” to the Father nor “less” than the Father but “from the Father.” See Augustine, *De Trin.* II.3, 98-99. For a discussion of Augustine’s trinitarian hermeneutics see Jaroslav J. Pelikan, “*Canonica Regula: The Trinitarian Hermeneutics of Augustine*,” in *Collectanea Augustiniana: Augustine – “Second Founder of the Faith,”* ed. Joseph C. Schnaubelt and Frederick Van Fleteren (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 329-343.

⁴¹ See *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, vol. 50A, (Turnholt: Brepols, 1968), 601-721.

⁴² Citations and allusions can be found in *De Trinitate* to twenty-seven canonical Old Testament books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Habakkuk, Zechariah and Malachi) as well as many of the deuterocanonical books.

⁴³ A popular misreading of *De Trinitate* suggests that Augustine attempts to offer “scriptural proof” for the unity and equality of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in Books I-VII and then turns to “rational proof” for the same in Books VIII-XV. This reading fails to recognize that Augustine never departs from the horizon of faith—even when he is investigating the divine image in the human mind. In the second half of *De Trinitate* Augustine does not abandon Scripture in order to reflect on the triunity of God; instead he wants to illumine the knowledge of the processions which he has discovered on the basis of “faith” (Scripture). Moreover, the purpose of his inquiry is not to offer an apologetic for the triunity of God using “natural theology”; rather, it is a contemplative exercise designed to draw the reader into the life of the triune God. These points will be developed further in chapter five.

missions (economic Trinity).⁴⁴ Notice how he carefully distinguishes

generation/procession from mission in the following statement near the end of Book IV:

Just as the Father, then, begot (*genuit*) and the Son was begotten (*genitus*), so the Father sent (*misit*) and the Son was sent (*missus*). . . . And just as being born (*natum*) means for the Son his being from the Father, so his being sent (*mitti*) means his being known to be from him. And just as for the Holy Spirit his being the gift of God (*donum Dei*) means his proceeding (*procedere*) from the Father, so his being sent (*mitti*) means his being known to proceed (*procedat*) from him.⁴⁵

The temporal missions of the Son and the Spirit are expressed in the phrase “being sent” while their eternal generation and procession are expressed in the respective phrases “being born” and “being gift.” This statement sums up a long investigation of the missions of the Son and the Spirit that began in Book II. This investigation was necessitated by the claim that the “sending” of the Son and Spirit implied that they were inferior to the Father.⁴⁶ Augustine labors to show that “being sent” does imply any inferiority on the part of the one who is sent. He accomplishes the latter by carefully distinguishing mission from generation/procession. It is helpful to consider this distinction both from ontological and epistemological perspectives. From an *ontological*

⁴⁴ Although later Western theologians like Thomas Aquinas speak in terms of two “processions,” it is crucial to note that Augustine reserves the term “procession” (*processio*) exclusively for the Holy Spirit while he uses the term “generation” (*generatio*) exclusively in relation to the Son.

⁴⁵ Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.29, 174.

⁴⁶ “Refuted here, they turn to another axiom: ‘The one who sends is greater than the one sent.’ So the Father is greater than the Son, who is constantly presenting himself as sent by the Father; he is also greater than the Holy Spirit, of whom Jesus said, *whom the Father will send in my name* (Jn 14:26). And the Holy Spirit is less than either, since besides the Father sending him, as mentioned, the Son sends him too, saying as he does, *But if I go away I will send him to you* (Jn 16:7).” Augustine, *De Trin.* II.7, 101.

perspective, generation/procession constitutes the ontological foundation for mission. The Son does not become “Son” by being sent; rather, the Son is constituted as Son by virtue of his generation by the Father (“birth in eternity”). Similarly, the Holy Spirit does not become Spirit by being sent; rather, the Holy Spirit is constituted as Spirit by proceeding from the Father and the Son (“being the Gift of God”).⁴⁷ From an *epistemological* perspective, the order is reversed: mission constitutes the epistemic foundation for generation/procession. The mission of the Son reveals his eternal generation by the Father while mission of the Spirit reveals his eternal procession from the Father (and the Son). Since the missions merely reveal generation and procession, there is no reason to conclude that sending implies inferiority on the part of the one sent.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ In the sentence immediately following the above statement, Augustine offers the following clarification: “Nor, by the way, can we say that the Holy Spirit does not proceed from the Son as well; it is not without point that the same Spirit is called the Spirit of the Father and of the Son.” Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.29, 174. The procession of the Spirit from the Father and Son will be discussed in chapter four.

⁴⁸ “For the moment, however, it has been sufficiently demonstrated, so I think, that the Son is not less than the Father just because he was sent by the Father, nor is the Holy Spirit less simply because both the Father and the Son sent him. We should understand that these sendings are not mentioned in scripture because of any inequality or disparity or dissimilarity of substance (*non propter inaequalitatem vel imparilitatem vel dissimilitudinem substantiae*) between the divine persons, but because of the created visible manifestation of the Son and the Holy Spirit; or better still, in order to bring home to us that the Father is the source and origin of all deity. For even if the Father had chosen to appear visibly through the creation he controls, it would be quite absurd to talk about him being sent by the Son he begot or the Holy Spirit who proceeds from him.” Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.32, 176-77. Here Augustine is summing up his discussion in Books II-IV. He points out that the “sendings” of the Son and Spirit do not reveal their inferiority to the Father but rather that the Father constitutes the source (*principium*) of the Godhead.

Another window into the distinction Augustine draws between mission and generation/procession can be seen in his discussion of the Holy Spirit as “Gift” (*donum*). Inasmuch as the Holy Spirit only becomes “Gift” when he is given in time (a point emphasized in Scripture), employing “gift” language runs the risk of potentially undermining the Spirit’s equality and eternity with the Father and Son. Augustine, however, averts this problem by explaining that the Holy Spirit does not become “Gift” by being given: “We should not be disturbed at the Holy Spirit, although he is coeternal with the Father and the Son, being said to be something from a point of time, like this name we have just used of ‘donation’ (*donatum*). The Spirit, to make myself clear, is everlastingly gift (*donum*), but donation (*donatum*) only from a point of time.”⁴⁹ Augustine draws a distinction between a gift in itself (*donum*) and a gift as a thing given (*donatum*) with the former constituting the basis for the latter. Spirit can exist as a “Gift” in time (economic Trinity) because the Spirit is “Gift” from all eternity (immanent Trinity).⁵⁰ Figure 1 (below) summarizes the distinction Augustine makes between generation/procession and mission in *De Trinitate*.

⁴⁹ Augustine, *De Trin.* V.17, 200.

⁵⁰ Thomas Aquinas will build upon this explanation suggesting that the Holy Spirit is rightly called “Gift” from all eternity because of an aptitude for being given. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia, q.38, a.1, ad. 4.

Mission	Generation/Procession
Temporal	Eternal
Sending of the Son	Eternal generation of the Son by the Father
Giving of the Spirit	Eternal procession from the Father and the Son
Inseparable action	Inseparable substance
Represents the <i>epistemic</i> means through which the eternal processions are revealed	Constitutes the <i>ontological</i> basis for the temporal sending of the Son and the Spirit
Economic Trinity	Immanent Trinity

Figure 1: Distinction between Mission and Generation/Procession

As Edmund Hill rightly notes, Augustine’s distinction between procession and mission represented a significant improvement over an earlier generation of “economic” theologians: “whereas Tertullian had been constrained to say that the economy *constitutes* the mystery of God,” Augustine claimed “that the economy (the missions) reveals the eternal mystery of God.”⁵¹

Although Augustine carefully distinguishes the economic and the immanent Trinity, he does not “sever” them as some contemporary critics allege. On the contrary, they remain inextricably linked in such a way that the missions of the Son and Spirit represent a kind of temporal extension of their eternal generation/procession.⁵² One of Augustine’s central epistemological claims in *De Trinitate* is that the temporal missions *reveal* the eternal generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit. This claim

⁵¹ Hill, *The Trinity*, 48 (italics original).

⁵² For this reason, Augustine would have had no problem affirming the first half of Rahner’s axiom, “the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity.”

depends upon a close continuity between God *in se* and God *pro nobis*; otherwise the missions could not reveal the processions. Notice how the following statement regarding the equality of the Father and Son assumes a close continuity between the economic and the immanent Trinity: “For [the Word] was not sent in virtue of some disparity of power or substance or anything in him that was not equal to the Father, but in virtue of the Son being from the Father, not the Father being from the Son.”⁵³ It is most appropriate that the Son was sent because the Son is *from* the Father.⁵⁴ Another example of close continuity between the economic and the immanent Trinity can be seen in Augustine’s discussion of John 5:19 and John 5:26.⁵⁵ After noting the inadequacy of his “form of a servant” rule to explain these texts, Augustine offers the following

⁵³ It is helpful to read this sentence in a broader context: “If however the reason why the Son is said to have been sent by the Father is simply that the one is the Father and the other the Son, then there is nothing at all to stop us believing that the Son is equal to the Father and consubstantial and co-eternal, and yet that the Son is sent by the Father. Not because one is greater and the other less, but because one is the Father and the other the Son; one is the begetter (*genitor*), the other begotten (*genitus*); the first is the one from whom the sent one is; the other is the one who is from the sender. For the Son is from the Father, not the Father from the Son. In the light of this we can now perceive that the Son is not just said to have been sent because the Word became flesh, but that he was sent in order for the Word to become flesh, and by his bodily presence to do all that was written. That is, we should understand that it was not just the man who the Word became that was sent, but that the Word was sent to become man. For he was not sent in virtue of some disparity of power or substance or anything in him that was not equal to the Father, but in virtue of the Son being from the Father, not the Father being from the Son.” Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.27, 172.

⁵⁴ Although Augustine is sometimes charged with having articulated the view that any of the divine persons could have become incarnate, this assumption is undermined by logic of the above quotation. Inasmuch as the missions are an extension of generation and procession of the Son and the Spirit, it is most fitting that the Son and the Spirit were sent.

⁵⁵ “So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise’” (John 5:19, ESV). “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself” (John 5:26, ESV).

explanation: “So the reason for these statements can only be that the life of the Son is unchanging like the Father’s, and yet is from the Father; and that the work of Father and Son is indivisible, and yet the Son’s working is from the Father just as he himself is from the Father; and the way in which the Son sees the Father is simply by being the Son.”⁵⁶ For our purposes, it is important to note that Augustine posits a close continuity in this statement between the nature of the divine persons (immanent Trinity) and the working of the divine persons *ad extra* (economic Trinity) through two parallels: (1) just as the life of the Son is unchangeable like that of the Father (immanent Trinity), so the working of the Son indivisible from the working of the Father (economic Trinity); and (2) just as the Son is *from* the Father (immanent Trinity), so the work of the Son (economic Trinity) is *from* the Father.⁵⁷ One final example of continuity between the economic and the immanent Trinity can be seen in Augustine’s discussion of the procession of the Holy Spirit. Augustine claims that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*. From

⁵⁶ The first half of this sentence attempts to explain John 5:26 while the second part of the sentence aims at explaining John 5:19. Augustine continues, “For him, being from the Father, that is being born of the Father, is not something different from seeing the Father; nor is seeing him working something different from his working equally; and the reason he does not work of himself is that he does not (so to put it) be of himself; and the reason he does what he sees the Father doing is that he is from the Father. He does not do other things *likewise*, like a painter copying pictures he has seen painted by someone else; nor does he do *the same* things differently, like the body forming letters which the mind has thought; but *Whatever the Father does*, he says, *the same the Son also does likewise* (Jn 5:19). ‘The same,’ he said; and also, ‘likewise’; thus showing that the working of the Father and of the Son is equal and indivisible, and yet the Son’s working comes from the Father. That is why the Son cannot do anything of himself except what he sees the Father doing.” Augustine, *De Trin.* II.3, 99.

⁵⁷ Thus, the reason the Son does not work “of himself” is the same reason he does not have life “in himself” —namely, because he is “from the Father.”

Scriptural references to the sending of the Spirit by the Son in the economy, Augustine infers that the Son must play a constitutive role in the procession of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁸ This claim depends upon a close continuity between the economic and the immanent Trinity.

On a broader scale, one of the striking features about *De Trinitate* is the way in which Augustine carefully integrates economic and ontological perspectives. In response to Latin Homoian readings of Scripture, Augustine attempts to articulate a coherent doctrine of the Trinity in the economy of salvation. The following description in Book I exemplifies this reality. Augustine explains that in the “form of God” (*forma Dei*) the Son created all things (John 1:3) while in the “form of a servant” (*forma servi*) he was made of a woman (Gal. 4:4). In the form of God, the Father and Son are one (John 10:30) while in the form of a servant the Son came to do the will of the Father (John 6:38). In the form of God, he is true God (I John 5:20) while in the form of a servant he was obedient to death (Phil 2:8). In the form of God, everything that belongs to the Father belongs to the Son (John 16:15) while in the form of a servant his doctrine is his Father’s

⁵⁸ “And just as for the Holy Spirit his being the gift of God means his proceeding from the Father, so his being sent means his being known to proceed from him. Nor, by the way, can we say that the Holy Spirit does not proceed from the Son as well; it is not without point that the same Spirit is called the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. And I cannot see what else he intended to signify when he breathed and said *Receive the Holy Spirit* (Jn 20:22). Not that the physical breath that came from his body and was physically felt was the substance of the Holy Spirit; but it was a convenient symbolic demonstration that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as from the Father.” Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.29, 174. The procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son will be discussed in chapter four.

(John 7:16).⁵⁹ Augustine is offering account of the Trinity in the economy of salvation that integrates assumptions about immanent Trinity.⁶⁰ The recent work of David Coffey is helpful in shedding light on the relationship between the economic and the immanent Trinity in Augustine's trinitarian theology.⁶¹ Coffey has proposed that we distinguish three steps in our knowledge of triune God.⁶² In the first step, we encounter the self-revelation of the triune God in the *oikonomia* recorded in Scripture. Coffey refers to this as the "biblical Trinity."⁶³ In the second step, we reflect upon what must be true regarding being and nature of the divine persons in light of God's self-revelation in the

⁵⁹ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.22, 82.

⁶⁰ Because every theological account of the "economic Trinity" contains implicit metaphysical assumptions about the immanent Trinity, one simply cannot arrive at a doctrine of the economic Trinity without reflecting on the being and nature of the divine persons. Thus, Augustine is not outlining a doctrine of the immanent Trinity as an end itself but rather as the necessary basis for a doctrine of the economic Trinity—the triune God in the economy of salvation.

⁶¹ According to Coffey one of the weaknesses of Rahner's axiom is that it "does not tell us which perspective [economic or immanent] is the more fundamental, nor does it throw light on the order of our knowledge of the Trinity." David Coffey, *Deus Trinitas: The Doctrine of the Triune God*. (New York: Oxford, 1999), 14-15. Coffey addresses this lacuna by distinguishing "epistemological" and "ontological" orders. From an epistemological perspective, God's self-revelation in the economy of salvation constitutes the foundation for our knowledge of the immanent Trinity. From an ontological perspective, the immanent Trinity constitutes the foundation for the economic Trinity.

⁶² Coffey, *Deus Trinitas*, 16-17. Coffey suggests that the epistemological order he has outlined—biblical Trinity, immanent Trinity, economic Trinity—corresponds to three orders of knowing (experiencing, understanding and knowing) in the work of Bernard Lonergan.

⁶³ Coffey claims that New Testament presents what would best be described as a "functional" theology. In this context, he denies that the New Testament affirms an ontological incarnation. Coffey, *Deus Trinitas*, 12-14. Coffey's claims notwithstanding, there is good reason to believe the New Testament affirms an ontological incarnation. For example, regarding the claim that the Son is *homoousios* with the Father see, David S. Yeago, "The New Testament and the *Nicene* Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis," *Pro Ecclesia* 3 (1994): 152-164.

oikonomia. The outcome of this reflection represents a doctrine of the “immanent Trinity.” In the third and final step, we articulate a systematic conceptualization of the triune God in the *oikonomia*—a doctrine of the “economic Trinity.”⁶⁴ In *De Trinitate* Augustine brings readers to this third step—a systematic conceptualization of the triune God in the economic of salvation. This can be seen in the structure of Augustine’s summary of “Catholic” teaching on the Trinity in Book I. The first paragraph offers a concise summary of teaching on the immanent Trinity (step two) while the second paragraph offers a systematic summary of this same Trinity in the economy of salvation (step three).⁶⁵

We are now in a position to summarize Augustine’s understanding of the relationship between the economic and the immanent Trinity:

- P1. The *oikonomia* revealed in Scripture constitutes the epistemic foundation for our knowledge of the triunity of God.
- P2. Inasmuch as the knowledge of the Trinity can be gained only through the *oikonomia* revealed in Scripture, any conceptualization of the Trinity (immanent or economic) must have clear roots in the *oikonomia* revealed in Scripture.

⁶⁴ In this third step Coffey explains that we make two simultaneous affirmations: first, the immanent Trinity, which because of divine transcendence must exist in its own right, and second, the economic Trinity, that is, this same Trinity involved in the divine plan of salvation through the missions of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, from a logical standpoint, no reason exists to distinguish the “biblical” from the “economic” Trinity as these merely represent different stages in our intellectual understanding once God’s involvement in the world has been recognized as trinitarian. Coffey, *Deus Trinitas*, 24. As a systematic conceptualization of the triune God in the economy of salvation, the “economic Trinity” is no less speculative than the “immanent Trinity” inasmuch as it incorporates (either explicitly or implicitly) assumptions regarding the immanent Trinity.

⁶⁵ See Augustine, *De Trin.* I.7, 69-70. A detailed discussion of this passage can be found in chapter four.

- P3. An important distinction must be drawn between the economic and the immanent Trinity.
- P4. As a revelation of the triune God in time, the economic Trinity reveals and closely reflects the immanent Trinity.
- P5. From an ontological perspective, the immanent Trinity (God *in se*) constitutes the foundation for the economic Trinity.
- P6. The purpose of a doctrine of the immanent Trinity is not to offer a speculative account of God apart from the economy of salvation as an end in itself but to provide the basis for a proper understanding of God within the economy of salvation.

Augustine claims that Holy Scripture constitutes the epistemic foundation of our knowledge of the triunity of God (P1). This can be seen most clearly in his claim that the temporal missions reveal the eternal generation of the Son and procession of the Spirit. Inasmuch as the knowledge of the Trinity can be gained only through the *oikonomia* revealed in Scripture, any conceptualization of the Trinity (immanent or economic) must have clear roots in the *oikonomia* revealed in Scripture (P2). One of Augustine's unique contributions to the development of trinitarian theology was the distinction he made between mission and generation/procession in which generation of the Son and procession of the Spirit constitute the ontological basis for their temporal missions. To state the principle more generally, we may say that the economic and the immanent Trinity must be distinguished (P3). At the same time, Augustine claims that the temporal missions reveal and closely reflect the eternal processions (P4). Just as procession constitutes the basis for mission, more generally we might say that the immanent Trinity constitutes the ontological ground for the economic (P5). Finally, the

purpose of a doctrine of the immanent Trinity is not to offer a speculative account of God apart from the economy of salvation as an end in itself but to provide the basis for a proper understanding of God within the economy of salvation (P6).

3.3 An Evaluation of Heim's Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends

In the discussion that follows, I will argue that the trinitarian problems in Heim's proposal center on the relationship between the economic and the immanent Trinity.⁶⁶ More specifically, I will show that the breakdown in Heim's trinitarian grammar occurs in steps two and three of the epistemic order (i.e., biblical Trinity, immanent Trinity, economic Trinity). In step two, Heim articulates a speculative understanding of the immanent Trinity that has little basis in the biblical Trinity. Then, in step three, he outlines a conception of the "economic Trinity" that includes "economies" of divine activity that bypass the temporal missions of the Son and the Spirit as revealed in the *oikonomia*.

We will begin by outlining Heim's account of the relationship between the economic and the immanent Trinity. Heim insists that the triune God of Christian confession represents the basis for his proposal:

⁶⁶ This is not to suggest that the *only* problems that Heim's proposal are trinitarian. One could also raise questions regarding the ontological coherence of multiple religious ends. My critique centers exclusively upon the trinitarian content of his proposal.

By 'Trinity' I do not mean to refer to a generic and symbolic scheme of abstract threeness. With such a minimalist pattern, one can run merrily through the religions gathering 'trinities,' from the *Brahma-Shiva-Vishnu* triumvirate of Hinduism to the *trikay* or 'three bodies' doctrine of Buddhism. I am speaking of the reality of God as presented in the doctrine of the Christian church, which presupposes the incarnation of the Word as crucial revelation and act of God.⁶⁷

Heim draws a distinction between the "ontological" and the "economic" Trinity.⁶⁸ The latter denotes "an understanding of the triune persons as varying external faces of God's action in the world" while the former refers to "the actual triune persons whose communion in God is the divine life itself."⁶⁹ Although he insists that a distinction must be drawn between the "ontological" and the "economic" Trinity, Heim maintains that the economic activity of the triune God closely corresponds to and reflects God's triune nature: "Christian belief that God is ontologically triune is belief that God's manifestation to us is shaped by God's true, deepest character. It is a conviction that our relation with God connects not with God's purpose but God's person."⁷⁰ This can be seen most clearly in the case of Christian salvation: "Salvation as a relation of deep communion with God makes sense because God's nature itself has the character of communion."⁷¹ Underlying the previous two statements is an assumption that the economic activity of the triune God (economic Trinity) must closely correspond to and

⁶⁷ Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 130.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 59-61, 126-133.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

reflect the immanent Trinity. From an ontological perspective, Heim insists that the immanent (or “ontological”) Trinity constitutes the ground for the economic Trinity: “The affirmation that the economic Trinity (an understanding of the triune persons as varying external faces of God’s action in the world) is *grounded* in the ontological Trinity (the actual triune persons whose communion in God is the divine life itself) implies that not all representations of God are mere projections. Relational images of God express something true of God’s true nature.”⁷² Heim insists that the ultimate purpose of trinitarian reflection is not to offer “a detailed, objective description of God when God is ‘home alone’” but to narrate “the various ways God acts in the world, and the various ways we experience God’s presence.”⁷³

Four assumptions shape Heim’s trinitarian “grammar.”

- A1. God’s self-revelation through the person and work of Christ constitutes the epistemic basis for our knowledge of the triunity of God.
- A2. An important distinction must be drawn between the economic Trinity and the ontological (immanent) Trinity.
- A3. The economic Trinity closely corresponds to and reflects the ontological (immanent) Trinity. “Trinity” does not merely describe an external representation of God; “Trinity” describes something that is ontologically true about God’s nature.
- A4. From an ontological perspective, the immanent Trinity constitutes the ground for the economic Trinity.

⁷² Ibid., 126 (italics mine).

⁷³ Ibid., 180.

So far Heim's grammar appears to be perfectly consistent with our Augustinian grammar: A1 corresponds to P1, A2 corresponds to P3, A3 corresponds to P4 and A4 corresponds to P5. In the case of the Christian "religious end" (salvation), Heim's trinitarian "grammar" functions perfectly. The inherent "relationality" of salvation mirrors the "relationality" of the divine life of the triune God. A problem, however, arises for Heim's trinitarian grammar in the case of other religious ends. According to A3, a close correspondence must exist between the economic activity of the triune God and the immanent life of the triune God.⁷⁴ In the case of Christian salvation, a close correspondence obtains; however, what about other religious ends? How, for example, does the Hindu end (*moksha*), which involves release from the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth, closely correspond to and reflect the immanent life of the triune God? Here Heim faces a dilemma. On the one hand, he insists that the economic activity of the triune God closely corresponds to and reflects God's true nature (A3). On the other hand, he affirms the existence of multiple religious ends which entails great economic diversity. How can these be reconciled? One alternative might be to follow the lead of "pluralists" such as John Hick and drop A3; however, if A3 is dropped, one can no longer claim that the Christian "end" (salvation) corresponds to and reflects God's

⁷⁴ This represents the entire point of Heim's insistence that the Christian end (salvation as communion with God) reveals something true regarding God's inner nature.

triune nature. Furthermore, one must also surrender the claim that “Trinity” describes something that is ontologically true about God. Ultimately, a denial of A3 would lead one to a position in which all religions are conceived as “authentic” *economic* responses to some indeterminate *immanent* divine reality. Heim clearly wants to avoid this. Rather than drop A3, he adds another premise into his trinitarian “grammar”:

A5. The immanent life of the triune God is “complex.”

Positing “complexity” in the inner life of God (A5) constitutes Heim’s solution to the dilemma of how, on the one hand, he can affirm that God’s economic activity closely corresponds to and reflects God’s nature and, on the other hand, he can affirm that economic expressions of the triune God are quite diverse.⁷⁵

What constitutes “complexity” in the divine life of the triune God? This question takes us to the heart of Heim’s proposal. As I noted in A4, the immanent (or ontological) Trinity represents the constitutive basis for Heim’s alternative religious ends. What is Heim’s understanding of the immanent Trinity? He claims that God is a communion of

⁷⁵ Notice how Heim appeals to “complexity” as the constitutive basis for economic diversity in the context of close correspondence between the economic and the immanent Trinity: “By affirming the closest possible unity of Christ with God, in the specific context of Jewish monotheism, Christian faith created a problem absent in more monistic or polytheistic traditions. For God to be distinctively connected with historical particularity in this way, while remaining the sole, transcendent creator, obviously required diversity in the means, the *economy*, by which God related to the world. And if this economic activity of God was to be at the same time true revelation of God’s very self, then that variety of manifestation had to be rooted in a complexity of relation intrinsic to God’s self. In other words, the means and ways in which God related to creation were not accidental or artificial but expressions of God’s intrinsic character.” Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 131 (italics original).

three divine persons: "God's personal reality is complex: God is 'made up' of personal communion-in-difference."⁷⁶ In this statement it may sound as if all Heim means by "complex" is that the divine life is merely constituted by three persons; however, as his proposal unfolds it becomes clear that the primary referent of "complexity" is not the three divine "persons" but the three "dimensions" of divine life.⁷⁷ Heim claims that three dimensions constitute the divine life of the triune God: (1) an impersonal dimension, (2) a personal dimension and (3) communion. All three of these dimensions "are a feature of the triune God's integral reality."⁷⁸ The impersonal dimension involves "the radical immanence and the radical emptiness, by which the divine persons indwell each other and make way for the others to indwell them."⁷⁹ Economically, the impersonal dimension can be perceived either as a kind of flux (corresponding to the

⁷⁶ Ibid., 62.

⁷⁷ "We have pressed this exploration of trinitarian thought, and particularly the meaning of 'person,' for a specific purpose. The complex nature of God holds out the possibility of a variety of distinct relations with God. That variety is the basis for truly different religious ends. Alternative religious ends represent an intensified realization of one dimension of God's offered relation with us." Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 179. Complexity in the above quotation is associated with the "dimensions" not the "persons." That this must be the case can be seen when one reads the following quotation alongside this earlier statement: "The distinctive religious *ends* of various traditions correspond to *relations* with God constituted by limitation or intensification within a particular *dimension* of the trinitarian life. This provides the basis both to affirm the reality of these religious *ends* and to distinguish them from salvation." Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 167-68 (italics mine).

⁷⁸ Ibid., 197.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 185.

Buddhist experience of nirvana) or as an experience of an absolute self (corresponding to Advaita Vedanta Hindu thought).⁸⁰

In terms of his trinitarian “grammar,” Heim is emphasizing the immanent Trinity as ground for the economic (A4). In the example cited above, the impersonal dimension of God’s immanent life constitutes the basis for an “economic” encounter between the triune God and Buddhists in which Buddhists experience “the radical immanence and the radical emptiness, by which the divine persons indwell each other and make way for the others to indwell them.”⁸¹ A relation with the impersonal dimension of the triune life by Buddhists leads to the Buddhist religious end—*nirvana*. His grammar functions similarly with other ends: a particular dimension of God’s immanent life constitutes the foundation for an economic manifestation of the triune God leading to a particular religious end.

3.3.1 From the Biblical to the Immanent Trinity

Having examined Heim’s trinitarian “grammar,” we will turn our attention to the first major trinitarian problem. Earlier I suggested that three phases of discovery may be distinguished: (1) biblical Trinity, (2) immanent Trinity and (3) economic Trinity. These are summarized in Figure 2 below.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 187.

⁸¹ Ibid., 185.

Biblical Trinity	Immanent Trinity	Economic Trinity
Revelation of the triunity of God in the <i>oikonomia</i> recorded in Scripture.	Conceptualization of the being and nature of the divine persons on the basis of God's self-revelation.	Conceptualization of the salvific action of the triune God in the economy of salvation.

Figure 2: Trinity: Biblical, Immanent and Economic

Thus, the biblical Trinity constitutes the epistemic foundation for our knowledge of the triunity of God (P1)—a point Heim affirms (A1). Inasmuch as the knowledge of the Trinity can be gained only through the *oikonomia* revealed in Scripture, any conceptualization of the Trinity (immanent or economic) must possess a clear basis in the biblical Trinity (P2). Thus, what Augustine affirmed regarding his own proposal applies equally to Heim's: "But first we must establish by the authority of the holy scriptures whether the faith is in fact like that."⁸² In light of Figure 2 we must ask the following question: What constitutes the revelatory basis in the *oikonomia* for Heim's understanding of the inner life of the triune God (specifically the three dimensions and corresponding relations)?

⁸² Augustine, *De Trin.* I.4, 67.

Biblical Trinity	Immanent Trinity	Economic Trinity
???	Three Dimensions of the Divine life: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impersonal • Personal • Communion 	Three types of relations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impersonal identity • Iconographic encounter • Personal communion

Figure 3: Trinity in Heim’s Proposal

Heim, of course, would insist that the triune God as revealed in Christian Scripture constitutes the basis for his proposal.⁸³ His claim that three “persons” (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) constitute the divine life of the triune God, certainly is rooted in the *oikonomia*; however, it is important to recognize that at the center of Heim’s doctrine of the immanent Trinity is the assumption that the divine life of the triune God is constituted by three “dimensions.” Regarding the latter claim, one must ask the following question: What aspect of God’s self-revelation in Scripture (the biblical Trinity) constitutes the foundation Heim’s three “dimensions”?

To make this criticism more concrete, it will be helpful to explore a specific example. According to Heim, the impersonal dimension involves the “radical immanence and the radical emptiness, by which the divine persons indwell each other and make way for the others to indwell them.”⁸⁴ What constitutes the foundation in the

⁸³ Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 130.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 185.

biblical Trinity for this claim? Heim asserts that an “impersonal” dimension can be seen in God’s economic interactions—particularly in the Old Testament. It will be helpful to quote him at length:

In the biblical tradition, we find clear indications of relation with God tuned into this wavelength. There is a very real note in Scripture that highlights an impersonal side of the divine. In the Old Testament the holiness of God and the direct presence of God frequently have this character, like a fire in the presence of which everything mortal is consumed. Theophanies, or even the continuing presence of God that rests in the ark of the tabernacle as it travels with the people of Israel, have this quality. Humans exposed to this presence are in great danger, in a purely ‘chemical’ and impersonal sense, quite apart from any specific intention on God’s part. It is as if a creature stepped into a circuit where unimaginable current was being exchanged. The raw divine life is a ‘consuming fire,’ and account of those who encounter it (Moses or Job, for instance) trade strongly on the language of impersonal forces like fire or wind. This divine power or force might be viewed as something like an electrical charge or field, generated by the constant interchange of the three divine persons with each other.⁸⁵

There are at least three problems with this line of argument. First, these apparently “impersonal” divine manifestations represent one facet of a fundamentally “personal” self-revelation. It is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who “speaks” to Moses from the “burning bush.” To sever an “impersonal” aspect from the “personal” and make it stand alone is highly problematic. Second, no epistemic warrant exists for assuming that a particular created form (e.g., fire) necessarily reveals something about the immanent nature of the triune God. In his discussion of the Old Testament theophanies Augustine

⁸⁵ Ibid., 185-86.

notes that God appeared to humans through a variety of “created objects.”⁸⁶ He insists that these Old Testament theophanies do not manifest God’s immanent nature: “All these visions, however, were produced through the changeable creation subject to the changeless God, and they did not manifest God *as he is in himself* (*non proprie sicuti est*), but in a symbolic manner as times and circumstances required.”⁸⁷ Thus, to draw inferences about the immanent life of the triune God based on the nature of a particular created representation (e.g., pillar of cloud, burning bush, fire and smoke, etc.) is without warrant.⁸⁸ Third, what is being (indirectly) manifested in these theophanies is not a “dimension of the divine life” but the divine persons.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ “Accordingly, whatever it was that the Old Testament fathers saw whenever God showed himself to them, unfolding his plan of salvation in a manner suited to the times, it is clear that it was always achieved through created objects.” Augustine, *De Trin.* III.22, 140. Later in this same book Augustine argues that angels played a key role in effecting these Old Testament manifestations. This represents one of the factors that distinguishes Old Testament theophanies from the New Testament sendings.

⁸⁷ Augustine, *De Trin.* II.32, 120 (italics mine). Augustine also argues that these theophanies possess an epistemic ambiguity in relation to the triunity of God such that it is frequently unclear which of the divine persons appeared through a particular visible representation. “Finally, to conclude: the first point we undertook to investigate in our threefold division of the field was whether it was the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit who appeared to the fathers in those various created forms; or whether it was sometimes the Father, sometimes the Son, sometimes the Holy Spirit; or whether it was simply the one and only God, that is the trinity itself, without any distinction of persons, as it is called. An examination of what seems a sufficient number of scriptural passages, and a modest and careful consideration of the divine symbols or ‘sacraments’ they contain, all served to teach us, I think, one lesson; that we should not be dogmatic in deciding which person of the three appeared in any bodily form or likeness to this or that patriarch or prophet, unless the whole context of the narrative provides us with probable indications.” Augustine, *De Trin.* II.35, 121-22. Augustine is responding to Homoian theologians who argued that the Son was the inherently visible person of the Trinity and that this visibility (which can be seen in the theophanies) was incompatible with an affirmation of the Son’s ontological equality with the Father.

⁸⁸ Augustine draws a clear distinction between the created medium of manifestation and the persons in such a way that the nature of the former does not entail any necessary assumptions about the nature of the latter. This can be seen in his comments on Exodus 33: “But however all this may be, some such interpretation of

What, then, constitutes the epistemic basis for Heim's claim that the immanent life of the triune God is characterized by a "radical immanence and radical emptiness, by which the divine persons indwell each other and make way for the others to indwell them"?⁹⁰ The primary source for Heim's claim that the divine life is characterized by "three dimensions" is not God's self-revelation in Scripture but Smart and Konstantine's *Christian Systematic Theology in World Context* (to which Heim acknowledges his indebtedness). The fact that Heim appropriates this concept from Smart/Konstantine is not in itself problematic. It simply pushes the same question back one level. What constitutes the basis for Smart/Konstantine's claim? Smart/Konstantine claim that the "Social Trinity" constitutes the ultimate referent of all religious experience. Their proposal starts with a particular construal of the immanent Trinity and attempts to explain the "economic" activity of the triune God among other religions on the basis of this account. Although they affirm that the "Social Trinity" constitutes the ultimate divine reality, they are quite skeptical regarding the epistemic foundation on which the doctrine ultimately rests. The three dimensions that characterize the divine life are

the story about Moses is required; for we must not allow ourselves to be so befogged by literal-minded materialism that we imagine the Lord's face to be invisible and his back visible. Both of course were visible in the form of a servant; in the form of God—away with the possibility of such thoughts! Away with the idea that the Word of God and the Wisdom of God has a face on one side and a back on the other, like the human body, or that it undergoes any local movement or periodic change in appearance whatever!" Augustine, *De Trin.* II.31, 119.

⁸⁹ In this sense, Heim is searching for theophanies of the "dimensions" in his reading of the Old Testament.

⁹⁰ Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 185.

simply asserted and then employed in their argument.⁹¹ Thus, from an Augustinian perspective, what makes their proposal most problematic is not their preference for a “Social” understanding of Trinity (over and against a “Psychological” approach) but the way their proposal explicitly abandons Scripture as the epistemic foundation for human knowledge of the triunity of God (P1). According to Smart/Konstantine: “The liberal-academic solvents have gnawed away the rusts of Biblical certainty. It therefore seems nonsense to pretend that the Bible has doctrinal or narrative authority.”⁹² By rejecting the authority of Scripture, they reject the epistemic basis for a *Christian* doctrine of the Trinity.⁹³ Inasmuch as Heim’s account of the three immanent “dimensions” is consciously dependent upon Smart/Konstantine, it represents a speculative account of the immanent Trinity that is inadequately rooted in the *oikonomia* revealed in Scripture. In contrast to Heim, Augustine is quite cautious in speculating about the immanent

⁹¹ “We can make a distinction too between the non-relational and the relational aspects of the Trinity. There is, first, the infinity of the divine life as it circulates through the selfless spirits. This is the non-relational aspect. Then, second, there is the plurality of the three Persons. Third, there is the communal life—the shared ego of the three. These last two aspects are relational (the first to one another, the second toward creatures).” Smart and Konstantine, *Christian Systematic Theology*, 174.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹³ As an alternative to Scripture, Smart/Konstantine attempt to ground their trinitarian doctrine in the liturgical life and experience of the church. In the absence of Scripture, one cannot help but ask why the religious experience of one particular group (early Christians) should be epistemically privileged over the religious experiences of other groups (Hindus, Buddhists, etc.) in formulating an understanding of the religious ultimate. Ironically, although they are quite skeptical about Scripture, they appear to be quite convinced that a “Social” account of the Trinity is manifestly superior to a “Psychological” understanding of this doctrine.

Trinity.⁹⁴ In his introduction to Book V, Augustine explains that “when we think about God the trinity we are aware that our thoughts are quite inadequate to their object, and incapable of grasping him as he is . . .”⁹⁵ Although we should always be praising God, “yet no words of ours are capable of expressing him.”⁹⁶ Whatever we say about God’s unchanging and invisible nature cannot be measured by material things. At one point Augustine explains that it is easier to say what God is not rather than what God is.⁹⁷ Augustine’s caution regarding the immanent Trinity can be seen in his discussion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as “persons” which we examined in chapter two.⁹⁸ From an Augustinian standpoint, Heim simply claims to know too much about the interior life of God. By affirming a speculative account of the immanent Trinity inadequately rooted in Scripture, Heim implicitly undermines a normative trinitarian grammar which states that the epistemic basis for our knowledge of the Trinity is God’s self-revelation.

⁹⁴ Augustine is sometimes criticized for engaging in unrestrained speculation about God *in se* (particularly in the second half of *De Trinitate*). For example, in his biography of Augustine, Peter Brown suggests that *De Trinitate* provides “remarkable evidence of Augustine’s capacity for speculation.” Moreover, “In the *De Trinitate* we have a book more radically metaphysical than that of any Greek author: throughout it we can see the tension involved in embracing, in one perspective, both the God of Abraham and Isaac and the God of the Philosophers.” Peter R. L. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 274. Although *De Trinitate* contains rigorous argumentation that sometimes requires great patience to follow, the actual trinitarian doctrine it defends is relatively basic.

⁹⁵ Augustine, *De Trin.* V.1, 189.

⁹⁶ Augustine, *De Trin.* V.1, 189.

⁹⁷ “Whoever thinks of God like that may not yet be able to discover altogether what he is, but is at least piously on his guard against thinking about him anything that he is not.” Augustine, *De Trin.*, V.1, 190.

⁹⁸ See Augustine, *De Trin.* V.7, 224.

3.3.2 From the Immanent to the Economic Trinity

A second trinitarian problem involves the way in which Heim's proposal moves from the immanent Trinity (step 2) to the economic Trinity (step 3). To better understand the nature of this problem, we must examine Heim's account of the economic Trinity. According to Heim, three "relations" characterize the economic activity of the triune God: (1) "impersonal identity," (2) "iconographic encounter" and (3) "personal communion." These relations represent three "faces" of the triune God within the *oikonomia*. "To encounter God as an impersonal reality touches in depth a dimension of the divine life, the ceaseless exchange among the persons."⁹⁹ Through an "iconographic encounter," God relates to the world in a more direct way. A third kind of relation involves awareness of communion among the divine persons. Heim insists that relations with God through all three dimensions are "real" relations with the triune God:

It is important to make the point that relations with God in *all* three dimensions we have described are real relations with God. They are not relations with something else (idols) or with false gods. What humans find in such relations is truly there. These are all relations with the God who is triune, though some may refine and restrict their relationship with the trinity of God. They are not relations to only one divine person rather than to others, since given God's nature and the communion of persons that is not possible. An isolated relation

⁹⁹ Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 191.

with one person of the Trinity is something that exists only in abstraction. In each case it is God in God's triune nature we meet.¹⁰⁰

These "real" relations constitute the economic means through which alternative religious ends (e.g., *moksha*, *nirvana*, etc.) are realized.

To say that other ends are part of God's economy implies that they are *willed* by God.¹⁰¹ Thus, Heim's proposal entails the assumption that the triune God actively *will*s alternative religious ends: "The triune God is party to the realization of alternate religious ends. They are not simply the actualization of innate human capacities; they are distinct relations with aspects of the triune life. *A particular grace of God is operative in them.*"¹⁰² It is crucial to recognize the implications of the above affirmation: alongside God's economy of "salvation" in Christ, other economies of divine activity exist. Through these "economies" of divine activity, the triune God is directing men and women to ends other than communion with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One cannot call these "economies of salvation" because Christian salvation does not represent their ultimate goal. Within Heim's proposal there is an economy of salvation (the Christian end), an "economy" of *nirvana* (the Buddhist end), an "economy" of

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 199.

¹⁰¹ "All of God's manifestation in the world is economic in the sense of being an outward expression of God's purpose." Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 125-26.

¹⁰² Ibid., 275 (italics mine).

moksha (the Hindu end), etc.¹⁰³ From a trinitarian standpoint, one might say that alongside the mission of the Son and the Spirit to restore men and women to communion with the triune God, other economic “missions” exist through which men and women are directed to ends other than salvation.

It must be acknowledged that no logical impossibility exists whereby the triune God could not will positive religious ends other than (Christian) salvation. My criticism does not concern the *logical possibility* of alternative ends but the *epistemic warrant* for positing “economies” of divine activity that bypass the mission of the Son and the Spirit to restore men and women to communion with the triune God *when this represents the only divine mission revealed in Scripture*. No epistemic warrant exists for such a move. Rather, the divine activity of the trinitarian persons must be understood in light of the temporal missions of the Son and the Spirit to restore men and women to communion with the triune God. This can be seen clearly in Augustine’s extended discussion of the

¹⁰³ From an economic standpoint, a significant difference exists between the role of Christ in the Christian end (salvation) and the role of Christ in other ends. In the former, Christ represents not only the constitutive *means* of salvation but the constitutive *end* of salvation; in the case of alternative ends, however, Christ represents a constitutive means but *not* a constitutive end: “The influence of Christ’s work plays an integral role in the process by which any religious believer forms the desire to seek relation with God through a true dimension of the triune life and then carries out the practices that lead to the fulfillment of that relation. Christ may constitute some of the *means* by which people are able to make progress on these paths. But Christ is not constitutive of these other religious ends themselves. This is because as separate and distinct final states they exclude each other. The one end that Christ does constitute is the communion of salvation. Christ cannot constitute these other religious ends *as* separate and final, since that would be the antithesis of that communion.” Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 288 (italics original).

work of Christ in Book IV.¹⁰⁴ A precise constitutive link exists for Augustine between the Trinitarian persons (immanent Trinity) and the one divine economy of salvation brought about in Christ (economic Trinity). Heim severs this link. In the process of positing religious ends other than salvation (or damnation), he implicitly posits other “economies” of divine activity that effectively bypass the work of Christ. It would be inconceivable to Augustine to posit additional “economies” of divine activity that bypass (or constitute an alternative) to this one economy of salvation. For Augustine (just as for the New Testament), all divine activity is focused on the one divine economy focused on Christ. No biblical warrant exists for positing economies of divine activity that bypass the salvific mission of the Son and the Spirit to restore men and women into communion with God. On the basis of a speculative understanding of the immanent Trinity (step 2), Heim outlines an account of the economic Trinity (step 3) that ultimately undermines the divine *oikonomia* revealed in Scripture.

3.2.3 A Trinity of Dimensions Replaces a Trinity of Persons

At the level of the immanent Trinity, Heim’s proposal ultimately employs two trinities. The first Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is the Trinity of Christian confession; however, this Trinity is not the one which does the real work in Heim’s

¹⁰⁴ See Augustine, *De Trin.* IV. Augustine’s discussion of the mission of the Son is discussed in detail in chapter four.

project. Multiple religious ends ultimately rest upon a different trinity—a trinity of “three dimensions”: “impersonal,” “personal” and “communion.” These immanent “dimensions” lead to three kinds of “irreducible” economic relations (“impersonal identity,” “iconographic encounter” and “personal communion”), which provide the basis for multiple religious ends.¹⁰⁵ Heim subtly substitutes the “dimensions” for the trinitarian “persons” effectively creating an alternate trinity. The term “complex” plays a key role in this substitution. When Heim first introduces this term, “complex” initially denotes the fact that God’s being is constituted by a multiplicity of persons; however, as his argument unfolds, “complex” subtly shifts to denote the three “dimensions.”¹⁰⁶

His substitution of “dimensions” for “persons” can be seen mostly clearly in the application of language, reserved for the trinitarian “persons,” to these “dimensions.”

Heim claims that only “three” dimensions exist. Why three? Why not two, four or even

¹⁰⁵ That “dimensions” are immanent and “relations” economic can be seen in the following quotation: “I am suggesting that there are four broad types of human destiny. There is salvation, that communion through Christ with God and with others that unites an unlimited diversity of persons and opens each to wider participation in the triune life. Second, we have alternative religious ends, the distinctive human fulfillments of various religious traditions. Each of these grasps some dimension of the triune life and its economic manifestation, and makes it the ground for a definitive human end.” Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 272.

¹⁰⁶ According to Heim, “The *complex* nature of God holds out the possibility of a variety of distinct relations with God. That variety is the basis for truly different religious ends.” Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 179. One must ask the following question: “To what does this complexity refer?” It seems quite clear that the primary referent of “complexity” is the three “dimensions.” This can be seen in Heim’s discussion of Smart and Konstantine’s proposal (from whom he appropriates his concept of dimensions). Central to their argument is the assumption that “only such a *complex* divine nature, which generates these diverse *dimensions*, can account inclusively for varieties of valid religious experience” (ibid., 161, italics mine). In this quotation a clear link can be seen between “complex” and “dimensions.” Although he is discussing Smart and Konstantine’s proposal at this point, this same link exists for him.

ten? Is it merely coincidental that there also happen to be three divine persons?

Claiming there are precisely three “dimensions” seems to be intended to create a link with the persons. Second, Heim suggests that “each of the dimensions is granted co-equality with the others.”¹⁰⁷ Here Heim intentionally applies the language of “co-equality” to the dimensions; yet this language applies only to the trinitarian persons. Third, he speaks about the “irreducible” nature of the relations corresponding to these dimensions: “If God is Trinity, these dimensions of the divine life are a seamless unity in the communion of the three persons. The various relations with God we have outlined are irreducible. If God is Trinity, then no one of these need be or can be eliminated in favor of the others.”¹⁰⁸ Yet “irreducibility” applies only to the persons. The Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Spirit. Finally, he claims that individuals experience “relations” with these “dimensions” in such a way that the “dimensions” effectively replace the trinitarian persons.¹⁰⁹ From an Augustinian perspective, this substitution of

¹⁰⁷ Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 213.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 197. Similarly, Heim claims, “Those who are convinced they have touched or heard the divine likely refer to one of these occasions: God above us, God alongside us and among us, God within us. The Trinity is an account of God that says these are experiences of the same reality, not different ones, and yet each has its own *irreducible* integrity.” Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 132 (italics mine).

¹⁰⁹ Heim’s equivocation on this point is quite revealing. On one hand, he insists that individuals relate to the triune God: “It is important to make the point that relations with God in *all* three dimensions we have described are real relations with God. They are not relations with something else (idols) or with false gods. What humans find in such relations is truly there. These are all relations with the God who is triune, though some may refine and restrict their relationship with the triunity of God. They are not relations to only one divine person rather than to others, since given God’s nature and the communion of persons that is not possible. An isolated relation with one person of the Trinity is something that exists only in abstraction. In

“dimensions” for the trinitarian persons is deeply problematic. For Augustine, all legitimate predications about God are of two types: statements of “substance” (*substantia*) and statements of “relationship” (*relatio*). Even if one were theoretically to grant that such “dimensions” existed (a claim Augustine would likely contest on biblical grounds) he would rightly argue that it is fundamentally inappropriate to apply relationship language to these dimensions because they constitute substantive predications.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, Augustine would insist that individuals experience a relationship with the trinitarian persons, not with an “aspect” or “dimension” of God’s nature. Ultimately it appears that Heim’s immanent “trinity of dimensions” (impersonal, personal and communion) has subtly replaced the Trinity of persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit).

3.4 Implications for the Christian Theology of Religions

In her controversial book *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, Catherine LaCugna argued that Christian theology went astray when its reflection on the life of the

each case it is God in God’s triune nature we meet” (ibid., 199). On the other hand, he also claims that individuals experience a relation merely with an “aspect” of God’s nature. Multiple religious ends result from an “intensification of a particular kind of relation with an *aspect of divine life*” (ibid., 289, italics mine). Thus, it is unclear whether the “relation” exists with the triune God or merely with an “aspect” of God.

¹¹⁰ See Augustine, *De Trin.* V, 189-201.

triune God (*theologia*) became severed from the economy of salvation (*oikonomia*).¹¹¹ According to LaCugna, increasing preoccupation with God *in se*, a trajectory established by the Council of Nicea, ultimately led to the “defeat” of trinitarian doctrine rendering it “irrelevant” to the Christian life. Although LaCugna’s historical and theological analysis is flawed,¹¹² her underlying concern regarding the danger of *theologia* becoming severed from *oikonomia* is, nonetheless, quite legitimate.¹¹³ Our analysis of Heim’s proposal demonstrates that LaCugna was right to be concerned about the danger of “severing” *theologia* and *oikonomia*. We must note, however, that it is not simply by articulating a doctrine of the immanent Trinity (God *in se*) that one severs *oikonomia* and *theologia* as LaCugna would have us believe. Heim errs *not* because the immanent Trinity constitutes the ontological basis for his proposal; rather, he errs because he offers a speculative account of the immanent Trinity that is without support in God’s self-revelation in the *oikonomia* (i.e., Scripture) and then uses this speculative account to develop a doctrine of the economic Trinity that ultimately undermines the *oikonomia*

¹¹¹ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).

¹¹² On this point, see Thomas Weinandy, “The Immanent and Economic Trinity,” *The Thomist* 57 (1993): 655-66; and Paul Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002).

¹¹³ I understand LaCugna’s concerns to be the following. First, we must recognize that we can only speak about the triune God on the basis of God’s self-communication. (In precisely this sense we must recognize that *oikonomia* represents the foundation for *theologia*.) Second, we must remember that the goal of trinitarian reflection is not an account of the life of the triune God *apart from* the economy of salvation but rather the life of the triune God *in* the economy of salvation. Finally, trinitarian reflection must ultimately serve a doxological purpose—enabling us rightly to worship the triune God.

revealed in Scripture. From an Augustinian perspective, his trinitarian “grammar” ultimately fails to maintain *oikonomia* as the epistemological foundation of our knowledge of the triunity of God. With reference to LaCugna, we might say that it is by articulating an account of the immanent (and the economic) Trinity that has little epistemic foundation in God’s self-revelation in the *oikonomia* that one “severs” *theologia* from *oikonomia*.

Perhaps the clearest example of severing the economic and the immanent Trinity can be seen in the case of “pluralist” theologies of religion. For example, John Hick claims all religions are culturally conditioned yet authentic responses to an indeterminate divine ultimate reality, which he calls “the Real.”¹¹⁴ According to Hick, “The Real” in itself cannot be known; it can only be perceived and experienced in a variety of economic faces through various religious traditions. From a trinitarian perspective, Hick’s proposal entails a complete severing of the economic and the immanent Trinity.¹¹⁵ An “immanent” Real, which in principle cannot be known, expresses itself through an unending number of “economic” faces (some of which

¹¹⁴ John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). Hick’s position can be more fully summarized through the following four propositions: (1) There is one divine ultimate reality (“the Real”) which is the ultimate ground of all religious experience. (2) No religious tradition directly perceives or experiences “the Real.” (3) Each religion represents a culturally conditioned yet authentic response to “the Real.” (4) The Real radically transcends all descriptions—both negative and positive.

¹¹⁵ It should be noted that although Hick still describes himself as a “Christian,” he has abandoned most of the basic tenets of orthodox Christian teaching including the doctrine of the Trinity.

greatly contradict one another). Although Heim's proposal differs substantively from Hick's, it faces a problem similar to Hick's inasmuch as it severs the economic and the immanent Trinity.

Just as reflection upon the relationship between economic and the immanent Trinity has brought sharply into the focus problems that inhere in certain accounts of the God/world relationship in a post-Hegelian context, greater attention to the relationship between the economic and the immanent Trinity could also help clarify problems in the "trinitarian" theology of religions. Much appropriation of the doctrine of the Trinity within the theology of religions moves in direction that is at odds with the modern trinitarian revival. One distinctive feature of the modern trinitarian movement is an attempt to reconnect Trinity and history, Trinity and salvation, Trinity and Christian living—in short, *theologia* and *oikonomia*.¹¹⁶ Ironically, in their attempts to make the doctrine of the Trinity "relevant" to other religions, theologians such as Heim move in a direction at odds with this movement by implicitly severing the economic and the immanent Trinity.

¹¹⁶ See Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives*, 155.

4. The Divine Relations in the Theology of Religions

The divine relations, which constitute the heart of the trinitarian mystery, have generated lively debate in contemporary theology. Divine “personhood” represents an excellent case in point. Karl Barth and Karl Rahner both argue that a modern concept of “person” should not be applied to Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹ By way of contrast, other theologians (who tend to be quite critical of the Augustinian tradition) commend a “social” conception of the Trinity which not only applies a modern concept of “person” to the divine hypostases but also presents the relations of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (particularly the “perichoretic” unity among the three) as a model for human relationships in the church and society.² In addition to divine “personhood,” the relation of the Spirit to the Son has also received extensive attention. Advocates of “Spirit-Christology” claim that theologians have not paid adequate attention to the radical dependence of Jesus Christ upon the Spirit during Jesus’ earthly life and ministry. On ecumenical grounds, there has been a growing consensus that the *filioque* clause should not have been unilaterally inserted into the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed by the western church. Moreover, in response to criticisms by the Orthodox

¹ Barth prefers to speak of Father, Son and Spirit as “divine modes of being” while Rahner prefers the term “distinct manners of subsisting.”

² See, for instance, Jürgen Moltmann *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

theologians, some western theologians have abandoned the Augustinian position that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*.³

Assumptions regarding the relations among the Father, Son and Holy Spirit play an important role in two recent proposals in the Christian theology of religions: Jacques Dupuis' Christian theology of religious pluralism and Amos Yong's pneumatological theology of religions. On the basis of a particular understanding of the Son/Spirit relationship, Yong argues that the Spirit is present and active in non-Christian religions and justifies the search for non-christological criteria in discerning the Spirit's presence among adherents of non-Christian religions. Similarly, on the basis of a particular construal of the Father/Son relationship, Dupuis argues that Jesus Christ is not the "absolute" Savior and that saviors exist in other traditions who mediate salvific grace. The purpose of this chapter is offer an Augustinian evaluation of the trinitarian grammar that informs the proposals of Yong and Dupuis. After briefly outlining the proposals of Yong and Dupuis, I will summarize Augustine's teaching on the relations among the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (both *ad intra* and *ad extra*). Then, on the basis of Augustine's teaching, I will critically evaluate the proposals of Yong and Dupuis.

³ It is important to note that the question regarding the formal legitimacy of the insertion of the *filioque* clause into the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed must be distinguished from the substantive theological question of whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*.

4.1 Amos Yong's Pneumatological Theology of Religions

In a monograph entitled *Discerning the Spirit(s)* Amos Yong, a young Pentecostal theologian, attempts to develop a "Pentecostal-charismatic" theology of religions.⁴ Given the distinctive emphasis upon the Holy Spirit that characterizes the Pentecostal movement, it should not be surprising that Yong adopts a pneumatological approach. While affirming that christological questions play an important role in any attempt to formulate a viable theology of religions,⁵ Yong suggests that *pneumatology* may provide the key to moving beyond what he calls the "christological impasse," that is, "the almost irreconcilable axioms of God's universal salvific will and the historical particularity of Jesus of Nazareth as Savior of all persons."⁶ The metaphysical basis for Yong's proposal is the universal presence of the Holy Spirit.⁷ Yong asserts that the Holy Spirit is present and active among non-Christian religions and that Christians must learn to discern the Spirit's presence.

⁴ Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to a Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000). *Discerning the Spirit(s)* is a revised version of Yong's dissertation which he completed at Boston University under Robert Cummings Neville in 1998.

⁵ Yong is not suggesting that christological issues are unimportant: "It is clear from the discussion in this chapter that Christology is central both to the construction of a Christian theology of religions and to its problematic. The christological dilemma confronts us with the crucial historical, existential and soteriological question, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' (Mt 16.13). . . . The whole christological question is, after all, whether or not Christ is *the* savior or just *a* savior" Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 57-58 (italics original).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁷ Yong argues that all human experience of God "is mediated by the presence of the divine Spirit." Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 123,

The “foundational pneumatology” Yong develops in *Discerning the Spirit(s)* is predicated upon a trinitarian distinction between an “economy” of the Word and an “economy” of the Spirit: “The entire objective of shifting to a pneumatological framework in order to understand non-Christian faiths is premised upon the recognition that there is a distinction between the economy of the Son and that of the Spirit relative to the redemption of the world.”⁸ Arguably, this distinction constitutes the trinitarian key to his proposal. According to Yong, “Recognition of the procession or mission of the Holy Spirit into the world relative to, yet distinct from that of the Son provides the theological space that is greatly needed at the present time for reflection on the place of the religions in the economy of the Spirit.”⁹ On the basis of this “distinct economy” of the Spirit, Yong affirms the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit among non-Christian religions and justifies the use of non-christological criteria for discerning the presence of the Spirit.

In arguing for a “distinct economy” of the Spirit, Yong builds upon the work of Georges Khodr. Central to Khodr’s proposal is a trinitarian distinction between an

⁸ Ibid., 61. In arguing for a “distinct economy” of the Spirit, Yong builds upon the work of Georges Khodr. Although in the immediate context Yong is describing the proposal of Georges Khodr, it is clear that he embraces this assumption as well.

⁹ Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 70. Similarly, Yong elsewhere notes, “The gain in this approach is that the recognition of the procession or mission of the Holy Spirit into the world as related to and yet distinct from that of the Son provides the theological space that is greatly needed at the present time because while the person of Jesus Christ is a historical symbol of God’s reality in the world, the Holy Spirit is *par excellence* the symbol of divine presence and activity in the cosmic realm” (ibid., 29).

economy of the Son and an economy of the Spirit: "The Spirit is present everywhere and fills everything by virtue of an economy distinct from that of the Son. Irenaeus calls the Word and the Spirit the 'two hands of the Father'. This means that we must affirm not only their hypostatic independence but also that the advent of the Holy Spirit in the world is not subordinated to the Son, is not simply a function of the Word."¹⁰ By recognizing that "the Spirit operates and applies his energies in accordance with His own economy," Khodr claims that one can affirm the work of the Spirit among non-Christian religions.¹¹ In addition to adopting Khodr's distinction between the economies of the Word and Spirit,¹² Yong also follows Khodr in justifying this distinction by appealing to Irenaeus' image of the "two hands"¹³ and denying any economic subordination of the Spirit to the Son.¹⁴ The latter point is most clearly expressed in Yong's discussion of the *filioque* clause. Yong approvingly cites Orthodox concerns that

¹⁰ Khodr, "Christianity and the Pluralistic World," 125-26.

¹¹ "The Spirit operates and applies his energies in accordance with His own economy and we could, from this angle, regard the non-Christian religions as points where his inspiration is at work." Khodr, "Christianity and the Pluralistic World," 126.

¹² See Khodr, "Christianity and the Pluralistic World," 125-26.

¹³ See Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 62.

¹⁴ Yong's reading of Khodr has been significantly influenced by Paul Knitter. Knitter (who was present at Khodr's presentation to the World Council of Churches) discusses it in the following essay: Paul F. Knitter, "A New Pentecost? A Pneumatological Theology of Religions," *Current Dialogue* 19 (1991): 32-41. In this essay, Knitter claims that pneumatology offers a way to move beyond the "christological impasse" (a claim explicitly echoed by Yong). In addition, Knitter suggests that recognition of a "different" (i.e. separate and independent) economy of the Spirit justifies the use of non-christological criteria: "At the same time, by recognizing a different economy of the Spirit within the religions, we can really relate to them as others without having to reduce them, either at the beginning or at the end of our conversations, to our Christian categories" (ibid., 37).

filioque leads to subordination of the Spirit to the Son (a subordination which, in the judgment of Yong, buttresses “ecclesiocentrism” in the western church): “In short, failure to differentiate between the two economies inevitably risks the subordination of the mission of the Spirit to that of the Son and ultimately to an ecclesiological definition of soteriology.”¹⁵

Yong offers the following summary of his understanding of the relationship between the economy of the Son and the economy of the Spirit:

There is, on the one hand, a perichoretical relationality that is at the heart of the divine relation with the world: the economies of the Word and that of the Spirit are mutually related, and should not be subordinated either to the other. On the other hand, rather than being understood as being interdependent only upon each other and thus implying a mutual definition, the divine missions should also be seen both as dimensionally affiliated and thus implying autonomy in relationality and vice versa, and as somehow commonly originating in the mystery of the Father.¹⁶

Although Yong acknowledges that these two economies are related yet autonomous, the emphasis seems to fall on their independence inasmuch as Yong denies any “subordination” between them and affirms their “autonomy.” These “economies” converge only eschatologically.¹⁷

¹⁵ Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 64. By “ecclesiological definition of soteriology” Yong presumably means some form of “exclusivism.”

¹⁶ Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 69. Elsewhere he speaks of the economies as “overlapping dimensionally” (*ibid.*, 62). Following Tillich, he prefers “dimensional” to “spatial” language because the former avoids any kind of hierarchy.

¹⁷ “Eschatologically, of course, there will be a convergence of Spirit and Word in the full revelation of the divine mystery.” Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 132.

Having established this framework, Yong turns to the problem of criteria for discerning this presence of the Spirit: "The goal of a pneumatological approach to the religions is to find sufficient analogues in other traditions to the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit such that we are put in a position to pursue the comparative task and affirm or deny the Spirit's presence or activity."¹⁸ Previous pneumatological approaches floundered because they were unable to identify non-christological criteria for discerning the presence of the Spirit.¹⁹ Although "christological" criteria are clearly useful in certain contexts,²⁰ Yong contends that they are not particularly helpful outside the church. Other (non-christological) criteria are needed. Because the Spirit acts in an economy "distinct" from that of the Son, one should be able to identify aspects of the Spirit's work that are not "constrained" by the Son.²¹ To this end, Yong outlines a "three-tiered process" for discerning the "religious" activity of the Spirit among adherents of other religions. At the first level ("phenomenological-experiential") one compares the religious experiences of adherents of other religions with Pentecostals looking for phenomenological similarities. On the second level ("moral-ethical") one

¹⁸ Ibid., 143.

¹⁹ Yong criticizes Karl Rahner's pneumatological approach to non-Christian religions for failing to move beyond christological criteria. For Rahner, "Christ is the central criterion for discerning the Spirit's presence and work." Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 75.

²⁰ Yong notes that the criterion outlined for testing spirits in 1 John 4:1-3 is "fundamentally christological." Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 137. This formula, however, appears to be directed toward a specific form of docetic Gnosticism. In other contexts, it would not be particularly useful.

²¹ Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 136.

looks for “concrete signs that follow claims of experiencing the transcendent.”²² Evidence of the Spirit’s activity on this level would include lives being made whole and mending of communal relationships.²³ On the third level (“theological-soteriological”) one must consider the difficult question of the “reference” of the religious symbols in non-Christian religions: “[T]o what transcendental reality, if any, do religious symbols refer?”²⁴ In addition to “divine presence” (i.e., the Holy Spirit), a foundational pneumatology must also account for “divine absence.” In the Christian tradition, divine absence has been traditionally understood in terms the “demonic.” The “demonic” can be understood as a “contrast symbol” to that of the Holy Spirit.²⁵ Whereas the Holy Spirit “points to the idea of law or legality, rationality, relationality, and processive continuity culminating in the eschaton,” the demonic “sets in motion fields or habits of chaos, irrationality, isolation or alienation, and stagnation.”²⁶ Thus, Yong’s theology of religions is able to account both for the “transformative” nature of religious experience as well negative elements of the same. Pentecostals should learn to “discern” the presence of the Spirit (or spirits) in other religions by cultivating a “pneumatological

²² Ibid., 251.

²³ Ibid., 253.

²⁴ Ibid., 254.

²⁵ Ibid., 131.

²⁶ Ibid., 131.

imagination” informed by these three elements. When the Spirit’s presence is discerned, one may recognize a non-Christian religion “as salvific in the Christian sense.”²⁷

As a test case for his proposal, Yong investigates the possibility of discerning the Spirit’s presence within “Umbanda” (an Afro-Brazilian tradition). Traditionally, Pentecostals have dismissed “Umbanda” as demonically inspired; however, Yong believes that evidence of the Spirit’s presence among the Umbanda can be seen in “the movement toward personal authenticity in the lives of individuals and toward social solidarity.”²⁸ Moreover, through a dialogue with the Umbanda, Pentecostals could grow in at least three areas: (1) understanding the diversity of religious experience in responses to the transcendent, (2) gaining a broader theology of community and healing and (3) recognizing that the lines between the divine and the demonic are not as sharp as Pentecostals often believe.²⁹ Adherents of Umbanda could learn from Pentecostals in three areas: (1) discerning the spirit-world, (2) a proper understanding of healing and (3) greater understanding of the battle against Exú spirits.³⁰

Although there is good reason to believe the Spirit is present and active in other religions, confirmation of the Spirit’s presence can come only through concrete

²⁷ Ibid., 312.

²⁸ Ibid., 279.

²⁹ Ibid., 288.

³⁰ Ibid., 297.

engagement with the religious “other” employing a “pneumatological imagination.” Christians should not merely view non-Christian religions in terms of *praeparatio evangelica*. Although religions can function this way, “to understand indigenous traditions *solely* on these terms leads to the kind of restrictive christological quests that continue to denigrate the Holy Spirit as having less-than-equal status as a trinitarian member.”³¹ If the Holy Spirit is genuinely at work in other religions, Christians must acknowledge this and be willing to learn from adherents of other religions: “The possible presence and activity of the Spirit in other traditions means the possible existence of theological insights in other traditions that may have a positive impact on Christian theology. To deny the latter possibility is to lapse to an extremely anemic pneumatology even on biblical grounds.”³² Furthermore, Christian theologians must also acknowledge the possibility that “other canonical traditions may also be divinely inspired in some way.”³³ None of this undermines the gospel mission of the church. On the contrary, it invigorates it. Dialogue in the search of truth, service as an expression of

³¹ Ibid., 320 (italics original). Yong locates Christians within the Church and adherents of other religions who experience the Spirit’s presence within the context of the “Kingdom of God.” “Whereas not distinguishing between the divine missions may lead to defining religions in ecclesiological terms, an explicit pneumatological framework would define both the Church and religions within the common ground of the cosmos, or, theologically speaking, the Kingdom of God.” Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 63.

³² Yong continues, “Perhaps the pneumatological approach to other religions developed here can provide the impetus toward a theological appropriation of the insights of other traditions that has been suggested but rarely accomplished.” Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 317.

³³ Ibid., 317-18.

love, and proclamation of the redemption of the world through Christ need to be combined.³⁴ “In this way, Christian faith in Christ is put to public test whereby the power of the Holy Spirit can be demonstrated through the course of human history.”³⁵

4.2 Jacques Dupuis’ Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism

In his book *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* Jacques Dupuis, a Catholic theologian, argues on trinitarian grounds that non-Christian religions mediate God’s saving grace.³⁶ Before outlining his proposal, it will be helpful to locate Dupuis’ work in the broader context of contemporary Catholic approaches to religious diversity.³⁷ Although Vatican II clearly affirmed that non-Christian religions are—in some sense—to be viewed positively and that individuals who have never heard the gospel can experience Christian salvation,³⁸ these conciliar documents were silent

³⁴ Ibid., 313.

³⁵ Ibid., 313.

³⁶ For a discussion of his methodology see Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 1-19. Dupuis claims that a Christian theology of religions requires a new method of “theologizing” that is able to relate the “datum of faith” with the “living context of pluralism” (ibid., 17).

³⁷ According to Dupuis, four attitudes toward other religions can be found in the history of the church: A negative attitude exemplified by the axiom “outside the church no salvation” (at least as traditionally understood); partial openness reflected in a recognition that individual adherents of non-Christian religions can be saved through their response to the “light” of natural revelation; Vatican II, which affirmed positive values in other religions; and finally, a search for the positive significance of religious traditions within God’s plan of salvation for humanity. See Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 27.

³⁸ One of the most important conciliar documents regarding the Church and other religions was *Nostra Aetate*. *Nostra Aetate* (NA) affirmed the Church’s desire for positive relations with other religions in the context of the urgent need for human unity (NA 1) and insisted that “The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions” (NA 2). A second conciliar document, *Lumen Gentium* (LG),

regarding the means through which salvific grace is mediated apart from the church.

Silence on this question has led to two conflicting positions that may be summarized as follows: (P1) While salvation is available outside the Church, it is not mediated through non-Christian religions.³⁹ (P2) Salvation is not only available outside the Church, but it is also mediated through non-Christian religions such that the latter are to be viewed as channels of salvation.⁴⁰ Dupuis embraces a form of P2.

According to Dupuis, the triune God constitutes the ultimate source of all genuine religious experience.⁴¹ Thus, different religions are able to convey differing—yet legitimate—insights into this divine ultimate reality: “The religious traditions of the world convey different insights into the mystery of Ultimate Reality. Incomplete as

addresses the possibility of salvation outside the church. While insisting that there exists only one holy Catholic Church (LG 8) and that Jesus Christ is the one mediator and way of salvation (LG 14), the council fathers broke new ground by affirming the possibility of salvation outside the church: “Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal salvation” (LG 16). These and other conciliar documents can be found in Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, vol. I, rev. ed. (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing, 1992). All quotations of the conciliar documents of Vatican II are taken from Flannery’s text. For a helpful discussion of the teaching of Vatican II on other religions, see Miikka Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions According to the Second Vatican Council* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1992).

³⁹ Catholic proponents of P1 would include Gavin D’Costa and Joseph DiNoia.

⁴⁰ Catholic Proponents of P2 would include Paul Knitter, Hans Küng, Raimundo Panikkar, and Karl Rahner. Rahner might best be viewed as the progenitor of P2.

⁴¹ “In every authentic religious experience the Triune God of Christian revelation is present and operative.” Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 277.

these may be, they nevertheless witness to a manifold self-manifestation of God to human beings in diverse faith-communities.

Although Jesus Christ is the “universal” savior of humankind, he should not be viewed as “absolute” savior. “Absoluteness” can be attributed only to God the Father. Jesus Christ is savior only in the derivative sense that “the world and humankind find salvation in and through him.”⁴² Therefore, rather than speaking of Jesus Christ as “absolute” savior, Dupuis suggests it would be better to speak of Jesus Christ as “constitutive” savior.⁴³ By insisting that Jesus Christ is “constitutive” savior, Dupuis wants to open the door to other “saviors” who somehow “participate” in the universal mediation of Christ. On one hand, he insists that one cannot sever the “universality of Jesus-the-Christ” from the “particularity of Jesus of Nazareth.” A “Christ” separated from the historical Jesus would not be the Christ of Christian revelation. On the other hand, one we must recognize that God’s saving action is not limited to the Christ-event.⁴⁴ On the contrary, the “two hands” of God, the Word and the Spirit, are universally present and active in non-Christian religions. These two divine persons were operative in the “pre-Christian dispensation without being formally recognized as

⁴² Ibid., 293.

⁴³ “However this may be, the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ, as understood here, are neither ‘relative’ nor ‘absolute.’ They are ‘constitutive,’ insofar as Jesus Christ holds saving significance for the whole of humankind and the Christ-event—in particular the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection—is ‘cause’ of salvation.” Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 283.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 298.

persons.”⁴⁵ Their universal action, therefore, is not limited by the Christ-event: “Yet the action of the Word of God is not constrained by its historically becoming human in Jesus Christ; nor is the Spirit’s work in history limited to its outpouring upon the world by the risen and exalted Christ.”⁴⁶ A “distinct action” of the non-incarnate Logos continues following Christ’s resurrection.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the Spirit is also universally active following the incarnation. For example, as the result of the Spirit’s inspiration, “revelation” can be encountered in the sacred writings of non-Christian religions. Moreover, one may affirm that sacred scriptures, such as the Qu’ran, contain the “word of God”⁴⁸ and that the Prophet Muhammad is an authentic prophet.⁴⁹

Dupuis explains that the Word and the Spirit work together in a single economy of salvation—an economy that is both singular and complex. Regarding the unicity of this economy, Dupuis is critical of theologians such as Paul Knitter who sharply distinguish the “economy of the Christ-event” from the “economy of the Spirit” with the result that two separate economies of salvation emerge. He insists that the action of the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 221.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 316.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 299.

⁴⁸ Recognizing the Qu’ran contains the “word of God” does not entail the affirmation that *all* of its contents are inspired: “Christian theologians who admit this, let us observe, are aware that the Qur’an in its entirety cannot be regarded as the authentic word of God. Error is not absent from it. But this does not prevent the divine truth it contains from being the word of God uttered through the prophet.” Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 245.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 245.

second and third persons of the Trinity, while distinct, should not be separated in this way. While singular, the economy of salvation is also complex, in that it extends beyond the Hebrew-Christian tradition.⁵⁰ “Salvation-revelation” exists in other traditions. Evidence for the latter can be found in a proper understanding of God’s covenants with humankind and recognition of the fruit of the Spirit in other traditions. Earlier universal covenants—including the Noahic and Mosaic covenants—have continuing and abiding force.⁵¹ Just as the Mosaic covenant has not been annulled by the Christ-event, neither was the covenant with Noah annulled by the Christ-event. Furthermore, the fruit of the Spirit among followers of other religious traditions “testifies to God’s saving and revealing action among them through their history.”⁵²

Through the work of the Word and the Spirit, God’s saving grace is mediated through other religions in such a way that they may legitimately be called “channels of

⁵⁰ Following Karl Rahner, Dupuis draws a distinction between “general” and “special” salvation history. General salvation history denotes all of human history while “special” salvation history refers to “[a]n explicit awareness and recognition of historical happenings as constituting divine interventions . . .” Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 218.

⁵¹ Dupuis’ discussion of the covenants is nuanced and complex. While affirming their abiding force, he is careful to point out that these covenants do not operate independent of the Christ-event. For example, after affirming the abiding force of the Mosaic covenant he writes, “Therefore, to the question whether the Jews are saved today through God’s covenant with Israel *or* through Jesus Christ in whom a ‘new’ covenant has been realized, the answer is that the dichotomy does not hold: salvation comes to the Jews through the covenant made by God with Israel and brought to perfection in Jesus Christ. The covenant remains even today as a way of salvation, but not independently from the Christ-event.” Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 233 (italics original).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 220.

salvation.”⁵³ According to Dupuis, salvation does not reach human beings *in spite of* their religious traditions but precisely *in and through* them.⁵⁴ For example, the worship of images may represent a means through which God’s grace reaches Hindus: “[T]he worship of sacred images can be the sacramental sign in and through which the devotee responds to the offer of divine grace; it can mediate secretly the grace offered by God in Jesus Christ and express the human response to God’s gratuitous gift in him.”⁵⁵

Precisely how grace is mediated remains a mystery; that it occurs, however, must be affirmed. One might ask the question, “Even if one were to grant *in principle* that saving grace is mediated through non-Christian religions, how could one know *in fact* that this is the case?” Dupuis explains that certain “saving values” serve as the basis for just such an evaluation. One of the most important saving values is radical *agape*.⁵⁶ Human beings, therefore, are destined for a single religious end—communion with the triune God: “In other words, salvation as revealed by God in Jesus Christ is the universal

⁵³ Ibid., 305-29.

⁵⁴ “Can other religions contain and signify, in some way, the presence of God to human beings in Jesus Christ? Does God become present to them in the very practice of their religion? It is necessary to admit this. Indeed, their own religious practice is the reality that gives expression to their experience of God and of the mystery of Christ. It is the visible element, the sign, the sacrament of that experience. This practice expresses, bears, supports and contains, as it were, their encounter with God in Jesus Christ.” Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 319.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 303.

⁵⁶ “That *agape* is indeed the sign of operative presence of the mystery of salvation in every man and women who is saved.” Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 325.

destiny devised by God for human beings, whichever situation they may find themselves in and whichever religious tradition they may belong to.”⁵⁷

Finally, Dupuis argues that non-Christian religions share in the reign of God.⁵⁸ The universal reign of God must be carefully distinguished from the Church. Although they are not members of the church, adherents of other religious traditions are, nevertheless, members of the kingdom: “While the believers of other religious faiths perceive God’s call through their own traditions and respond to it in the sincere practice of these traditions, they become in all truth—even without being formally conscious of it—active members of the Kingdom.”⁵⁹ They contribute to its growth in the world.⁶⁰ This does not mean that the Church plays no special role; on the contrary, it stands as a unique “sacrament of the Reign of God.”⁶¹ Moreover, it constitutes a sign that the kingdom of God has been established in Christ. The Church, however, does not possess a “monopoly on the Reign of God.”⁶² Adherents of other religions are rightfully co-members of this kingdom and, in the *eschaton*, will share in its fullness. In light of these

⁵⁷ Ibid., 312.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 330-57.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 345. Whereas Rahner maintained that “anonymous Christians” are invisible members of the church, Dupuis claims that adherents of other religions who experience God’s grace and salvation are invisible members of the *kingdom of God*.

⁶⁰ “It follows that the religious traditions contribute, in a mysterious way, to the building up of the Reign of God among their followers and in the world.” Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 346.

⁶¹ Ibid., 353.

⁶² Ibid., 356.

and other factors, religious pluralism should not be viewed with suspicion by Christians but welcomed with open arms recognizing that “God has manifested himself to humankind in manifold ways . . .”⁶³

4.3 The Relations of the Divine Persons in De Trinitate

Having examined the proposals of Dupuis and Yong, we will turn to Augustine’s teaching on the divine relations. Augustine offers a concise summary of pro-Nicene teaching on the Trinity in Book I:

The purpose of all the Catholic commentators I have been able to read on the divine books of both testaments, who have written before me on the trinity which God is, has been to teach that according to the scriptures Father and Son and Holy Spirit in the inseparable equality of one substance present a divine unity; and therefore there are not three gods but one God; although indeed the Father has begotten the Son, and therefore he who is the Father is not the Son; and the Son is begotten by the Father, and therefore he who is the Son is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but only the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, himself coequal to the Father and the Son, and belonging to the threefold unity. It was not however this same three (their teaching continues) that was born of the virgin Mary, crucified and buried under Pontius Pilate, rose again on the third day and ascended into heaven, but the Son alone. Nor was it this same three that came down upon Jesus in the form of a dove at his baptism, or came down on the day of Pentecost after the Lord’s ascension, with a roaring sound from heaven as though a violent gust were rushing down, and in divided tongues as of fire, but the Holy Spirit alone. Nor was it this same three that spoke from heaven, *You are my Son*, either at his baptism by John (Mk 1:11), or on the mountain when the three disciples were with him (Mt 17:5), nor when the resounding voice was heard, *I have both glorified it (my name) and will glorify it again* (Jn 12:28), but it was the Father’s voice alone addressing the Son; although just as Father and Son and Holy Spirit are

⁶³ Ibid., 386.

inseparable, so do they work inseparably. This is also my faith inasmuch as it is the Catholic faith.⁶⁴

This summary possesses a chiastic structure:

A1 – Inseparable equality of the divine persons in one substance

B1 – Real distinctions between the divine persons

B1' – Distinction of persons in the economy of salvation

A1' – Inseparable action of the divine persons in the economy of salvation

First, Augustine discusses the divine relations from an intra-trinitarian standpoint.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit exist in an “inseparable equality of one substance” (A1).

Thus, we must speak of *one* God. At the same time, real distinctions exist between the persons that are grounded in causal relations of origin (B1). Because the Son is begotten by the Father, the Son is not the Father and the Father is not the Son. Next, Augustine discusses the relations of the divine persons from an economic standpoint. It was not the three who were born of the virgin Mary but only the Son. It was not the three who descended as a dove, but only the Spirit. It was not the three that “spoke” at Jesus’ baptism but only the Father (B1'). His summary draws to a close with an affirmation of the inseparable action of the divine persons (A1'). It is important to note how A1/A1' and B1/B1' mirror each other in such a way that A1 constitutes the ground for A1' and

⁶⁴ Augustine, *De Trin.* 1.7, 69-70.

B1 constitutes the ground for B1'.⁶⁵ Having set forth this summary, Augustine defends it biblically and theologically in the first seven books of *De Trinitate*. With this background in mind, we will now investigate Augustine's understanding of the divine relations in greater detail following the pattern of the preceding summary.

4.3.1 Unity and Equality of the Divine Persons *ad intra*

Following a theological tradition which can be traced to Tertullian, Augustine grounds the equality of the divine persons in a unity of divine substance: Father, Son and Spirit "are of one and the same substance or essence (*unius eiusdemque substantiae vel essentiae*)."⁶⁶ Although he frequently speaks of one *substantia*, Augustine's vocabulary is somewhat flexible such that he also speaks of one *essentia*, one *divinitas* or one *deitas*.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ The inseparable equality of the divine persons *ad intra* constitutes the ground for the inseparable action of the divine persons *ad extra*. Similarly, the real distinctions among the persons *ad intra* constitute the ground for the distinction of the persons *ad extra*.

⁶⁶ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.4, 67.

⁶⁷ "[T]his same three is also one, and there is one substance (*substantia*) and godhead (*deitas*) of Father and Son and Holy Spirit." Augustine, *De Trin.* I.19, 79. Augustine explains that *substantia* has the same meaning as *ousia* in Greek: "As it is not one thing for God to be and another for him to be great, but being is for him the same thing as being great, for that reason we do not say three greatnesses any more than we say three beings, but one being and one greatness. By 'being' (*essentia*) I mean here what is called *ousia* in Greek, which we more usually call substance (*substantia*). The Greeks also have another word, *hypostasis*, but they make a distinction that is rather obscure to me between *ousia* and *hypostasis*, so that most of our people who treat of these matters in Greek are accustomed to say *mia ousia, treis hypostaseis*, which is literally one being, three substances (*unam essentiam, tres substantias*). But because we have grown accustomed in our usage to meaning the same thing by 'being' (*essentia*) as by 'substance' (*substantia*), we do not dare say one being, three substances (*unam essentiam, tres substantias*)" Augustine, *De Trin.* V.9-10, 195-96.

The essence of God is unchanging and eternal.⁶⁸ Moreover, God is “absolutely simple being (*summe simplex essentia*)” lacking any kind of composition.⁶⁹

In order to argue that the divine persons are one substance, Augustine attempts to show that the Son and the Holy Spirit are consubstantial (*consubstantialis*) with the Father. One of the “clearest and most consistent divine testimonies” showing Jesus Christ is God can be found in John 1:1-3.⁷⁰ The “Word of God” in this passage is none other than the “Son of God” who became incarnate (cf. John 1:14). John 1:1-3 “clearly shows that he is not only God but also of the same substance as the Father.”⁷¹ Augustine arrives at this conclusion by observing that in John 1:2 the Word of God (which must be recognized as the Son of God) created “all things.” If the Son of God created all things and was not himself among the all things that were created, then “he is of one and the same substance as the Father”⁷² based on the assumption that whatever is not created must be God. Thus, the Son is not only God but also “true God.”⁷³ A few paragraphs later, he offers a similar argument by reading 1 Corinthians 8:6 alongside John 1:2. 1

⁶⁸ “So then it is difficult to contemplate and have full knowledge of God’s substance (*substantia*), which without any change in itself makes things that change, and without any passage of time in itself creates things that exist in time.” Augustine, *De Trin.* I.3, 66.

⁶⁹ Augustine, *De Trin.* VII.2, 220.

⁷⁰ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.9, 71.

⁷¹ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.9, 71.

⁷² Augustine, *De Trin.* I.9, 71.

⁷³ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.9, 71. In arguing that the Son is “true God,” Augustine is responding to Homoian theologians like Palladius who claim that only the Father can be described as “true God.” See Barnes, “Exegesis and Polemic in Augustine’s *De Trinitate* I,” 43-52.

Corinthians 8:6 affirms that God the Father created all things through the Son while John 1:2 affirms that the Son created all things. Together these passages preclude the idea that the Father made some things and the Son others; it is clear that the Father made *all* things and the Son made *all* things. If the Father created all things and the Son created all things, then they must have created the same things. This implies that “the Son is equal to the Father.”⁷⁴ One of the most important texts affirming the consubstantiality of the Son is Philippians 2:6.⁷⁵ Notice how Augustine emphasizes the word “equal” (*aequalis*): “In any case the apostle did not fail to use the very word ‘equal,’ and said as plainly as could be, *who being in the form of God did not think it robbery to be equal to God* (Phil 2:6), here using ‘God’ as a proper name for the Father, as he does in another text, *But the head of Christ is God* (1 Cor. 11:3).”⁷⁶ Another important text affirming the consubstantiality of the Son to the Father is John 10:30: “There are then some statements of scripture about the Father and the Son which indicate their unity and equality of substance, like *I and the Father are one* (Jn. 10:30) . . .”⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.12, 72.

⁷⁵ From this text Augustine draws his distinction between the Son in the “form of a servant” (human nature) and the Son in the “form of God” (divine nature). This provides a hermeneutical key to dealing with apparently subordinationist passages such as John 14:28.

⁷⁶ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.12, 73.

⁷⁷ Augustine, *De Trin.* II.3, 98.

Augustine's argument for the consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit proceeds in a parallel fashion. First, he argues that the Holy Spirit is not a creature but God (both by appealing directly to Scripture as well as to biblical "testimonies" to this effect which have been collected by others).⁷⁸ For example, if the Holy Spirit is a creature, then how can Paul say (1 Cor. 6:19) that Christian bodies are the "temple" of the Holy Spirit? "Could anything be more insanely sacrilegious than to have the effrontery to call the members of Christ the temple of a creature who is inferior, in these people's opinion, to Christ himself?"⁷⁹ Augustine notes that four verses earlier (1 Cor. 6:15) Paul claims that believers' bodies are "members of Christ." "But if things that are the members of Christ are the temple of the Holy Spirit, then the Holy Spirit is not a creature, since we cannot but owe, to one whom we offer our bodies to as a temple, that service by which only God is to be served, which in Greek is called *latreia*. So he says in conclusion, *Glorify God therefore in your bodies* (1 Cor 6:20)."⁸⁰ Implicit in his argument is an assumption—rooted in Augustine's reading of Romans 1:25—that genuine *latreia* must only be offered to the Creator God and not to any creature. If the Holy Spirit is God, then he must be

⁷⁸ "In the same way testimonies have been collected on the Holy Spirit and copiously employed by previous expositors of the subject to show that he too is God and not a creature." Augustine, *De Trin.* I.13, 73.

⁷⁹ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.13, 73.

⁸⁰ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.13, 73.

“absolutely equal to the Father and the Son, and consubstantial (*consubstantialis*) and co-eternal (*coaeternus*) in the oneness of the three (*in trinitatis unitate*).”⁸¹

In addition to passages that affirm that the Son and Spirit are consubstantial with the Father, Augustine also discusses passages that speak of the unity of three. Romans 11:36 offers an important example (“*Since from him and through him and in him are all things, to him be glory for ever and ever.*”).⁸² “If he means Father and Son and Holy Spirit, attributing a phrase apiece to each person—*from him*, from the Father; *through him*, through the Son; *in him*, in the Holy Spirit—then it is clear that Father and Son and Holy Spirit is what the one God is, since he concludes in the singular, *to him be glory for ever and ever.*”⁸³ The key to Augustine’s reading is an assumption that “God,” in this text, refers to the triune God—not merely the Father.⁸⁴ After presenting passages that affirm the consubstantiality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Augustine also addresses passages that appear to undermine this claim including texts that speak of the Son as

⁸¹ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.13, 73.

⁸² Augustine, *De Trin.* I.12, 72.

⁸³ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.12, 72. One of the clues for this reading can be found in 1 Corinthians 8:6 where Paul says that the Father is one “from whom” are all things while the Son is one “through whom” are all things.

⁸⁴ “As a matter of fact, he began the expression of this sentiment by saying, *Oh the depths of the riches of wisdom and knowledge*, not of the Father or of the Son or of the Holy Spirit, but of *God!*” Augustine, *De Trin.* I.12, 72. It may be helpful to note that even if one adopts the reading that *theos*, in Romans 11:36, must refer to the Father, this does undermine the broader point Augustine is attempting to establish in *De Trin.* I.12. He wants to show that the Son and the Father are equal. If Romans 11:36 merely teaches that the Father created all things, then Augustine can set this alongside John 1:3 which affirms that the Son created all things. If the Father created all things (Rom. 11:36) and the Son created all things (John 1:3), then “the Son is equal to the Father, and the work of the Father and Son is inseparable.” Augustine *De Trin.* I.12, 72.

“less” than the Father (e.g. John 14:28) and passages which speak of the Son and Spirit as “sent” by the Father (e.g., Gal. 4:4-6).

4.3.2 Distinction of Divine Persons *ad intra*

If Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one substance, then there can be no inequality within the divine life. Although this affirmation eliminates all subordination, it leaves an important question unanswered: if all three persons share the same nature, in what sense, and on what basis, are the divine persons distinct? Augustine’s answer—namely, that real distinctions exist between the persons that are grounded in subsistent relations—constitutes one of his key contributions to the development of trinitarian theology in the West. When we affirm that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are “one God” this does *not* imply that the Son is the Father or that the Spirit is the Father; rather, these names signify relations that obtain between the persons. Augustine’s grammar of relations is fleshed out through polemical engagement with Homoian theologians.⁸⁵ In response to the pro-Nicene claim that the Father is “unbegotten” while the Son is “begotten,” these Homoian theologians argued that “begotten” and “unbegotten” respectively describe the essence of the Father and Son. Because “begotten” and “unbegotten” differ, the substance of the Father must be different from the substance of

⁸⁵ See Barnes, “The Arians of Book V,” 185-95.

the Son.⁸⁶ Thus, Father and Son cannot be equal. Augustine responded by pointing out that while God can have no accidents, it does not follow from this that every statement about God must be a substance statement:

With God, though, nothing is said modification-wise, because there is nothing changeable with him. And yet not everything that is said of him is said substance-wise. Some things are said with reference to something else, like Father with reference to Son and Son with reference to Father; and this is not said modification-wise, because the one is always Father and the other always Son—not ‘always’ in the sense that he is Son from the moment he is born or that the Father does not cease to be Father from the moment the Son does not cease to be Son, but in the sense that the Son is always born and never began to be Son.⁸⁷

In short, Augustine insists that one must distinguish language of “relationship” from language of “substance.”⁸⁸ In the case of the Son, “begotten” means the same thing as “Son” since being a son is a consequence of being begotten.⁸⁹ Through an engagement with Homoian theologians in Books V-VII, Augustine defends the logical coherence of his trinitarian grammar and clarifies the language he uses to refer to the triune God. The generation of the Son and procession of the Holy Spirit constitute the ultimate ground for the distinction of persons in Augustine’s trinitarian theology.

⁸⁶ Augustine, *De Trin.* V.4, 191.

⁸⁷ Augustine, *De Trin.* V.6, 192.

⁸⁸ This is one of the primary claims in Book V.

⁸⁹ Augustine, *De Trin.* V.7, 192.

4.3.2.1 Generation of the Son

In the previous chapter we examined Augustine's discussion of the "sending" texts. Augustine insists that sending does not imply inequality; rather the sending of the Son simply reveals his eternal generation. Now we must examine the generation of the Son in greater detail. Generation (*generatio*) includes several elements. First, the generation of the Son is incorporeal. Augustine explains that a number of people make the mistake of "transfer[ing] what they have observed about bodily things to incorporeal and spiritual things . . ." ⁹⁰ As Lewis Ayres notes, "We might say that the (often unconscious) tendency of fallen humanity is to apply to God the rules we use for *the grammar of material objects*." ⁹¹ Ayres suggests that one of the primary functions of Augustine's "grammar of divine simplicity" is to oppose a "grammar of materiality." ⁹² Second, the Father begot the Son "timelessly" such that the Son is co-eternal with the Father. ⁹³ Thus, one should not introduce any notion of temporality into the generation of the Son. Third, the Father begot (*gigno*) the Son in an equality of nature. John 5:26 ("As the Father has life in himself, so he has given the Son to have life in himself") plays a key role in Augustine's explanation of generation. Augustine explains that the Father

⁹⁰ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.1, 65.

⁹¹ Ayres, "The Fundamental Grammar of Augustine's Trinitarian Theology," 62 (*italics original*).

⁹² *Ibid.*, 62.

⁹³ See Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.47, 432.

“begot [the Son] timelessly in such a way that the *life* which the Father gave the Son by begetting him is co-eternal with the *life* of the Father who gave it . . .”⁹⁴ Through generation the Son receives the “life” — that is, the nature or substance—of the Father. Finally, Augustine rejects the view that the Father begot the Son by his will; on the contrary, he insists that the Son is begotten of the substance of the Father.⁹⁵ We should not think of the generation of the Son like “water flowing out from a hole in the ground or in the rock, but like light flowing from light.”⁹⁶ The Son’s “light” is equal in its radiance to “light” of the Father.

4.3.2.2 Procession of the Holy Spirit

Although earlier theologians recognized that the procession of the Spirit clearly differed from the generation of the Son (such that it would be inappropriate to speak of the Spirit as a second “Son”), many were at a loss to offer a theological rationale for this distinction. Augustine made an important contribution by suggesting that the Holy

⁹⁴ Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.47, 432 (italics mine). Similarly, in Book I, he explains that John 5:26 implies that the Father “begot the Son to be unchangeable life, that is to say eternal life.” Augustine, *De Trin.* I.26, 85.

⁹⁵ Augustine attributes the view that the Father begot the Son by his will to “Eunomius”: “He was unable to understand and unwilling to believe that the only-begotten Word of God through whom all things were made is the Son of God by nature, that is, he is begotten of the substance of the Father; and so he said that he is not the Son of the nature or substance or being of God but the Son of his will. He wished of course to assert that the will by which God begot the Son is something accidental to him, on the grounds apparently that we sometimes will something that we were not willing before—as though this were not proof of the changeableness of our nature, a thing we could not possibly believe to be the case in God.” Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.38, 425.

⁹⁶ *De Trin.* IV.27, 172. This image is employed frequently in patristic writings as evidenced by its inclusion in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

Spirit proceeds (*procedit*) jointly from the Father and the Son *as from one principle*.⁹⁷

Augustine succinctly summarizes his position in the following statement: “And just as for the Holy Spirit his being the gift of God means his proceeding from the Father, so his being sent means his being known to proceed from him. Nor, by the way, can we say that the Holy Spirit does not proceed from the Son as well; it is not without point that the same Spirit is called the Spirit of the Father and of the Son.”⁹⁸ Augustine sees biblical warrant for affirming a role for the Son in the procession of the Spirit in the way that Scripture speaks of the Holy Spirit as the “Spirit of the Father and the Son.”⁹⁹ Further evidence can be seen in the bestowal of the Spirit upon the disciples by Christ following the resurrection (e.g. John 20:22).¹⁰⁰ Two of the most important biblical texts for Augustine are John 14:26 and 15:26: “By saying then, *Whom I will send you from the Father* (Jn 15:26), the Lord showed that the Spirit is both the Father's and the Son's. Elsewhere too, when he said, *whom the Father will send*, he added, *in my name* (Jn 14:26).”¹⁰¹ The

⁹⁷ In order to avoid confusion, I will use the term *filioque* (“and the Son”) exclusively in reference to the controversial interpolation in the Creed while I will use the phrase “procession from the Father and Son” to refer to Augustine's position.

⁹⁸ Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.29, 174.

⁹⁹ Perhaps the most obvious example of this is Galatians 4:6 which explains that God sent the “Spirit of his Son.”

¹⁰⁰ “And I cannot see what else he intended to signify when he breathed and said *Receive the Holy Spirit* (Jn 20:22). Not that the physical breath that came from his body and was physically felt was the substance of the Holy Spirit; but it was a convenient symbolic demonstration that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as from the Father.” Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.29, 174.

¹⁰¹ Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.29, 174.

logic of this is quite clear: if sending reveals procession and if the Son sent the Spirit, then the Spirit must proceed from the Father *and the Son*.¹⁰²

After affirming that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, Augustine offers an important qualification. He notes that John 15:26 does not say, “whom the Father will send from me” but rather “whom I will send from the Father.” By this “he indicated that the source (*principium*) of all godhead (*totius divinitatis*), or if you prefer it, of all deity (*deitatis*), is the Father. So the Spirit who proceeds (*procedit*) from the Father and the Son is traced back, on both counts, to him of whom the Son is born.”¹⁰³

Although Augustine speaks of Father, Son and Spirit as one substance, he is clear that the source of deity (*principium deitatis*) is the Father.¹⁰⁴ Augustine also affirms that Father

¹⁰² There is one additional reason it is important for Augustine to affirm that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. It stems from his understanding of relations: “If we do not say that the Holy Spirit proceeds both from the Father and from the Son (as from one principle, or origin, of course, a qualification Augustine is most careful to make), but only from the Father, then there really is no way to distinguish his procession from that of the Son, no way therefore to distinguish the Holy Spirit from the Son.” Hill, *The Trinity*, 269.

¹⁰³ Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.29, 174.

¹⁰⁴ Later in the same book, he notes that the sendings reveal to us that “that the Father is the source and origin of all deity.” Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.32, 177. The English phrase “source and origin of deity” represents Hill’s translation of the Latin term *principium*. Elsewhere Augustine claims that the Holy Spirit proceeds “principally” from the Father. Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.47, 433. As Edmund Hill rightly notes, “It is one of the Greek objections to the *Filioque* in the Latin creed, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit’s proceeding from the Son as well as the Father, that it derogates from the Father’s *monarchia*. It is clear that Augustine at least was aware of the need to safeguard this attribute, and that he so envisaged the double procession of the Holy Spirit that this *monarchia* was not impugned.” Hill, *The Trinity*, 185, note 112. Similarly, “The charge that Augustine’s theology describes the divine essence as prior to the divine persons, or as the source of the persons, is unwarranted. In fact, he consistently and specifically rules out any such account of the divine essence. He also clearly maintains the Father as the personal source of the divine simplicity and essence. Using the grammar of simplicity, Augustine argues that we should beware of speaking about a

and Son are not “two origins” but “one origin” (*unum principium*) with respect to the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁵ Like the generation of the Son, the procession (*processio*) of the Holy Spirit is immaterial, timeless and results in equality of nature.

One final issue merits attention in relation to the procession of the Holy Spirit. According to Augustine, names signify relations that obtain between the divine persons. A unique problem arises in the case of the Holy Spirit inasmuch as the name “Holy Spirit” does not appear to suggest a relation.¹⁰⁶ Augustine finds a solution in the language of “gift”: “This relationship, to be sure, is not apparent in this particular name [Holy Spirit], but it is apparent when he is called *the gift of God* (Acts 8:20; Jn 4:10).”¹⁰⁷ The Holy Spirit, according to Augustine, is the gift of the Father and the Son.¹⁰⁸ Gift implies relationship: “So when we say ‘the gift of the giver’ and the ‘the giver of the gift,’ we say each with reference to the other. So the Holy Spirit is a kind of inexpressible communion or fellowship of the Father and Son, and perhaps he is given this name just because the same name can be applied to the Father and the Son.”¹⁰⁹ Appealing to gift-

substance in which three persons are ‘contained’: there is nothing but the three co-eternal and consubstantial persons.” Ayres, “Fundamental Grammar,” 68.

¹⁰⁵ Augustine, *De Trin.* V.15, 199.

¹⁰⁶ Augustine, *De Trin.* V.12, 197.

¹⁰⁷ Augustine, *De Trin.* V.12, 197.

¹⁰⁸ “He is the gift of the Father and of the Son, because on the one hand he *proceeds from the Father* (Jn 15:26), as the Lord says; and on the other the apostle’s words, *Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ is not one of his* (Rom. 8:9), are spoken of the Holy Spirit.” Augustine, *De Trin.* V.12, 197.

¹⁰⁹ Augustine, *De Trin.* V.12, 197.

language also provides a way to distinguish generation and procession: while the Son comes forth “as being born,” the Spirit comes forth “as being given.”¹¹⁰ Thus, we do not speak of him as a son.¹¹¹

4.3.3 Unity of Operation *ad extra*

Having examined the divine relations *ad intra*, we will now turn to the relations among the Father, Son and Spirit *ad extra*. First, we will begin by considering the divine persons in their unity of action. According to Augustine, Father, Son and Holy Spirit work “inseparably.” Lewis Ayres argues that the inseparable action of the divine persons constitutes one of the fundamental axioms of Augustine’s trinitarian theology.¹¹² Augustine acknowledges that this “statement of faith worries some people.”¹¹³ They wonder, for example, how it can be that the Trinity acts inseparably and yet that an utterance of the Father is not an utterance of the Son or how it can be that the persons act inseparably when only the Son became human, died and rose again. An explanation of the inseparable action of the divine persons can be found in a sermon Augustine preached on Matthew 3:13-17 around 410. It succinctly summarizes the teaching he sets

¹¹⁰ Augustine, *De Trin.* V.15.199.

¹¹¹ Further justification for his distinction between generation and procession can be found in his examination of the divine image in the *mens* in Books VIII-XV.

¹¹² Ayres, “Fundamental Grammar,” 56. It is important to recognize that the inseparable action of the divine persons is not unique to Latin trinitarian theology. The Cappadocians affirmed this axiom as well. See chapter two.

¹¹³ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.8, 70.

forth in *De Trinitate*. In the baptism of Jesus, Augustine sees a clear revelation of the divine persons: “So we have the three, somehow or other, clearly distinguished: in the voice the Father, in the man the Son, in the dove the Holy Spirit. There is no need to do more than just remind you of this; it's easy enough to see.”¹¹⁴ Augustine points out that the divine persons appear to be manifested in a “separable” way. Their apparently separable manifestation of the persons raises a problem: “Now someone may say to me, ‘Demonstrate that the three are inseparable. Remember you’re speaking as a Catholic, speaking to Catholics.’”¹¹⁵ The Catholic faith, rooted in Scripture and Apostolic truth holds “with the firmest and most orthodox faith, that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one inseparable trinity or triad; one God, not three gods; but one God in such a way that the Son is not the Father, that the Father is not the Son, that the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but the Spirit of the Father and of the Son.”¹¹⁶ How, then, can this be reconciled with the Son coming separately in human flesh, the Holy Spirit descending separately and the voice of the Father sounding separately from heaven?

After reminding his audience of the truth of Catholic teaching regarding the inseparable action of the persons, Augustine restates the problem: “If the Father does

¹¹⁴ Saint Augustine, Sermon 52.1 in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, vol. III/3, *Sermons III (51-94) on the New Testament*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991), 50.

¹¹⁵ Augustine, Sermon 52.2, 51.

¹¹⁶ Augustine, Sermon 52.2, 51.

nothing without the Son and the Son nothing without the Father, won't it follow, presumably, that we have to say the Father too was born of the Virgin Mary, the Father suffered under Pontius Pilate, the Father rose again and ascended into heaven?"¹¹⁷ To answer this question affirmatively would be to fall into the same error as the "Patripassians." This raises a dilemma: it appears that Augustine must either abandon his claim that the Son acts without the Father or he must acknowledge that the Father suffered, died and rose again. After rejecting both these options, Augustine offers the following solution: "the Son indeed, and not the Father, was born of the Virgin Mary; but this birth of the Son, not the Father, from the Virgin Mary was the work of both Father and Son. It was not indeed the Father, but the Son who suffered; yet the suffering of the Son was the work of both Father and Son. It wasn't the Father who rose again, but the Son; yet the resurrection of the Son was the work of both Father and Son."¹¹⁸ Having stated his solution, Augustine turns back to Scripture in order to demonstrate that the birth, death and resurrection of the Son were the work of the Father and the Son, yet that only the Son was born, died and rose. After establishing these points from Scripture, Augustine asks whether any analogy might exist for the inseparable operation of three separable things. To find three things that act inseparably we must turn inward to the

¹¹⁷ Augustine, Sermon 52.6, 52-53.

¹¹⁸ Augustine, Sermon 52.8, 53-54.

divine image in the human mind (*mens*)—specifically the triad of memory, understanding and will (the same triad he explicates in the second half of *De Trinitate*).¹¹⁹ Returning to Matthew 3, Augustine explains that while the Trinity acted together in the forming the body of Christ, this body belongs only to Christ. While the Trinity acted together in the formation of the dove, it belongs to none but the Spirit. While the Trinity produced the voice from heaven, the voice belonged only to the Father.¹²⁰ A reciprocal relationship exists for Augustine between inseparable action of the persons and their inseparable nature. On the one hand, inseparable action implies inseparable nature.¹²¹ On the other hand, inseparable nature implies inseparable action.¹²²

¹¹⁹ “So I think I have explained what I proposed. What I have separately pronounced, I have inseparably operated. All three produced just one of these names; and yet this one name which all three have produced doesn’t belong to all three but only to one of them. All three produced the name ‘memory,’ but the only one of them it belongs to is the memory. All three produced the name ‘understanding,’ but the only one of them it belongs to is the understanding. All three produced the name ‘will,’ but the only one of them it belongs to is the will. So too, the Trinity produced the flesh of Christ, but the only one of them it belongs to is Christ. The Trinity produced the dove from the sky, but the only one of them it belongs to is the Holy Spirit. The Trinity produced the voice from heaven, but the only one of them the voice belongs to is the Father.” Augustine, Sermon 52.21, 61. Augustine is careful to point that the triad of memory, understanding and will is *not* an exact analog for the Trinity.

¹²⁰ The very same explanation appears in *De Trinitate*: “So too the trinity together produced both the Father’s voice and the Son’s flesh and the Holy Spirit’s dove, though each of these single things has reference to a single person.” Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.30, 175.

¹²¹ “If some things were made through the Father, others through the Son, then it cannot be all things through the Father nor all through the Son. But if it is all things through the Father and all through the Son, then it is the same things through the Father as through the Son. *So the Son is equal to the Father*, and the work of Father and Son is inseparable.” Augustine, *De Trin.* I.12, 72 (italics mine). Arguing from inseparable action to inseparable nature was a very common pro-Nicene strategy.

¹²² Notice how the latter assumption supports Augustine’s claim that other persons are implied even when they are not mentioned: “It is to make us aware of the trinity that some things are even said about the persons singly by name; however, they must not be understood in the sense of excluding the other persons,

Finally, the inseparable action of the persons reflects the intra-trinitarian *taxis*—Father, Son and Holy Spirit: A clear example of this can be seen in Augustine’s discussion of John 5:19. The reason the Son does not work of himself is that he is not—so to speak—“of himself.” Rather he is *from* the Father. Just as the Son receives his being from the Father, so the “Son’s working comes from the Father. That is why the Son cannot do anything of himself except what he sees the Father doing.”¹²³ A second example can be seen in the case of the Holy Spirit. The reason the Spirit is not said to “speak from himself” in John 16:13 is because is not “from himself.”¹²⁴ The “speaking” of the Holy Spirit arises from the one from whom the Spirit proceeds.¹²⁵ The problem of how, on the one hand, the three divine persons work inseparably and how, on the other hand, only the Father spoke, only the Son became incarnate and only the Spirit

because this same three is also one, and there is one substance and godhead of Father and Son and Holy Spirit.” Augustine, *De Trin.* I.19, 79.

¹²³ Augustine, *De Trin.* II.3, 99. Commenting on this same text in his *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Augustine offers a fuller explanation in which the trinitarian *taxis* plays a key role: “Whatever one does, these the other, also. The Father [made] the world, the Son [made] the world, the Holy Spirit [made] the world. If [there are] three gods, [there are] three worlds; if [there is] one God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, one world was made by the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit (*unus mundus factus est a Patre per Filium in Spiritu sancto*). Therefore the Son does these things which the Father also does, and he does them not in a dissimilar manner; he both does them, and does them in like manner.” Saint Augustine, Tractate 20.9 in *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 79, *Tractates on the Gospel of John, 11-27*, trans. by John W. Rettig (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 172. Latin from Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 35:1561.

¹²⁴ Augustine, *De Trin.* II.5, 100.

¹²⁵ “So it is as proceeding from the Father that he is said not to speak from himself.” Augustine, *De Trin.* II.5, 100.

descended as a dove merely represents an economic version of the problem of how God can simultaneously be both one and triune.

4.3.4 Distinction of Persons *ad extra*

Having considered their unity of operation, we will now consider the distinction of the persons by examining the central economic concept in *De Trinitate*—the divine “missions.” In chapter three we examined the relationship between “mission” and “generation/procession” highlighting Augustine’s central insight that the temporal missions reveal the eternal generation of the Son and procession of the Spirit. If the missions of the Son and Spirit closely correspond to their eternal generation and procession, this suggests that the intra-trinitarian *taxis* represents one of the keys to understanding the interrelationships of the divine persons in the economy of salvation. Indeed this is precisely what we discover: the Father—the source and origin of all deity (*principium*)—is the one who sends while the Son (who proceeds from the Father) and the Spirit (who proceeds from the Father and Son) are the ones sent.

4.3.4.1 Sending of the Son

Augustine links the sending of the Son to the incarnation explaining, “what constituted the sending of the Lord was his being born in the flesh, his issuing, so to speak, from the hidden invisibility of the Father’s bosom and appearing to the eyes of

men in the form of a servant. . ."¹²⁶ Augustine argues that the sending of the Son represents a unique moment in salvation-history such that one cannot properly speak of the Son being "sent" prior to the incarnation. Two key differences exist between Old Testament theophanies the sending of the Son in the incarnation. First, the latter involves the direct "presence" of the Son in the world while the former were mediated by angels.¹²⁷ Second, the sending of the Son in the New Testament differs in purpose from the divine appearances in Old Testament. In Book IV, Augustine engages in a protracted discussion of the work of Christ, in which he appears to digress from his argument. Augustine discusses the reality of humans under sin and how, as mediator,¹²⁸ Jesus Christ solved this problem. Humans were dead both in body and soul; however, through his "single" death, Christ overcame our "double" death: "So then, the one death

¹²⁶ Augustine, *De Trin.* III.3, 129.

¹²⁷ "But the discussion, I think, has now gone on sufficiently long to demonstrate what we set out to show in this book. It has been established by all rational probability as far as man—or rather as far as I—can work it out, and by firm authority as far as the divine words of scripture have declared it, that whenever God was said to appear to our ancestors before our savior's incarnation, the voices heard and the physical manifestations seen were the work of angels." Augustine, *De Trin.* III.27, 144.

¹²⁸ "Mediation" represents the central concept through which Augustine narrates the work of Christ. "So it is that the Son of God, who is at once the Word of God and the mediator between God and men the Son of man, equal to the Father by oneness of divinity and our fellow by taking of humanity, so it is that he intercedes for us insofar as he is man, while not concealing that as God he is one with the Father . . ." *De Trin.* IV.12, 161. Edmund Hill suggests Augustine's focus upon the *mediation* of the incarnate Word may "serve to show up the difference in kind between his mission and the sort of mission on which angels were sent, which had been the subject of Book III. This purpose helps to explain why in chapters 3 and 4 Augustine describes Christ's mediation by contrasting it with the pseudomediaion of the devil, and why indeed he makes mediation his key term at all, rather than say redemption or salvation." Hill, *The Trinity*, 148. According to Hill, Augustine frames the "mediation" of the incarnate Word in two ways: (1) the restoration of harmony to a discordant world in the context of the problem of the one and the many and (2) the work of purification.

of our savior was our salvation from our two deaths, and his one resurrection bestowed two resurrections on us, since in either instance, that is both in death and in resurrection, his body served as the sacrament of our inner man and as the model of our outer man, by a kind of curative accord or symmetry."¹²⁹ The road that led to death came through Adam (Rom. 5:12) and the mediator of this road was the devil. In contrast to the incarnate Word, the devil offers a kind of counterfeit "purification" through false religious practices and many are deceived by his sacred rites. Only sacrifice of a "holy and just priest" can bring genuine purification. That priest was the Son of God: "What priest then could there be as just and holy as the only Son of God, who was not one who needed to purge his own sins by sacrifice, whether original sin or ones added in the course of human life?"¹³⁰ Some people, however, mistakenly believe "that they can purify themselves for contemplating God and cleaving to him by their own power and strength of character, which means in fact that they are thoroughly defiled by pride."¹³¹ Purification, according to Augustine, can be found only through the incarnate Son. It is not until the final part of Book IV that the reader discovers the purpose of this apparent digression: "There you have what the Son of God has been sent for; indeed there you

¹²⁹ Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.6, 157.

¹³⁰ Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.19, 166.

¹³¹ Augustine, *De Trin.* IV. 20, 167. Here Augustine offers a polemic against a Neoplatonic ascent to God.

have what it is for the Son of God to have been sent.”¹³² In other words, his apparent digression in the first part of book four was intended to explicate the purpose for which the Son was sent—namely, to restore fallen humans into a relationship of communion with the triune God.

This discussion also gives us a glimpse into the *unique* role of the Son of God in the economy of salvation. One of the striking features of his extended discussion of the mediation of the Son in Book IV is that nowhere does Augustine mention the work of Holy Spirit.¹³³ Some might argue that this phenomenon simply reflects a deficiency in Augustine’s pneumatology. Three factors, however, suggests that such a judgment may be unwarranted. First, we need to keep in mind that while the Son alone is mediator, the mediation of the Son is joint work not merely of the Son and Spirit but also the Father. Second, elsewhere Augustine discusses the vital role of the Spirit in Christ’s ministry from the time of his conception forward.¹³⁴ Finally, we need to remember that the purpose of Augustine’s discussion is to explicate the proper mission of the Son. This factor alone may account for his exclusive emphasis upon the work of the Son. For our

¹³² Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.25, 171.

¹³³ Augustine’s discussion of the mediatorial role of the incarnate Word begins in *De Trin* IV.2 and ends in *De Trin.* IV.24. Aside from a single biblical citation including a reference to the Spirit in *De Trin.* IV.5, all the occurrences of *spiritus* refer either to the human spirit or to demonic spirits.

¹³⁴ See, for example, Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.46, 431.

purposes, it is important simply to note that Augustine's discussion underscores the unique role of the Son in the economy of salvation.

4.3.4.2 Sending of the Spirit

Augustine's claim that the Son appeared in a "created bodily form" while, in his "uncreated spiritual form," he remained hidden, also enables one to understand the sense in which the Holy Spirit was sent. The Holy Spirit was "visibly displayed in a created guise which was made in time, either when he descended on our Lord himself *in bodily guise as a dove* (Mt 3:16), or when ten days after his ascension *there came suddenly from heaven on the day of Pentecost a sound as of a violent gust bearing down, and there appeared to them divided tongues as of fire, which also settled upon each one of them* (Acts 2:2)."¹³⁵ The sending of the Holy Spirit differs from the sending of the Son in that the Holy Spirit did not join a created reality "to himself and his person to be held in an everlasting union."¹³⁶ For this reason, we cannot say that the Spirit is "God and dove" or "God and fire" as we say of the Son "that he is God and man."¹³⁷ This raises an important question: inasmuch as the divine manifestations in the Old Testament also involved the temporary appropriation of a created reality, how does the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost substantively differ from these earlier appearances? Augustine

¹³⁵ Augustine, *De Trin.* II.10, 104.

¹³⁶ Augustine, *De Trin.* II.11, 104.

¹³⁷ Augustine, *De Trin.* II.11, 104.

offers two responses. First, he points out that John 7:39 teaches that “there was going to be a kind of giving or sending of the Holy Spirit after Christ's glorification such as there had never been before.”¹³⁸ Second, he suggests that uniqueness of the Spirit's sending can be seen in its *results*. Nowhere prior to Pentecost do we read of people speaking languages they did not previously know. The Holy Spirit's “coming needed to be demonstrated by perceptible signs, to show that the whole world and all nations with their variety of languages were going to believe in Christ by the gift of the Holy Spirit, in order to fulfill the psalmist's prophetic song, *There are no languages or dialects whose voices are not heard; their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the end of the world* (Ps 19:3).”¹³⁹ Augustine sees a special significance in the “perceptible sign” through which the bestowal of the Spirit is manifested (i.e., bearing witness to Christ in multiple languages): it not only underscores the unique role of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation but it also offers proleptic fulfillment of the ultimate goal of Holy Spirit's mission—namely, leading people in every nation to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

¹³⁸ Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.29, 174.

¹³⁹ Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.29, 175.

4.3.4.3 Two Sendings—One Goal

Having examined the roles of the Son and the Holy Spirit, we must now bring our discussion to close by considering how these two “missions” relate to one another. First and foremost, we must remember that these “missions” (or better “sendings”)¹⁴⁰ have one ultimate goal—bringing men and women into eternal contemplation of Father, Son and Holy Spirit: “Contemplation in fact is the reward of faith, a reward for which hearts are cleansed through faith, as it is written, *cleansing their hearts through faith* (Acts 15:9). Proof that it is that contemplation for which hearts are cleansed comes from the key text, *Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God* (Mt 5:8).”¹⁴¹ Augustine is careful to point out that it is not merely the Father who is the object of eternal contemplation but also the Son and the Spirit.¹⁴² This contemplation is the source of

¹⁴⁰ It is important to note that Augustine does not actually speak about two “missions” in the sense that the word “mission” is often used in contemporary English. He uses the Latin noun *missio*, which denotes “sending,” along with the Latin verb *mitto*, which means “to send.” Although the English term “mission” is derived from *missio*, the latter and former have slightly different connotations. The emphasis of the latter is upon the act of sending, while the emphasis of the former is often more on the purpose for which one is sent. Perhaps it might be more faithful to Augustine (and, for that matter, Scripture) to speak of two sendings (with reference to the *act* of sending) and one mission (with regard to the ultimate *purpose* of the sendings). This distinction seems to be missed by those who want to talk about an “economy” of the Spirit which is “distinct,” “separate” or “different” from that of the Son.

¹⁴¹ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.17, 77. Regarding the centrality of Matthew 5:8 in Augustine’s eschatology, see Michel R. Barnes, “The Visible Christ and the Invisible Trinity: Mt. 5:8 in Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology of 400,” *Modern Theology* 19 (2003): 329-55.

¹⁴² “Whether we hear then ‘Show us the Son,’ or whether we hear ‘Show us the Father,’ it comes to the same thing, because neither can be shown without the other. They are indeed one, as he tells us, *I and the Father are one* (Jn 10:30). In a word, because of this inseparability, it makes no difference whether sometimes the Father alone or sometimes the Son alone is mentioned as the one who is to fill us with delight at his countenance. Nor is the Spirit of each separable from this unity, the Father’s Spirit, that is, and the Son’s, the Holy Spirit

eternal joy: “For the fullness of our happiness, beyond which there is none else, is this: to enjoy God the three in whose image we are made.”¹⁴³ In the second half of *De Trinitate*, Augustine attempts to lead his reader into contemplation of the triune God through consideration of the divine image in the *mens* which represents a mirror through which one may perceive—albeit it dimly—the triunity of God.

4.4 An Evaluation of Amos Yong’s Trinitarian Pneumatology

Inasmuch as Yong’s pneumatological theology of religions is rooted a distinction between the “economy” of the Son and the “economy” of the Spirit, his proposal raises important questions about the relations among the trinitarian persons both within the divine life of the triune God (*ad intra*) and within the economy of salvation (*ad extra*). Yong suggests that the adequacy of his pneumatological theology of religions should be evaluated with respect to three criteria: “The trinitarianism to be developed should relate the missions of the Word and Spirit without identifying them. It should also be sensitive to the classical Christian concerns regarding the doctrine of the Trinity as well

which is given the proper name of *the Spirit of truth, which this world cannot receive* (Jn 14:17).” Augustine, *De Trin.* I.17-18, 77.

¹⁴³ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.18, 77. Augustine suggests that Mary sitting at Jesus’ feet prefigures this joy: “A sort of picture of what this joy will be like was sketched by Mary sitting at the Lord’s feet intent upon his words; at rest from all activity and intent upon the truth, in such measure as this life allows of, but thereby foreshadowing that joy which is going to last for ever.” Augustine, *De Trin.* I.20, 80.

as the contemporary methodological issues that confront transcendental theology.”¹⁴⁴ In the discussion that follows, I will argue that Yong relates the Spirit to the Father and Son in a way that inadequately addresses “classical Christian concerns regarding the doctrine of the Trinity.”¹⁴⁵

4.4.1 Insufficient Trinitarian Framework

Although Yong acknowledges that the “mission” of the Spirit must ultimately be understood in a trinitarian context,¹⁴⁶ he offers no comprehensive trinitarian framework *at the outset* within which to relate the work the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁷ At the economic level, “mission” plays a key role in his proposal. Although he frequently refers to the “missions” of the Son and Spirit, he offers no substantive discussion of the

¹⁴⁴ Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 95.

¹⁴⁵ My critique will focus upon Yong’s proposal as outlined in *Discerning the Spirit(s)*. At the end of this section I will briefly discuss a more recent book entitled *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003). At this point I would simply note that Yong does not offer any substantive revisions to the substance of his proposal in the latter book. On the contrary, he continues to affirm a distinct “economy” of the Spirit as well the legitimacy of non-christological criteria for discerning the Spirit’s presence.

¹⁴⁶ Yong acknowledges the need for a broader trinitarian framework: “But what if we were to begin elsewhere, let’s say, with the doctrine of the Spirit? Surely, there is no doubt that the christological question would be merely postponed, not entirely dismissed. Eventually, Christology and pneumatology must be understood within a broader trinitarian framework . . . Yet it would be intriguing to explore in that light how the Word and Spirit together accomplish and mediate the salvific gift of the Father, both separately, if discernible, and in tandem. It is even the case that such may be a clue toward bringing together particularity and universality.” Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 58.

¹⁴⁷ I am not suggesting that Yong does not offer a rigorous *theological* framework within which to understand the universal “presence” of the Spirit. On the contrary, he develops a very sophisticated metaphysic (his “foundational pneumatology”) for understanding the Spirit’s presence. The problem is that this “foundational pneumatology” is built upon the premise of a “distinct economy of the Spirit” for which he has not offered adequate trinitarian justification.

content of these “missions” from a salvation-historical perspective.¹⁴⁸ Echoing several contemporary theologians, he simply asserts that the Spirit operates in an economy “distinct” (i.e., separate) from that of the Son, brackets the “mission” of the Son and then focuses exclusively on the “mission” of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁹

At the level of the immanent Trinity, Yong offers no account of the relations among the trinitarian persons *ad intra* as ground for his understanding of the divine “missions.” Inasmuch as his distinction between the “economy” of the Son and the “economy” of the Spirit necessarily depends upon the hypostatic distinction between the Son and Spirit, some discussion of intra-trinitarian relations seems to be required.¹⁵⁰

Yong, however, rejects out of hand any attempt to speculate about the immanent Trinity.¹⁵¹ The closest Yong comes to a discussion of intra-trinitarian relations is a brief

¹⁴⁸ On the contrary, following Khodr, he attempts to redefine *oikonomia* in cosmic rather than salvation-historical terms.

¹⁴⁹ By speaking of a “distinct” economy of salvation, Yong ultimately means a *second* economy of salvation. I will use the adjectives “distinct” and “separate” interchangeably in my critique of Yong. Ultimately the issue is not whether these economies are “distinct” or “separate” but whether it is legitimate to speak of multiple economies at all. I will argue that Yong’s trinitarian pneumatology is inadequate because it posits two economies of salvation.

¹⁵⁰ In a proposal such as Yong’s, reflection on the immanent Trinity simply cannot be avoided because every conceptualization of the “economic Trinity” necessarily presumes certain assumptions about the “immanent Trinity.” See Coffey, *Deus Trinitas*, 15-26.

¹⁵¹ “I would therefore want to radicalize Karl Rahner’s axiom—‘the Trinity of the economy of salvation is the immanent Trinity and vice versa’ (1970)—in the direction of the divine economy while emphasizing that there is nothing further that can be known about God in Godself apart from what has been revealed in creation. In doing so, I would retain language about the ‘immanent’ Trinity only if by that we are talking about the mystery of creation, redemption and glorification as manifesting the essential nature of the divine reality, and not about internal or social communion among the divine ‘persons’ abstracted from relations with the world or pushed behind the veil of a primordial eternity.” Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 68-69. In a

discussion of the procession of the Spirit. Yong rejects the traditional western view (expressed in the *filioque* clause) that the Spirit proceeds jointly from the Father *and the Son*. What is at stake for Yong in problematizing the *filioque* is not an alternative understanding of the immanent Trinity but rather maintaining a theological basis for an separate “economy” of the Holy Spirit (which is then used to justify the search for non-christological criteria to discern the Spirit’s presence).¹⁵² However, inasmuch as compelling reasons exist to affirm the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son,¹⁵³ Yong’s rejection of the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son is

footnote, Yong refers to the following article in which he outlines his reasons for rejecting reflection on the immanent Trinity: Amos Yong, “Oneness and the Trinity: The Theological and Ecumenical Implications of Creation *Ex Nihilo* for an Intra-Pentecostal Dispute,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 19 (1997): 81-107. In this essay, Yong asserts that the key to an ecumenical *rapprochement* between “Oneness” Pentecostals and traditional trinitarian Pentecostals can be found by both groups refusing to speculate about the immanent Trinity: “Throughout, I speak as a trinitarian, and yet I am proposing that insofar as the doctrine of the immanent Trinity has been the source of confusion between Oneness and trinitarian Pentecostals, it should be discarded, and that there are viable theological and, more importantly, Pentecostal reasons for doing so.” Yong, “Oneness and the Trinity,” 82-83. Yong’s rejection of speculation regarding the immanent Trinity raises an important question: How does one know that the work of the “Spirit” and the work of the “Son” are not simply modes of economic activity of one undifferentiated God? If “Spirit” is nothing more than a mode of economic activity, then no warrant exists for a separate economy of the “Spirit.”

¹⁵² “In short, failure to differentiate between the two economies inevitably risks the subordination of the mission of the Spirit to that of the Son and ultimately to an ecclesiological definition of soteriology.” Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 64. Rejection of the *filioque* has become standard fare among many who advance a “pneumatological” theology of religions. See Clark Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 185-214

¹⁵³ The *filioque* clause was inserted into the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed at the Third Council of Toledo in 589—over one hundred and seventy years after Augustine wrote *De Trinitate*. Thus, the question regarding the formal legitimacy of the insertion of the *filioque* clause into the creed must be distinguished from substantive theological question of whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*. One can affirm the latter and while simultaneously denying the propriety of the former.

unwarranted.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, evidence *against* the twofold procession of the Spirit *ad intra* does not count as positive evidence *for* a separate economy of the Spirit *ad extra*.

Yong seems to assume that by problematizing the twofold procession of the Spirit, he gains positive ground for dual economies. The latter does not follow from the former.

Finally, it is possible to affirm the full “equality” of the Spirit to the Son (a concern that drives Eastern rejection of the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son) without positing dual “economies.”¹⁵⁵

4.4.2 Severing the “Two Hands” of the Father

Throughout *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, Yong repeatedly appeals to Irenaeus’ image of the Son and Spirit as the “two hands” of God as a way of conceptualizing the Son/Spirit relationship.¹⁵⁶ His use of this image, however, stands in tension with his

¹⁵⁴ Although it may be a relatively minor point, Yong misrepresents the Latin tradition by speaking of the “twofold origins” (plural) of the Spirit: “*Filioque* applied to the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit refers to an understanding of the twofold *origins* of the Spirit: from the Father ‘and the Son’.” Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 66 (italics mine). According to Augustine, the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son as from one principle. Hence, it would be much more accurate to speak of the “twofold origin” of the Spirit.

¹⁵⁵ See Kilian McDonnell, *The Other Hand of God: The Holy Spirit as the Universal Touch and Goal* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003), 86-97, 196-201, 228-29. McDonnell argues at length for the equality of the mission of the Spirit to the Son; however, he is quite clear that this does not require two “economies.”

¹⁵⁶ Yong refers to the Son and Spirit as the “two hands” of God on at least sixteen different occasions in *Discerning the Spirit(s)*. This image is read not only as illustrating the equality of the Son and Spirit (in contrast to the alleged “subordination” of Spirit to the Son in the western church as evidenced by the *filioque*) but it is also seen as providing epistemic warrant for an economy of the Spirit separate from that of the Son. Yong follows Khodr on this point. Notice how Khodr reads “two hands” in terms of dual economies: “The Spirit is present everywhere and fills everything by virtue of an economy distinct from that of the Son. Irenaeus calls the Word and the Spirit the ‘two hands of the Father’. This means we must affirm

emphasis upon the “distinct economy” of the Spirit. From an economic standpoint, the “two hands” imagery is not about a left hand doing one activity and the right hand doing another (which seems to be implied by associating a separate “economy” with each of the hands). It is fundamentally about the *Father* acting through the Son and Spirit to a particular end.¹⁵⁷ The image underscores unity of action,¹⁵⁸ combining hypostatic distinction at the intra-trinitarian level (i.e., Father, Son and Spirit) with unity of action at the economic level. As a heuristic device, Yong is free to use the “two hands” imagery in any way he sees fit; however, it must be noted that this image, in the broader context of Irenaeus’ trinitarian theology, offers no theological warrant for a

not only their hypostatic independence but also that the advent of the Holy Spirit in the world is not subordinated to the Son, is not simply a function of the Word.” Khodr, “Christianity and the Pluralistic World,” 125-26. Yong appears to follow Khodr on this point: “Khodr’s suggestion, echoed by Samartha, Dupuis and Knitter, is that a retrieval of Irenaeus’s theological metaphor allows us to recognize the different economies of the Word and the Spirit.” Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 62.

¹⁵⁷ In the original context of Irenaeus’ trinitarian theology, the “two hands” imagery served to highlight the “direct” nature of God’s involvement in the world over and against Gnostics who posited a chain of intermediaries between God and the world: “For God did not stand in need of these [beings], in order to the accomplishing of what He had Himself determined with Himself beforehand should be done, as if He did not possess His own hands. For with Him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously, He made all things, to whom also He speaks, saying, ‘Let Us make man after Our image and likeness;’ He taking from Himself the substance of the creatures [formed], and the pattern of things made, and the type of all the adornments in the world.” Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, IV.20.1 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 487-88. For a discussion of the “two hands” image, see Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 89-93.

¹⁵⁸ “A striking way of expressing the divine unity and its embrace is through the description of the word and spirit as the hands of God.” Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 91.

separate economy of the Spirit.¹⁵⁹ On the contrary, Yong's use of this image causes one to wonder if his proposal implicitly severs the "two hands."¹⁶⁰

Although Augustine would likely have viewed the "two hands" language as subordinationist,¹⁶¹ he too emphasizes the unity of the divine persons *ad extra*.¹⁶² According to Augustine, Father, Son and Spirit work together in a single economy of salvation.¹⁶³ Although the *missiones* of the Son and Spirit are "distinct" in such a way that one must speak of two "sendings" (Gal. 4:4-6), these two sendings have one ultimate goal—bringing men and women into communion with the triune God. Yong's

¹⁵⁹ Moreover, as heuristic device, it is not particularly helpful in expressing a distinct "economy" of the Spirit.

¹⁶⁰ In fairness to Yong, it should be noted that in most places where he employs the "two hands" metaphor, he explicitly acknowledges that the Son and Spirit work together. For example, "To reiterate, the foundational pneumatology developed here posits every experience as, at some level, that of the presence and activity of the Word and Spirit." Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 178. Similarly, "Tongues-speech is a sign that the two hands of the Father are at work, albeit in different dimensions." Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 174. A tension therefore exists between his use of this image and his emphasis upon the distinct economy of the Spirit.

¹⁶¹ Although the "two hands" image need not be understood in a subordinationist way—Yong certainly does not use it this way—Irenaeus' trinitarian theology does contain elements of subordination. Consider, for example, the way Irenaeus divides the "economic" labor among the divine persons: "By this arrangement, therefore, and these harmonies, and a sequence of this nature, man, a created and organized being, is rendered the image of God,—the Father planning everything well and giving His commands, the Son carrying these into execution and performing the work of creating, and the Spirit nourishing and increasing [what is made] . . ." Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, IV.38.3, 523. This kind of moderate subordination can be found in much pre-Nicene trinitarian theology. It should not be confused with Arian subordinationism which denies the consubstantiality of the Son to the Father.

¹⁶² In Sermon 52 on the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:14) Augustine expresses the joint action of Father, Son and Spirit through memory, understanding and will. The "two hands" are to Irenaeus what memory, understanding and will are to Augustine. Both offer a way of conceptualizing the joint action of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the world.

¹⁶³ In contrast to Augustine, Irenaeus' concept of "economy" is rather complex. *Oikonomia* possesses at least four distinct meanings for Irenaeus. See Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 73-94.

trinitarian pneumatology is deficient not because it affirms differing economic *roles* for the Son and the Spirit (e.g., the fact that the Son alone became incarnate). Rather, it is deficient because it affirms two distinct “economies” — one associated with the Son and other with the Spirit. From two “sendings” (*missiones*) one should not infer two separate “economies.”¹⁶⁴ As Kilian McDonnell rightly notes, “To insist on the equality of the Spirit and the Spirit’s mission, it is neither necessary nor advisable to postulate a ‘distinct economy of the Spirit,’ as does Vladimir Lossky. There is one economy from the Father constituted by the missions of the Son and the Spirit, each of the missions being present and active at the interior of the other.”¹⁶⁵ Although we must recognize a “real” distinction between the missions (or sendings), to speak of two “economies” in such a way that they represent two foci could lead to a form of “economic tritheism.”¹⁶⁶ The *missiones* issue from the Father and lead back to the Father.¹⁶⁷ By positing two

¹⁶⁴ Yong makes the mistake of equating “mission” and “economy.” Notice how he uses these terms interchangeably in the following statement: “Preliminarily then, a pneumatological theology of religions that validates the distinction between the *economy* of the Word and Spirit holds the christological problem in abeyance. For now, it is sufficient to grant that there is a relationship-in-autonomy between the two divine *missions*.” Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 70 (italics mine).

¹⁶⁵ McDonnell, *The Other Hand of God*, 198.

¹⁶⁶ “While insisting on the ‘real’ distinction between the two missions of the Word and Spirit, there is a danger of conceiving of them as two foci at the ends of an ellipse . . . Such a conception, although not necessarily heretical, would be dangerous and might lead to a kind of economic tritheism.” McDonnell, *The Other Hand of God*, 199-200. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that positing two economies could lead to economic “bitheism.”

¹⁶⁷ This highlights another problem with Yong’s proposal. Yong not only brackets a christological perspective but he also brackets what might be called a “patrological” perspective. If the Spirit represents divine *presence* in Yong’s proposal, one might rightly say with McDonnell that the Father symbolizes divine

“economies,” Yong implicitly severs the “two hands” and undermines the unicity of the economy of salvation.

Further evidence that Yong’s trinitarian pneumatology severs the “two hands” of the Father can be seen in the way he relates the work of the Spirit to the Son. Although Yong emphasizes the empowering role of the Spirit in the incarnation and earthly ministry of Christ,¹⁶⁸ he fails to take seriously biblical teaching regarding the Spirit’s unique role in bearing witness to and glorifying the risen Christ.¹⁶⁹ I already noted how

purpose: “The Father is the origin of the downward (outward) movement and the goal of ascending (returning) movement. Creation and the church are the immediate goal of the outward movement, achieved in the Spirit. The Father is the point of departure and ultimate goal of the two movements. The Spirit is both the point of contact with the world and the church on the downward movement and the turning around point on the journey back from the world and church to the Father. The primary earthly locus of this movement is baptism and the church, in which believers are touched and transformed by the Spirit, and made bearers of the prophetic Spirit who leads to the Son, bringing them to the Father.” McDonnell, *The Other Hand of God*, 94-95. By bracketing the Father, Yong effectively obscures the goal of the economy of salvation.

¹⁶⁸ At several points Yong highlights the biblical basis for and benefits of “Spirit-Christology” for a pneumatological theology of religions. See Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 118-120. “Spirit-Christology” is attractive because it emphasizes the dependence of Jesus upon the Spirit in his earthly life and ministry in a way that undermines “subordinationist” understandings of the Spirit’s ministry. Yong’s appeal to Spirit-Christology, however, raises an important question: If there is no “Christ without Spirit” (as advocates of Spirit-Christology insist), then how can one affirm “Spirit without Christ” as Yong’s proposal seems to imply? Inasmuch as Spirit-Christology emphasizes the intrinsic economic *relatedness* of the Son and Spirit, it stands in tension with Yong’s “distinct economy” of the Spirit.

¹⁶⁹ See John 15:26-27; 16:7-15; Acts 1:6-9; 4:24-31. In the Pauline epistles we see further evidence that Holy Spirit bears witness to, and glorifies the Son. The Spirit glorifies Christ by witnessing to the “sonship” of the redeemed (Rom. 8:1-17), empowering the preaching of the gospel (1 Cor. 2:2-5; Rom. 15:14-21), enabling believers to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (1 Cor. 12:2-3), removing the “veil” so that men and women can see the glory of Christ who is the image of God (2 Cor. 3:7-4:6), enabling believers to become conformed to the image of the Son (Rom. 8:26-30), producing the fruit of Christ in the lives of believers (Gal. 5:15-24) and enabling believers to know and experience the love of Christ (Eph. 3:14-19). According to Augustine, the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son because he “receives” from the Son. Just as the Son does not speak of his own but because he is from the Father, so the Spirit does not speak of his own because he is from the Father and the Son. See Augustine, *De Trin.* II.5, 100. Augustine fleshes out this logic in greater detail in his *Tractates on*

Augustine views the sign through which the bestowal of the Spirit was manifested at Pentecost as a proleptic fulfillment of the goal of Holy Spirit's work (namely, of leading people in every nation to believe in Jesus Christ).¹⁷⁰ It is precisely in this sense that the Spirit "universalizes" the work of Jesus Christ. This universal work of the Spirit constitutes the basis for the evangelistic mission of the church.¹⁷¹ Commenting on John 16:14, Augustine explains that the Spirit "glorifies" Christ by pouring out love in the hearts of Christ's followers so that they will proclaim him and spread his fame throughout the world.¹⁷² Thus, from a salvation-historical perspective, the work of the Spirit (along with the Father and Son) among adherents of other religions must be

the Gospel of John. Commenting on John 16:13, Augustine writes, "Therefore, we ought to take what has been said about the Holy Spirit, 'For he will not speak of himself; but what things soever he will speak,' in such a way that we understand that he is not of himself. For the Father alone is not of another. The Son is born from the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, but the Father is neither born nor proceeds from another. . . . Therefore 'he will not speak of himself' because he is not of himself. 'But what things soever he will hear, he will speak'; he will hear of that one from whom he proceeds." Saint Augustine, Tractate 99.4 in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 90, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 55-111, trans. John W. Rettig (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 223.

¹⁷⁰ Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.29, 175.

¹⁷¹ As Lesslie Newbigin rightly notes, "The Spirit who thus bears witness in the life of the Church to the purpose of the Father is not confined within the limits the Church. It is the clear teaching of the Acts of the Apostles, as it is the experience of missionaries, that the Spirit goes, so to speak, ahead of the Church. Like Cornelius, men of every age and nation have been miraculously prepared beforehand to receive the message of Christ. But—because the Spirit and the Father are one—this work of the Spirit is not in any sense an alternative way to God apart from the Church; it is the preparation for the coming of the Church, which means that the Church must be ever ready to follow where the Spirit leads." Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Themes for Today's Mission* (London: Paternoster, 1998), 53-54.

¹⁷² "For his words, 'He will glorify me,' can be understood in this way: by pouring out love in the hearts of believers and by making them spiritual, he revealed to them how the Son, whom they only knew before according to the flesh and, as men, thought him a man, was equal to the Father. Or at least in this way: filled with confidence by love itself, and with fear driven out, they announced Christ to men, and thus his fame was spread out in all the world." Augustine, Tractate 100.1, 229.

understood in terms of *praeparatio evangelica*.¹⁷³ No grounds exist for positing a distinct salvation-historical economy of the Spirit leading to some other end. Inasmuch as Yong's proposal attempts to move beyond a *praeparatio evangelica* approach to the Spirit's work in the lives of non-Christians (including adherents of other religions),¹⁷⁴ it severs the "two hands" of the Father and obscures the true nature of the *missio Dei*.¹⁷⁵

A final way Yong's trinitarian pneumatology severs the two hands of the Father is by bracketing christological criteria for discerning God's work: "The value of a pneumatological theology of religions can now be seen in clearer light. I have argued that insofar as Word and Spirit are related but yet distinct as the two hands of the

¹⁷³ Adopting this view does not require one to deny the presence of truth and goodness in the lives of adherents of other religions. On the contrary, these elements can be accounted for in terms of a Christian anthropology informed by the doctrine of creation. For example, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* John Calvin argues that inside each person there resides an "awareness of divinity" (*sensus divinitatis*). Every form of religion can be viewed as a response to this awareness of divinity. For a helpful discussion of the implications of Christian anthropology for a Christian theology of religions, see Harold A. Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 308-48.

¹⁷⁴ Although Yong acknowledges, to a certain extent, the legitimacy of a *praeparatio evangelica* approach, it appears that he wants to move beyond this approach. Yong explains that viewing religions solely in terms of *praeparatio evangelica* "leads to the kind of restrictive christological quests that continue to denigrate the Holy Spirit as having less-than-equal status as a trinitarian member." Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 320.

¹⁷⁵ The term *missio Dei* emerged out of a missionary conference in Willingen in 1952. It emphasizes, first and foremost, that mission is rooted in and reflects God's nature and will (based on the assumption that the economic Trinity corresponds to and closely reflects the immanent Trinity). "The *ultimate basis* of mission is the triune God—the Father who created the world and sent his Son by the Holy Spirit to be our salvation. The *proximate basis* of mission is the redemption of the Son by his life, death and resurrection, and the *immediate power* of mission the Holy Spirit. It is, in trinitarian terms, a *missio Dei*. Thus mission is based on the will, movement, and action of the grace and love of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives*, 72 (italics original). Although Barth's trinitarian theology may have influenced the historical development of the *missio Dei* at Willingen, the roots of a *missio Dei* can be found in Augustine. See Edward W. Poitras, "St. Augustine and the *Missio Dei*: A Reflection on Mission at the Close of the Twentieth Century," *Mission Studies* 32 (1999): 28-46.

Father, we should be able to identify dimensions of the Spirit's presence and activity that are not constrained by that of the Word."¹⁷⁶ According to Yong, earlier pneumatological approaches failed precisely because they were unable to move beyond christological criteria. For example, because of his commitment to the *filioque*, Karl Rahner was ultimately unable to distinguish the economy of the Son and the Spirit. This left Rahner unable to articulate non-christological criteria for discerning God's presence. Furthermore, even Clark Pinnock, who rejects the *filioque*, yields too quickly "to the theological pressure exerted by Christology."¹⁷⁷ If, however, as Augustine rightly insists, the Father, Son and the Spirit are working together in a single economy which exists to draw men and women into the life of the triune God, then any criteria for discerning the Spirit's redemptive work must include a christological element. Thus, it should not be surprising that Rahner, Pinnock and others who affirm the universal work of the Spirit nevertheless want to preserve a Christological criterion for discerning the Spirit's presence.

Before we draw our evaluation to a close, we must briefly consider Yong's discussion of his proposal in a more recent book entitled *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions*. In the latter work, Yong tempers his proposal in

¹⁷⁶ Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 136.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 201.

two ways. First, he acknowledges, to a greater degree, the inherent economic relatedness of the “two hands” of the Father.¹⁷⁸ Although a pneumatological theology of religions initially seems to be promising in emphasizing a “distinct” economy of the Spirit, he explains that this distinctiveness must be qualified: “Because of the relationality between Spirit and Son, any Christian theology of religions that begins pneumatologically must ultimately include and confront the christological moment.”¹⁷⁹ Second, Yong seems more aware of the problems associated with a search for non-christological criteria for discerning the Spirit’s presence. At the same time, none of these acknowledgements leads to any explicit revision of his earlier proposal. On the contrary, he continues to affirm a distinct “economy” of the Spirit and still wants to maintain the legitimacy of non-christological criteria for discerning the Spirit’s presence and activity.¹⁸⁰ Thus, at the end of the day a significant tension remains. Inasmuch as

¹⁷⁸ This shift can be seen in his reading of Khodr. In *Discerning the Spirit(s)* Yong reads Khodr almost solely as emphasizing an independent economy of the Holy Spirit effectively bracketing Khodr’s discussion of how this distinct economy of the Spirit inherently points to Christ. See Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 60-64. In *Beyond the Impasse*, he acknowledges the *christological* dimension of Khodr’s proposal (which he nevertheless seems to view as problematic): “Khodr’s presentation is nevertheless not free from tension. Theologizing as he does from within the framework of Orthodox trinitarianism, he sees the missions of the Son and Spirit as much more connected than not. While the religions may be the working of the economy of the Spirit, yet they are at the same time in a very real sense connected to the economy of the Son.” Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 89.

¹⁷⁹ Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 103.

¹⁸⁰ Perhaps the best way to summarize the difference between *Discerning the Spirit(s)* and *Beyond the Impasse* would be to say that the latter book, while articulating the same proposal, is marked by much greater reserve. *Beyond the Impasse*, for example, contains no bold assertions regarding the salvific work of the Holy Spirit among the Umbanda in Brazil.

Yong emphasizes a separate economy of the Spirit in order to legitimize a non-christological approach to other religions, he implicitly severs the “two hands” of the Father. However, inasmuch as he acknowledges the intrinsic relatedness of the “two hands” under pressures of “classical Christian concerns regarding the doctrine of the Trinity,” he undermines his quest for non-christological criteria.

4.5 An Evaluation of Dupuis’ Trinitarian Christology

Although, at first glance, Dupuis appears to be faithful to the Catholic trinitarian tradition,¹⁸¹ I will demonstrate that a close reading reveals that his proposal introduces subordinationism into the Father/Son relationship, undermines the unicity of the economy of salvation and severs the economic and the immanent Trinity.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ For example, in contrast to pluralists like John Hick, Dupuis denies that “Trinity” merely represents a penultimate face of God; on the contrary, he insists that Father, Son and Spirit constitute *the* ultimate divine reality: “For the Christian faith, then, the Triune God cannot be viewed as a manifestation or appearance, among others, of an Ultimate Reality toward which men and women are tending in and through the various religious traditions of the world (John Hick). It is not a penultimate sign of the Real *an sich*; it is the Ultimate Reality itself.” Dupuis, *Christian Toward a Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 263. In addition, he ostensibly affirms a Chalcedonian Christology which recognizes Jesus Christ as fully human and fully divine. Furthermore, he suggests that Son and the Spirit, the two “hands” of God, act distinctly yet inseparably in one economy of salvation. Finally, he claims that the ultimate end of the economy of salvation is communion with the triune God.

¹⁸² In addition to *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, I will also draw upon a more recent work: *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2002).

4.5.1 Subordinationism in the Father/Son Relationship

In order to make space for other “saviors” and “mediators,” Dupuis appeals to a “trinitarian Christology” in which Christ is recognized not as “absolute” savior but merely as “constitutive” savior.¹⁸³ Only “God” (i.e., the Father) is the “absolute” savior in the sense of being the primary and ultimate source of salvation. Jesus Christ is savior only in a secondary and derivative sense:

In the Hebrew Bible, the title ‘Savior’ has to do primarily with God; in the New Testament it is applied to God, and only secondarily to Jesus Christ—without gainsaying that God remains the ultimate cause and original source of salvation. The object of faith, according to New Testament theology, remains primordially God the Father; likely, according to that theology, it is primarily God who saves, and not primarily but conjointly, Jesus Christ: God saves through his Son (cf. Jn 3:16-17).¹⁸⁴

Prima facie it may sound as if Dupuis merely wants to affirm the traditional notion that the Father is the source (*principium*) of divinity. In such a context it is certainly appropriate to speak of the Father as the “primary” source of salvation; however, when Dupuis speaks of Jesus Christ as “constitutive” savior, he has something more in mind. That Jesus Christ is “constitutive” savior means, among other things, that he is not the *goal* of salvation but merely the constitutive *means* of salvation: “[Christocentrism] never places Jesus Christ in the place of God; it merely affirms that God has placed him at the center of his saving plan for humankind, not as the end but as the way, not as the goal of

¹⁸³ Whereas Yong’s proposal appeals to a trinitarian *pneumatology*, Dupuis appeals to a trinitarian *Christology*.

¹⁸⁴ Dupuis, *From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 167.

every human quest for God but as the universal ‘mediator’ (cf. I Tim 2:5) of God’s saving action toward people.”¹⁸⁵ What is troubling about the preceding statement is not the suggestion that Jesus Christ is the *means* of salvation¹⁸⁶ but rather the obvious attempt to distinguish the salvific role of incarnate Son (constitutive savior) from that of the Father (absolute savior) by limiting the Son to an *instrumental* role in salvation.¹⁸⁷ In Dupuis’ “inclusive pluralism” the Father is “absolute” savior as the one who *wills* salvation while the Son is “constitutive” savior as the one who *effects* salvation. The latter assumption seems to be implicit in his claim that God’s saving *will* is not limited to the Christ event: “[W]hile the Christ event is the ‘universal sacrament’ of God’s will to save humankind and of his saving action, it need not be thereby and exclusively the only possible expression of that will. God’s saving power is not exclusively bound by the universal

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 88.

¹⁸⁶ Like Dupuis, “mediation” represents the central category through which Augustine describes the work of the incarnate Son of God.

¹⁸⁷ “What, then, would be the implications of a Trinitarian Christology for a theology of religious pluralism? On the divine side, it will be necessary to show clearly that Jesus Christ must never be thought to replace the Father. As Jesus himself as entirely ‘God-centered,’ so must the faith-interpretation proposed of him—the Christ—by the Christian kerygma remain at all times. The Gospel according to John calls Jesus, ‘the way, and the truth, and the life (Jn 14:6)—never the goal or the end; the same gospel makes it clear that the goal of human existence—and of history—is the unfathomable mystery of God, whom no human being has ever seen but has been ‘made known’ to us by his incarnate Son (Jn 1:18). The unique closeness that exists between God and Jesus by virtue of the mystery of the incarnation may never be forgotten, but neither can the unbridgeable distance that remains between the Father and Jesus in his human existence. . . . While it is true that Jesus the man is uniquely the Son of God, it is equally true that God (the Father) stands beyond Jesus. When he is said to be at the center of the Christian mystery, this is not to be understood in an ‘absolute’ sense but in the order of the economy of God’s freely entertained dealings with humankind in history.” Dupuis, *From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 92. A similar claim can be found in Dupuis, *Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 306.

sign God has designed for his saving action.”¹⁸⁸ To suggest that the salvific role of Jesus Christ is *merely* instrumental sounds suspiciously subordinationist. One of the fundamental axioms of Augustine’s theology—an assumption he shares in common with the Cappadocians—is that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit act with *one will* in the economy of salvation. Of particular relevance is Augustine’s discussion of the Passion. In contrast to Dupuis, Augustine argues that the decision leading to the Passion involved not only the Father but also the Son.¹⁸⁹ Inasmuch as Jesus Christ is Savior precisely as God-incarnate (*homoousios* with the Father), one must affirm (on the basis of the unity of *opera ad extra*) that the Son also willed salvation along with the Father. If, on the contrary, one insists that Jesus Christ is merely a *constitutive means* of salvation and did not also will it (along with the Father and the Spirit), then it would seem that some form of subordinationism is unavoidable.

Subordinationism can also be seen in Dupuis’ claim that Jesus Christ, as the incarnate Son, is not the *goal* of salvation. Contra Dupuis, Augustine insists that the object of contemplation in the eschaton will not merely be the Father but *all* the divine persons: “For we shall contemplate God the Father and Son and Holy Spirit” when the

¹⁸⁸ Dupuis, *From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 176. Commenting on 1 Timothy 2:5, Dupuis notes, “The universal ‘saving will’ toward all humankind is attributed not to the risen Christ but to God. That universal divine will is the ‘absolute’ element that constitutes the salvation of the world; it is the focal point for a correct understanding of the affirmation of faith in human salvation.” Dupuis, *From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 41.

¹⁸⁹ Augustine notes that while Romans 8:32 attributes the giving of the Son to the Father, Galatians 2:20 attributes the Son’s death to his own decision.

work of the mediator is complete.¹⁹⁰ Similarly, when Jesus Christ “brings the believers to the contemplation of God and the Father, he will assuredly bring them to the contemplation of himself, having said, *I will show myself to him* (Jn 14:21).”¹⁹¹ Thus,

Whether we hear then ‘Show us the Son,’ or whether we hear ‘Show us the Father,’ it comes to the same thing, because neither can be shown without the other. They are indeed one, as he tells us, *I and the Father are one* (Jn 10:30). In a word, because of this inseparability, it makes no difference whether sometimes the Father alone or sometimes the Son alone is mentioned as the one who is to fill us with delight at his countenance.¹⁹²

To deny that the Son is also the goal of salvation necessarily leads to subordinationism in the Father-Son relationship.

Dupuis is not unaware of the problem outlined above. In order to avoid positing subordinationism in the immanent life of the triune God, he appeals to the distinction between human and divine natures of Jesus Christ as the basis for his claim that Jesus Christ is merely “constitutive” savior: “The unique closeness that exists between God and Jesus by virtue of the mystery of the incarnation may never be forgotten, but neither can the *unbridgeable distance* that remains between the Father and Jesus in his human existence. . . . While it is true that Jesus the man is uniquely the Son of God, it is equally

¹⁹⁰ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.20, 80. Also, “For the fullness of our happiness, beyond which there is none else, is this: to enjoy God the three in whose image we were made.” Augustine, *De Trin.* I.18, 77.

¹⁹¹ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.18, 79.

¹⁹² Augustine, *De Trin.* I.17, 77.

true that God (the Father) stands beyond Jesus.”¹⁹³ In other words, when pressed with the subordinationism inherent in his notion of Jesus Christ as constitutive savior, Dupuis can respond by insisting that he is only speaking about Jesus Christ in his human nature. Although this move may solve the problem of subordinationism, it does so only by undermining the unity of the two natures in *one* person. It was not a *nature* that the Father sent to save the world but a *person*. It was not a *nature* that died on the cross but a *person*. That person was the Son of God, who became incarnate by taking on human nature. To speak of Jesus Christ as “constitutive Savior” is to speak of the *person* of the Son as “constitutive Savior” and it is precisely at this point that subordination arises. The only way Dupuis can avoid subordinationism is by sharply distinguishing the two natures of Jesus Christ in a way that undermines their unity. Initially it might appear that the distinction Dupuis makes between the two natures is simply identical to the distinction Augustine makes between the Son in the “form of God” and the Son in the “form of servant.”¹⁹⁴ Clearly a distinction between the two natures of Christ provides a hermeneutical key to Augustine’s reading of Scripture. Moreover, Augustine is quite clear that divine nature of the Son was not changed when he took on a human nature.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ Dupuis, *From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 92 (italics mine).

¹⁹⁴ See Augustine, *De Trin.* I.22, 82.

¹⁹⁵ “If you go on to ask me how the incarnation itself was done, I say that the very Word of God was made flesh, that is, was made man, without however being turned or changed into that which he was made; that he was of course so made that you would have there not only the Word of God and the flesh of man but also

At the same time, subtle but important differences exist between Augustine and Dupuis.

It will be helpful to quote Augustine at length:

However, if it were not one and the same person who is Son of God in virtue of the form in which he is, and Son of man in virtue of the form of a servant which he took, the apostle Paul would not have said, *If they had known, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory* (1 Cor 2:8). It was in the form of a servant that he was crucified, and yet it was the Lord of glory who was crucified. For that ‘take-over’ was such as to make God a man and a man God. Yet the careful and serious and devout reader will understand what is said of him for the sake of which, and what in virtue of which. For example, we said above that it is in virtue of his being God that he glorifies his followers—in virtue, obviously, of his being the Lord of glory; and yet the Lord of glory was crucified, because it is quite correct to talk even of God being crucified—owing to the weakness of flesh, though, not to the strength of godhead.¹⁹⁶

Although one can rightly speak of two “forms,” Augustine makes it quite clear that these two “forms” exist in one person—the Son of God. Although we can say that that the Son was crucified in the form of a servant, we must never forget that it was “the Lord of glory” (i.e., the Son) who was crucified. Thus, when Augustine speaks of the *subject* of the incarnation, he always speaks of the Son. In contrast, when Dupuis speaks of his “constitutive Savior,” he always refers to the human person Jesus Christ. By doing this, Dupuis subtly obscures the fact that the subject of the incarnation is the eternal Son. It is important to notice that Augustine describes the unity of two natures in a way that anticipates later creedal developments at Chalcedon. The unity of the two

the rational soul of man as well; and that this whole can be called God because it is God and man because it is man.” Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.31, 176.

¹⁹⁶ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.28, 86.

natures can be seen most clearly in his claim that it is appropriate to speak of “God being crucified.” It is precisely the latter kind of speech that is undermined by Dupuis’ “absolute”/ “constitutive” distinction. Although Dupuis acknowledges the hypostatic unity of the natures, in reality he consistently emphasizes their distinction in a way that cannot be reconciled with a full Chalcedonian Christology.

At the end of the day Dupuis faces a serious dilemma. He cannot continue to affirm that Jesus Christ is merely “constitutive” savior and uphold an orthodox “trinitarian Christology.” If, on the one hand, he suggests that Jesus Christ is merely the constitutive *means* of salvation and did not will it along with the Father, he necessarily introduces subordinationism into the Father/Son relationship. If, on the other hand, he attempts to overcome this problem by emphasizing the “unbridgeable distance” between God the Father and Jesus Christ in his human nature, he undermines the unity of the two natures.

4.5.2 Undermining the Unicity of the Economy of Salvation

One might assume that Dupuis would appeal to the independent action of the Holy Spirit as the basis for the salvific work of the triune God among non-Christian religions. Although he clearly affirms the universal presence and work of the Spirit, Dupuis’ proposal is primarily *Christological* in its orientation. He draws an important distinction between the work of the Logos *ensarkos* (the incarnate Logos) and the work of the Logos *asarkos* (the non-incarnate Logos). His distinction between the work of the

Logos *ensarkos* and Logos *asarkos* following the incarnation is grounded, to a significant degree, in the distinction between the two natures of Christ: “Admittedly, in the mystery of Jesus-the-Christ, the Word cannot be separated from the flesh it has assumed. But, inseparable as the divine Word and Jesus’ human existence may be, they nevertheless remain distinct. While, then, the human action of the Logos *ensarkos* is the universal sacrament of God’s saving action, it does not exhaust the action of the Logos.”¹⁹⁷ On the basis of this distinction, Dupuis claims that an enduring work of the Logos *asarkos* (distinct from the Logos *ensarkos*) continues following the incarnation: “[T]here is a salvific working of the Word as such, distinct from that of the Word operating through his human being in Jesus Christ, risen and glorified, though in ‘union’ with it.”¹⁹⁸ He insists that activity of the Logos *ensarkos* does not exhaust God’s saving action following the incarnation.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Dupuis, *Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 299. In support of a distinct action of the Logos *asarkos* following the incarnation, Dupuis also appeals to Catholic interpretation of John 1:9, conciliar teaching on the distinction between the two natures of Jesus Christ and the teaching of the early church Fathers including Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria. Dupuis, *From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 138-62. Dupuis’ claims notwithstanding, it should be noted that official teaching from the Roman Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith explicitly denies any distinction between the salvific action of the Logos *asarkos* and Logos *ensarkos* following the incarnation. See “Declaration *Dominus Iesus*: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church” (Vatican City: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, August 6, 2000).

¹⁹⁸ Dupuis, *From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 139.

¹⁹⁹ “Thus, while the human action of the incarnate Word is the universal sacrament of God’s saving action, it does not exhaust the action of the Word of God.” Dupuis, *From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 177.

The distinction Dupuis draws between the economic activity of Logos *ensarkos* and economic activity of the Logos *asarkos* prompts a crucial question from an Augustinian standpoint: does the work of the Logos *asarkos* constitute a *second* economy of salvation existing in parallel with the first? A cursory reading might suggest a negative answer: Dupuis repeatedly affirms there is only one economy of salvation. Moreover, he criticizes those who, through an appeal to the work of the Logos *asarkos* or to the universal action of the Holy Spirit, posit a second economy of salvation distinct from the economy of the incarnate Word (Logos *ensarkos*).²⁰⁰ Although, at first glance, Dupuis appears to affirm the unicity of the economy of salvation, the way he employs the Logos *ensarkos* / Logos *asarkos* distinction ultimately seems to imply (and even require) two parallel economies of salvation.²⁰¹ This reality becomes clear when one compares the economic activity of the Logos *asarkos* with that of the Logos *ensarkos*. Through the work of the Logos *ensarkos* (and the Spirit),²⁰² the Christian Scriptures

²⁰⁰ See Dupuis, *From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 82-83.

²⁰¹ I am not suggesting that any kind of distinction between the Logos *ensarkos* and Logos *asarkos* necessarily implies two economies of salvation; rather, I am arguing that the specific way Dupuis employs this distinction implies this.

²⁰² Although I am focusing on the work of the Logos, Dupuis is careful not to sever the action of the Logos from the action of the Spirit. It will become clear that Dupuis does not sever the unicity of the economy of salvation by severing the Word from the Spirit but rather by severing the work of the Logos *ensarkos* from the work of the Logos *asarkos*.

contain the Word of God. Through the work of the Logos *asarkos* (and the Spirit),²⁰³ the Qu'ran and other non-Christian scriptures contain the Word of God.²⁰⁴ Through the work of the Logos *ensarkos*, there is one mediator between humans and God. Through the work of the Logos *asarkos*, other mediators exist between humans and God (although these mediators somehow participate in the mediation of Christ). Through the work of the Logos *ensarkos*, the Church mediates salvific grace. Through the work of the Logos *asarkos*, the worship of Hindu images mediates salvific grace.²⁰⁵ Through the work of the Logos *ensarkos*, men and women are reconciled to God and incorporated into Christ's Church. Through the work of the work of the Logos *asarkos*, men and women are not incorporated into the Church but become members of "the kingdom of God."²⁰⁶ The latter contrast is particularly revealing. Moving beyond Karl Rahner, Dupuis no longer wants to talk about "anonymous Christians."²⁰⁷ However, following Christ's resurrection, how can one be savingly related to the triune God without concomitantly being included in Christ's Church? The latter contrast in particular seems to suggest a

²⁰³ In the rest of this paragraph, it should be understood that the Spirit is included when I speak of the work of the Logos *ensarkos* or the Logos *asarkos*.

²⁰⁴ See Dupuis, *From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 115-37. Dupuis suggests that while Jesus Christ represents the "qualitative fullness" of revelation, he does not represent the "quantitative fullness" of revelation. It is precisely in this sense that the revelation of the incarnate Christ is not "absolute." On this basis, Dupuis claims that one may recognize that other religious scriptures contain the "word of God."

²⁰⁵ Dupuis, *Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 303.

²⁰⁶ See Dupuis, *From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 195-217.

²⁰⁷ Karl Rahner coined the phrase the "anonymous Christian" to describe individuals who experienced Christian salvation without knowing it.

second parallel economy. The result is two parallel economies that converge only eschatologically; in the present stage in salvation-history, they exist more or less in parallel. From an Augustinian perspective, no epistemic warrant exists for positing a second economy of salvation in parallel with that of the incarnate Word. Augustine is quite clear that the sending of the Son and the sending of the Spirit have one goal: bringing men and women into fellowship with the triune God *by* leading people in every nation to confess Jesus as Savior and Lord.²⁰⁸ Inasmuch as Dupuis implicitly posits two economies, he undermines the unicity of the economy of salvation.

If it is true that Dupuis distinguishes the work of the Logos *asarkos* and Logos *ensarkos* in a way that undermines the unicity of the economy of salvation, this also suggests a further deficiency in his Christology (inasmuch as the distinction between the work of the Logos *asarkos* and Logos *ensarkos* is grounded the distinction of the divine and human natures). In its rejection of a distinction between the salvific working of the Logos *asarkos* and Logos *ensarkos* following the incarnation, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith rightly links its rejection of the latter to the unicity of Christ's two natures:

²⁰⁸ According to Augustine, the Spirit glorifies (and "universalizes") the Son by pouring out love in hearts of men and women so that, filled with the confidence of love, they may spread Christ's fame in every nation. The evangelistic mission of the church therefore represents an extension of the temporal missions of the Son and the Spirit.

It is likewise contrary to the Catholic faith to introduce a separation between the salvific action of the Word as such and that of the Word made man. With the incarnation, all the salvific actions of the Word of God are always done in unity with the human nature that he has assumed for the salvation of all people. The one subject which operates in the two natures, human and divine, is the single person of the Word.²⁰⁹

When one combines Dupuis' emphasis on the "unbridgeable gap" between "God" and Jesus in his human nature as the basis for his "constitutive" Christology along with his insistence upon the distinction between the divine and human natures as the basis for a distinct and continuing action of the Logos *asarkos*, it appears that his "Trinitarian Christology" implicitly undermines the unity of the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ in a "Nestorian" fashion.

4.5.3 Severing the Unity of the Economic and the Immanent Trinity

One final trinitarian problem should be noted. On the one hand, Dupuis claims that "the mystery of the Triune God—Father, Son, Spirit—corresponds objectively to the inner reality of God, even though only analogically."²¹⁰ On the other hand, Dupuis insists that *authentic* economic manifestations of the triune God can be found in other religious communities.²¹¹ Obviously a number of these economic "manifestations" of the

²⁰⁹ The declaration continues, "Therefore, the theory which would attribute, after the incarnation as well, a salvific activity to the Logos as such in his divinity, exercised 'in addition to' or 'beyond' the humanity of Christ, is not compatible with the Catholic faith." *Dominus Iesus*.

²¹⁰ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 259.

²¹¹ "The religions of the world convey different insights into the mystery of Ultimate Reality. Incomplete as these may be, they nevertheless witness to a manifold self-manifestation of God to human beings in diverse

triune God are conflicting, and in some cases, even contradictory. Buddhists, for example, envision the triune God as emptiness while Muslims, according to Dupuis, conceive of the triune God as a personal absolute. This leads to a problem. Inasmuch as these conflicting economic manifestations of the triune God are to be viewed as *authentic*, one seems to encounter a situation in which a kind of “God-above-God” must be posited with the result that the identity of the economic Trinity with the immanent Trinity is implicitly undermined.²¹² One reason Christian theologians have insisted that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity (the first half of Rahner’s axiom) is precisely to avoid any possibility of a God-above-God. Dupuis’ answer to this dilemma is found in his analysis of religious experience. Although adherents of other religions have authentic experiences of the triune God,²¹³ they do not possess adequate conceptualizations.²¹⁴ The “economic” faces they posit are—objectively speaking—false. Although this may solve the problem of conflicting economic manifestations, it seems to

faith-communities. They are incomplete ‘faces’ of the Divine Mystery experienced in various ways, to be fulfilled in him who is ‘the human face of God.’” Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 279.

²¹² Or, at the very least, one would encounter a situation in which the epistemic priority of the “Christian” economic manifestation of the triune God is effectively marginalized.

²¹³ “[W]herever there is genuine religious experience, it is surely the God revealed in Jesus Christ who enters into the lives of men and women . . .” Dupuis, *From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 122.

²¹⁴ Dupuis makes a critical distinction between “religious experience” and one’s “formulation” or interpretation of religious experience. Any “authentic religious experience” represents an experience of “the God revealed in Jesus Christ” Dupuis, *From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 122. Christians interpret their religious experiences as experiences of the Father of Jesus Christ. Non-Christians experience the Father of Jesus Christ but interpret this God in other terms.

undercut their *authenticity*. To the extent Dupuis emphasizes that these economic faces are *false* (ostensibly to protect his trinitarian grammar), he undercuts their authenticity. To the extent Dupuis emphasizes the *authenticity* of these alternative economic manifestations, he implicitly severs the unity of the economic and the immanent Trinity. At the end of the day, his proposal rests upon a deficient trinitarianism. This reality casts a dark shadow over his claim that the triune God constitutes a “key” to a Christian theology of religious pluralism.

4.6 Implications for the Christian Theology of Religions

Perhaps one of the most pressing questions raised by current appeal to divine relations in the Christian theology of religions concerns the relationship of the Spirit to the Son. Assumptions about the Son/Spirit relationship constitute the trinitarian key to Yong’s proposal. He rejects all “subordination” of the Spirit to the Son at the ontological level in order to clear space on the economic level for an “economy” of the Spirit “distinct” (i.e., separate) from that of the Son. On the basis of this distinction, Yong justifies the use of non-christological criteria for discerning the Spirit’s presence in order to affirm the work of the Spirit among adherents of other religions. Yong is not alone in appealing to a separate economy of the Spirit as the basis for a Christian theology of religions. One encounters this claim with increasing frequency in the Christian theology

of religions.²¹⁵ For example, in his monograph exploring the implications of Paul Tillich's trinitarian theology for a Christian theology of religions, Pan-Chiu Lai argues that an "exclusivist" theology of religions is rooted in a wrongful subordination of the Spirit to the Son (as expressed in the *filioque*) and that one can move beyond "exclusivism," "Christocentrism" and "theocentrism" by recognizing that the Spirit operates in an economy "distinct" from that of the Son.²¹⁶ According to Lai, a "trinitarian" theology of religions is able "to integrate the centrality of Christ and the freedom of the Holy Spirit within the framework of the doctrine of the Trinity."²¹⁷ By stressing "the economy and sovereignty of the Holy Spirit," a trinitarian theology of religions is able to affirm both the universality of salvation and the value of openness toward other religions.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ See Paul F. Knitter, "A New Pentecost? A Pneumatological Theology of Religions," *Current Dialogue* 19 (1991): 32-41; Stanley J. Samartha, "The Holy Spirit and People of Other Faiths," *Ecumenical Review*, 42 (1990): 250-263; Michael E. Lodahl, *Shekhinah/Spirit: Divine Presence in Jewish and Christian Religion* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992); and Peter C. Hodgson, "The Spirit and Religious Pluralism," in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2005), 135-50.

²¹⁶ See Lai, *Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 37-44. Lai's proposal was discussed at length in chapter one.

²¹⁷ Lai continues, "On the one hand, it gives more emphasis to the centrality of Christ than a (Unitarian) theocentric approach will. On the other hand, it will stress the distinctive economy and sovereignty of the Holy Spirit more than the Christocentric, particularly the christomonistic, approach will stress." Lai, *Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 43.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 43. Lai offers little critical evaluation of Tillich's doctrine of the Trinity. On the basis of Lai's exposition of Tillich, the reader is left wondering whether Tillich has articulated an account of the Trinity that could be described as orthodox in any reasonable sense. One of the most troubling aspects of Tillich's trinitarian doctrine (as explicated by Lai) is the relationship between the economic and the immanent

Our investigation holds at least five implications for reflection on the Son/Spirit relationship in the Christian theology of religions. First, because the Son/Spirit relationship can only be understood within a broader trinitarian context, greater attention must be paid to the trinitarian framework in which claims about a “distinct” economy of the Spirit are being articulated. One of the striking features about *De Trinitate* is the rigorous (and coherent) trinitarian framework that Augustine develops in his analysis of the divine relations. This framework is precisely what is lacking in many “trinitarian” proposals in the Christian theology of religions. Noticeably absent, for example, in a many proposals regarding a separate economy of the Spirit is any substantive discussion of the role of the *Father* in relation to the Spirit (and the Son). One cannot offer judgments about work of the Son and the Spirit *ad extra* without explicitly reflecting on the relationship of the Son and the Spirit to the Father *ad intra*.

Second, in light of the inseparable action of the divine persons, no epistemic warrant exists for inferring two “economies” of salvation on the basis of the hypostatic distinction that exists between the Son and the Spirit in the immanent Trinity.²¹⁹ One

Trinity. On Lai’s reading of Tillich, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity seems to be little more than a symbolic expression of the “Trinitarian principle.” See Lai, *Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 152-54.

²¹⁹ Furthermore, Irenaeus’ frequently cited image of the Son and Spirit as the “two hands” of the Father provides no epistemic warrant for two distinct “economies” of salvation. From an economic standpoint, the “two hands” imagery is not about a left hand doing one activity and the right hand doing another (which

might simply choose to reject Augustine's position regarding the unity of action *ad extra*; however, one cannot reject Augustine's teaching on the unity of action without also rejecting the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocians. For example, the inseparable action of the divine persons is one of the fundamental themes in Gregory of Nyssa's trinitarian theology. In his "Answer to Ablabius," Gregory offers the following explanation of the inseparable action of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: "We do not learn that the Father does something on his own, in which the Son does not co-operate. Or again, that the Son acts on his own without the Spirit. Rather does every operation which extends from God to creation and is designated according to our differing conceptions of it have its origin in the Father, proceed through the Son, and reach its completion by the Holy Spirit."²²⁰ Gregory further explains that the work of the divine persons "is not by separate action according to the number of the persons; but there is

seems to be implied by associating a distinct "economy" with each of the hands). It is fundamentally about the *Father* acting through the Son and Spirit to a particular end. The image underscores unity of action in the context of hypostatic distinction.

²²⁰ Gregory continues, "It is for this reason that the word for the operation is not divided among the persons involved. For the action of each in any matter is not separate and individualized. But whatever occurs, whether in reference to God's providence for us or the government and constitution of the universe, occurs through the three Persons, and it not three separate things." Gregory of Nyssa, *An Answer to Ablabius*, 261-62. One of Gregory of Nyssa's purposes is to refute the claim that his trinitarian theology is open to the charge of tritheism. He argues that oneness of action implies oneness of nature. Thus, he is not talking about three gods. For an exposition of this text, see Ayres, "The Fundamental Themes of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology," 445-474.

one motion and disposition of the good will . . ."²²¹ Thus, one cannot simply abandon Augustine for the "East." One must abandon the entire trinitarian tradition.

Third, we must remember that evidence *against* the twofold procession of the Spirit *ad intra* does not constitute positive evidence *for* a separate economy of the Spirit *ad extra*. Yong and others frequently turn to the "East" in order to garner support for a separate economy of the Spirit. The Cappadocians, however, provide no support for the kind of separate "economy" of the Spirit about which Yong speaks. Furthermore, although he speaks of two "economies," Georges Khodr describes the role of the Spirit in terms of revealing *Christ* in non-Christian religions and insists that *Christ* represents the key to understanding and interpreting non-Christian scriptures and religious experience.²²² Moreover, although Vladimir Lossky speaks in *The Mystical Theology of the Church* of a discrete "economy" of the Spirit and wants to avoid any economic "subordination" to the Son,²²³ he is not talking about a separate (in the sense of

²²¹ "Thus the holy Trinity brings to effect every operation in a similar way. It is not by separate action according to the number of the persons; but there is one motion and disposition of the good will which proceeds from the Father, through the Son, to the Spirit. For we do not call those who produce a single life three life-givers; nor do we say they are three good beings who are seen to share in the same goodness; nor do we speak of them in the plural in reference to their attributes." Gregory of Nyssa, "An Answer to Ablabius," 262.

²²² See Khodr, "Christianity and the Pluralistic World," 127. Yong downplays Khodr's emphasis upon Christ in *Discerning the Spirit(s)*.

²²³ "Intimately linked as they are in the common work upon earth, the Son and the Holy Spirit remain nevertheless in this same work two persons independent the one of the other as to their hypostatic being. It is for this reason that the personal advent of the Holy Spirit does not have the character of a work which is subordinate, and in some sort functional, in relation to that of the Son. Pentecost is not a 'continuation' of

independent) economy of salvation in the way Yong's proposal requires but simply the *role* of the Spirit distinct from that of the Son which he understands to involve bearing witness to the Son: "[The Spirit] comes not in His own name but in the name of the Son, to bear witness to the Son—as the Son came in the name of the Father, to make known the Father."²²⁴

Fourth, from two "sendings" (*missiones*) come no epistemic warrant for inferring two separate "economies" of salvation. On the contrary, the Son and the Spirit work together in a *single* economy of salvation which has as its goal drawing men and women into the life of the triune God. Ironically, Jacques Dupuis recognizes that one cannot ground a Christian theology of religions in an appeal to an economy of the Spirit *separate* from that of the Son. This is why he does not attempt to ground the salvific validity of non-Christian religions in the Son/Spirit distinction.

the Incarnation. It is its sequel, its result. The creature has become fit to receive the Holy Spirit and he descends into the world and fills with His presence the Church which has been redeemed, washed and purified by the blood of Christ." Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, trans. The Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius (Cambridge and London: James Clarke & Co., 1957), 159. The second and third sentences are frequently quoted by theologians like Yong [*Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 65] wanting to argue for an independent economy of the Spirit. It is important to note that Lossky's statement does not support the kind of reading it frequently receives. First, Lossky locates the equality of the Spirit to the Son not in a separate economy but the Spirit's hypostatic independence from the Son. Second, the reason Pentecost is not a continuation of the Incarnation is *not* because the Spirit acts in a separate economy but because the Spirit is *hypostatically distinct* from the Son. Finally, Lossky understands the work of the Spirit to be an application of the work of Christ.

²²⁴ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 159.

Finally, our exploration of Augustine's trinitarian theology serves to remind us that the missionary nature of the church is rooted not in an outdated form of cultural imperialism but in the very life of triune God.²²⁵ The *missio* of the church is rooted in the dual *missiones* of the Son and the Spirit (Gal. 4:4-6). Just as the Father sent the Son into the world, so the Son sends his followers into the world (John 20:21). The Spirit, who is sent into the world by the Father and the Son, bears witness to the Son by preparing the

²²⁵ "The sending of the church to the world is a continuation of the Father's sending of the Son and the Spirit. It is the aim of these sending operations to awaken faith, to baptize, and to start new communities of discipleship. The Holy Spirit leads the church to open new fields of mission, continuing the apostolic history that began at Pentecost in Jerusalem. . . . Should the church today continue to evangelize the nations in the name of the triune God? That is basically the same question as: Should the church continue to be the church? The church is constituted by the structure of the trinitarian mission of God in the history of salvation. The church is the eschatological creation of God's Word serving to unite all humankind." Carl E. Braaten, "The Triune God: the Source and Model of Christian Unity and Mission," *Missiology* 18 (1990): 425. See also Stephen R. Holmes, "Trinitarian Missiology: Towards a Theology of God as Missionary," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8 (2006): 72-90. In conversation with Augustine, Holmes argues that it is important not merely to affirm that God *has* a mission but that God *is* a missionary in God's immanent life. Although he is generally sympathetic to Augustine, Holmes suggests one of the inadequacies Augustine's trinitarian theology is that "on his account God has a mission, but God is not properly described as missionary" (Holmes, 78). According to Holmes, "[T]he fundamental difference between asserting that God has a mission and asserting that God is missionary is that in the former case the mission may be incidental, disconnected from who God is; in the latter case, mission is one of the perfections of God, as adequate a description of who he is as love, omnipotence or eternity" (Holmes, 89). Inasmuch as the *missiones* of the Son and Spirit represent a temporal extension of their eternal *processiones*, Holmes' claim that Augustine makes "mission" incidental to the life of God seems unwarranted. On the contrary, Augustine claims that the *missiones* of the Son and Spirit clearly reveal the immanent life of God in the economy of salvation (cf. Books II-IV). If by positing "missionary" as an attribute of God, one simply means God's self-sacrificing love for those who deserve the wrath of God, then Augustine would understand the "missionary" attribute in terms of the perfection of God's love (the dominant emphasis of the New Testament). Moreover, the kind of immanent grounding Holmes is searching for can be found in Augustine's notion of the Spirit as "Gift." "Gift," for Augustine is both an economic and intra-trinitarian description of the Spirit. The Spirit is "gift" in time because he is "gift" from eternity. If, however, by positing "missionary" as an attribute of God, one means that God's involvement in the word (including redemption) becomes "necessary," Augustine would rightly reject it. It seems to me that one can rightly call God a "missionary God" without making "sending" constitutive of the life of the triune God. As Augustine rightly understood, there is a huge difference between saying the economy of salvation *reveals* the divine life and that the economy *constitutes* the divine life.

way for and empowering the witness of Christ's disciples (John 15:26-27; Acts 1:8). As

Lesslie Newbigin rightly notes,

The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. The decisive mark of his presence is the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord (1 Cor. 12:1-3; 1 Jn. 4:1-3). His coming in power is the fruit of hearing and believing the Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and risen. He takes the things of Christ and shows them to us. He leads men to Christ, in whom we are baptized into one body, the body of Christ. He is no will-o'-the-wisp, leading men to all sorts of individual vagaries, but the one who binds men to Jesus Christ in the fellowship of his one body. It is true that he is free and sovereign; he goes ahead of the Church, as every missionary knows--but it is (if one may put it so) the Church that he goes ahead of.²²⁶

It seems ironic that at the very time advocates of "Spirit-Christology" are arguing that

we should not think about Christ apart from the Spirit, some of these very same

theologians want us to believe that it is appropriate to think about the Spirit apart from

Christ in a way that ultimately severs the "two hands" of the Father. Surely Yves

Congar is much closer to the mark when he insists, "If I were to draw but one conclusion

from the whole of my work on the Holy Spirit, I would express it in these words: no

Christology without pneumatology and no pneumatology without Christology."²²⁷

²²⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 79-80.

²²⁷ Yves M. J. Congar, *Word and Spirit*, trans. David Smith (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 1. Congar repeatedly emphasizes the joint work of the Word and Spirit work in the economy of salvation: "The glorified Lord and the Spirit do the same work. The unity of the glorified Christ and the Spirit is functional, that is to say, it is an operative unity. The work to be done in believers is common to both of them and the two 'hands' proceeding from the Father do conjointly whatever the Father, who is Love, wishes to do" (ibid., 25).

Congar, therefore, rightly recognizes that it is “not possible to develop a pneumatology separately from the Word.”²²⁸

²²⁸ Congar, *Word and Spirit*, 131. In another work, Congar explains that in his early efforts to call attention to the mission of the Spirit, he made too sharp a distinction between work of the Spirit and the work of Christ. Upon later reflection he realized that he was “not sufficiently conscious of the unity that exists between the activity of the Spirit and that of the *glorified Christ*, since ‘the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom’ (2 Cor. 3:17). According to Paul, the glorified Lord and the Spirit may be different in God, but they are so functionally united that we experience them together and are able to accept one for the other: ‘Christ in us’, ‘the Spirit in our hearts’, ‘(we) in Christ’, ‘in the Spirit’—all of these are interchangeable.” Yves M. J. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol II, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury, 1983), 12.

5. The *Vestigia Trinitatis* in the Theology of Religions

Reasoning from the assumption that creation must somehow reflect its Creator, various Christian theologians have, throughout the history of the church, searched for traces of the triune God (*vestigia Trinitatis*) in the structures in creation. A vibrant expression of this tradition can be found in Bonaventure's *Itinerarium Mentis Dei*, written in the middle of the thirteenth century. Bonaventure outlines a six-step process through which the soul ascends to union with God by contemplating the Trinity through the vestiges in creation, through the divine image and through God's essential and personal attributes. Although they may search for reflections of the triune God in differing facets of creation, theologians including Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Richard of St. Victor, Bonaventure, and others share a conviction that certain created realities possess a discernible trinitarian structure.

Several contemporary theologians have suggested that trinitarian structures can be discerned in non-Christian religious experience and that this reality bears witness to the validity of these religions. Notice how Jacques Dupuis explicitly appeals to the vestige tradition in the context of his Christian theology of religious pluralism:

As the tradition has persistently sought and found 'traces' of the Trinity (*vestigia Trinitatis*) in creation and, more especially, in the spiritual activity of the human being, so must we search for and discover similar traces, outside the Biblical

tradition, in the religious life of individual persons and the religious traditions to which they belong. They too in some way echo in history the Father's eternal uttering of the Word and issuing of the Spirit.¹

Reasoning from the assumption that all human religious experience possesses a "trinitarian structure,"² Dupuis claims that extra-biblical traditions "bear an imprint of the economic Trinity."³ Similarly, William Cenkner argues that triadic structures can be discerned in Chinese religions (e.g., Taoism and Buddhism) which bear witness—albeit it dimly—to the Trinity.⁴ Along similar lines, Bede Griffiths suggests that a triadic pattern can be discerned in the major religious traditions: (1) the "supreme Principle" beyond any name or form, (2) "the manifestation of the hidden reality" and (3) the "Spirit."⁵ Finally, Mark Heim's argument for the validity of other religions explicitly

¹ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 227-28.

² "It has been suggested above that a Trinitarian Christological model may serve as a useful hermeneutical key for an open Christian theology of religions. An effort has also been made to uncover a *Trinitarian structure*, no matter how inchoate and imperfect, in all human experience of the Divine. Following this cue, it may be said that the divine Trinity is experienced, though hiddenly and 'anonymously,' wherever human beings allow the Divine Reality that impinges upon them to enter into their life." Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 276-77 (italics mine).

³ *Ibid.*, 227. See also Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 2.

⁴ See William Cenkner, "Interreligious Exploration of Triadic Reality: the Panikkar Project," *Dialogue & Alliance* 4 (1990): 80-81.

⁵ "We can thus discern a basic pattern in all the great religious traditions. There is first all the supreme Principle, the ultimate Truth, beyond name and form, the Nirguna Brahman of Hinduism, the Nirvana and Sunyata of Buddhism, the Tao without a name of Chinese tradition, the Truth of Sikhism, the Reality—all Haqq—of Sufism, the Infinite En Sof of the Kabbala, the Godhead (as distinguished from God) in Christianity. There is then the manifestation of the hidden Reality, the Saguna Brahman of Hinduism, the Buddha or Tathagata of Buddhism, the Chinese Sage, the Sikh Guru, the personal God, Yahweh or Allah, of Judaism and Islam, and the Christ of Christianity. Finally there is the Spirit, the *atman* of Hinduism, the

appeals to the trinitarian structure of reality: "Trinitarian conviction rules out the view that among all the possible claimed manifestations of God, one narrow strand alone is authentic. . . . There is an irreducible variety in what is ultimately true or of greatest significance. Christians find validity in other religions because of the conviction that the Trinity represents a universal truth about the way the world and God actually are."⁶

One of the most substantive appeals to the "trinitarian structure" of non-Christian religious experience can be found in Raimundo Panikkar's *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*.⁷ Panikkar believes that recognition of the "trinitarian structure" of religious experience could lead to greater human unity: "The deepening into the trinitarian structure of religious experience and of human beliefs may here again offer a possibility of fecundation, agreement and collaboration not only among religions

'Compassion' of the Buddha, the Grace (*Nadar*) of Sikhism, the 'Breath of the Merciful' in Islam, the *Ruah*, the Spirit, in Judaism and the *Pneuma* in Christianity." Bede Griffiths, *Universal Wisdom: A Journey through the Sacred Wisdom of the World* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994), 41-42.

⁶ Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*, 127.

⁷ Raimundo Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Person-Icon-Mystery* (New York: Orbis, 1973). Other important works by Panikkar include: *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, rev. ed. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964, 1984); *The Intra-Religious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist, 1978); *Blessed Simplicity: The Monk as Universal Archetype* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982); *The Silence of God: The Answer of the Buddha* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1989); and *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993). Panikkar has written over thirty books and several hundred articles. A helpful introduction to Panikkar's life and thought can be found in the introduction to Raimundo Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony: Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility*, ed. Harry J. Cargas (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1995), vii-xiv. Cargas, who describes Panikkar as a "Catholic priest who is also a Hindu, a Buddhist and a secularist" (Cargas, vii), claims that a trinitarian perspective pervades Panikkar's writings. Similarly, William Cenkner claims that "Few scholars have made the Trinity as central to their intellectual project as has Raimundo Panikkar. Even as recent as the Gifford Lectures of 1989, Panikkar explores the triadic structure of God and, indeed, reality itself." Cenkner, "Interreligious Exploration of Triadic Reality," 71.

themselves, but also with modern man at large, so often torn apart by religious subtleties which he does not understand.”⁸ According to Panikkar, three irreducible forms of spirituality reflect the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The purpose of this chapter is to offer an Augustinian evaluation of Panikkar’s trinitarian proposal. After outlining his proposal, we will consider how Ewert Cousins, an interpreter of Panikkar, relates Panikkar’s proposal to the vestige tradition. Next, we will explore Augustine’s search for reflections of the Trinity in the functioning of the human soul in Books VIII-XV of *De Trinitate*. Finally, on the basis of Augustine’s teaching, we will evaluate the trinitarian grammar that grounds Panikkar’s theology of religious experience.

5.1 Panikkar’s Theandric Spirituality

5.1.1 Three Forms of Spirituality

In the first section of *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* Panikkar identifies three irreducible forms of “spirituality”⁹ which he identifies as “iconolatry,”

⁸ Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, xiv.

⁹ Underlying Panikkar’s proposal is a key distinction between “spirituality” and “religion” (or between “essence” and “form”). “Spirituality” denotes the “mass of rites, structures, etc., that are indispensable to all religions” while the “religion” represents “an attitude of mind” independent of any particular tradition. Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 9. One religion, therefore, may possess several “spiritualities.”

“personalism” and “mysticism.”¹⁰ These three spiritualities parallel the Hindu ways of action (*karmamārga*), devotion (*bhaktimārga*) and knowledge (*jnanamārga*).¹¹ Panikkar claims that his description of these spiritualities “does not proceed from an *a priori* construction but emerges from an empirical assessment of the situation.”¹² “Iconolatry” involves the “the projection of God under some *form*, his objectivation, his personification *in an object* which may be mental or material, visible or invisible, but always reducible to our human ‘representation’.”¹³ One might think of “iconolatry” as a *legitimate* form of idolatry which stands in contrast to illegitimate or “false” forms of idolatry. “False” idolatry denotes worship which fails to rise to God because it terminates in a created object.¹⁴ By way of contrast, iconolatry involves worship which ascends *from* an object upon which divine glory rests *to God*. As such, it represents a legitimate form of human religious consciousness which can be found not only in the Judeo-Christian tradition (with its emphasis upon the human person as the image of God and the world as vestige of the divine) but also in the way of sacred action in

¹⁰ Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 10. Elsewhere he describes them as “apophatism, personalism and divine immanence” (ibid., 55).

¹¹ Ibid., 10.

¹² Ibid., 9.

¹³ Ibid., 15 (italics original).

¹⁴ According to Panikkar, false idolatry involves the “transference to a creature of the adoration due to God alone, i.e. an adoration which stops short at the object without going beyond it in an ongoing movement toward the Creator, the Transcendent, is without doubt the gravest of sins.” Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 16. Israel was chastened for following “false” idols. Yahweh alone was to be Israel’s “own special idol” (ibid., 12).

Hinduism: "The fundamental attitude, however, of an iconolatric spirituality is the cultic *act* of adoration of an 'image' of God, believed to represent each time the true God. It is this action which allows us to call this spirituality *karmamārga* or the way of action in order to reach 'salvation', i.e., the end and fulfillment of man in whatever way it is interpreted."¹⁵

While "iconolatry" is rooted in "cosmo-anthropomorphism," "personalism" denotes a form of religious consciousness founded "on the concept of *person*."¹⁶ "We call God a personal being *because* we ourselves are persons. We consider God a Being because we ourselves are beings."¹⁷ In a personalist context, love is no longer "unconscious ecstasy but a mutual giving."¹⁸ Similarly, worship does not involve negation of the self but represents a voluntary response to the divine person. Panikkar points out that "personalism" should not be viewed as the essence of religion. It simply represents one form of spirituality among several possible forms. In itself, it is unable to exhaust the richness of the Absolute. Personalism found not only in Christian faith but also in Hindu way of devotion and love (*bhaktimārga*).

¹⁵ Ibid., 18 (italics original).

¹⁶ Ibid., 21 (italics original).

¹⁷ Ibid., 22 (italics original).

¹⁸ Ibid., 22.

A third and final form of spirituality is "*advaita*."¹⁹ Panikkar explains that a personalist concept of the Absolute faces a number of conceptual problems. For example, if God is a "person," then God appears to be indifferent to evil and suffering. Furthermore, in what seems like sheer cruelty, God requires the blood of his "son." Moreover, God seems powerless to create a better world. Although various Christian theologies have sought to address these problems, these limitations suggest that "an exclusively personal" conception of the Absolute cannot do adequate justice to it.²⁰ Hinduism rightly teaches that "the mystery of God" cannot be "exhausted in his unveiling as *Person*."²¹ At the center of this third form of spirituality is an experience of divine immanence: "An immanent God cannot be a God-person, 'someone' with whom I could have 'personal' relationship, a God-other. I cannot *speak* to an immanent God."²² Hindus refer to this immanent ground as *Brahman*.²³ Panikkar explains that the relationship that one forms with *Brahman* "consists in the rupture and negation of every

¹⁹ Panikkar also refers to this form of spirituality as "mysticism."

²⁰ Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 28.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 29 (italics original).

²² *Ibid.*, 31 (italics original).

²³ Regarding the nature of *Brahman*, Panikkar offers the following explanation: "One can prove, that is to say, demonstrate, the existence of God starting from certain premises: one cannot, however, prove the existence of *brahman*. *Brahman* in fact does not *ek-sist*. It is not the Creator, the origin of the *ek-sistential* tension between God and creature; *brahman* has no *ek-sistence* because it possesses no *consistence*. If (to suppose the impossible) one succeeded in proving the existence of *brahman*, the result of this demonstration would, by very definition, be neither *brahman* nor Divinity." Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 35.

alleged relation.”²⁴ Thus, “The sole way of discovering *brahman* is by revelation in the sense of an unveiling of all the veils of *existence*, including that of the *ego*, i.e. of the one who undertakes the ascent, or rather the descent, in search of *brahman*.”²⁵ It is the latter experience to which the Upanishads bear witness.²⁶ Whereas praise, prayer and dialogue are central to personalism, *advaita* involves silence, abandonment and non-attachment.²⁷ The Hindu way of knowledge (*jnanamarga*) exemplifies this spirituality.

5.1.2 Panikkar’s Doctrine of the Trinity

After identifying these three spiritualities, Panikkar presents his account of the Trinity. His primary objective is not to “expound the doctrine of the Trinity” but rather “to show how in the light of the Trinity the three forms of spirituality described above can be reconciled.”²⁸ According to Panikkar, only a “trinitarian understanding of Reality” allows for “a synthesis between these three apparently irreducible concepts of

²⁴ Ibid., 34.

²⁵ Ibid., 35 (italics original).

²⁶ Panikkar explains that the Upanishads also bear witness to the “transcendent” aspect of the Absolute. He asserts that there is no such thing as a purely immanent spirituality.

²⁷ “For *advaita* the divinity is not something in me or outside me; for the *advaitin* experience is not something that *I* have. It is, rather, like a light in which the Real is illuminated and discovered. What the *advaitin* recognizes is not his nothingness that is revealed *to* him but *the* Fullness which is unveiled in *itself*. There is thus no place for an *ego* in the *advaitin*’s experience. There is no *ego* who has. It *is*, and that is all.” Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 39 (italics original).

²⁸ Ibid., 41.

the Absolute.”²⁹ On the one hand, Panikkar insists that “a very real continuity [exists] between the theory of the Trinity” he presents and Christian doctrine.³⁰ Moreover, he maintains that his proposal is “authentically orthodox.”³¹ On the other hand, he acknowledges that his formulation of the Trinity moves beyond the traditional Christian understanding.³² In addition, he insists that a trinitarian understanding of the Absolute is not merely a Christian insight.³³ Adherents of other religions experience the same trinitarian mystery but simply describe it in different terms.

5.1.2.1 The Father

All religious traditions recognize that the Absolute is ineffable and has no name.

One may call the Absolute *Brahman* or *Tao* but these merely represent human

²⁹ Ibid., 41. Interestingly, Panikkar claims that God must of necessity be trinitarian: “A non-trinitarian God cannot ‘mingle’ and much less unify himself with Man without destroying himself. He would have to remain aloof, isolated. . . . A non-trinitarian man cannot jump outside his little self, cannot become what he wants and long for without destroying himself.” Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, xii.

³⁰ Ibid., 43.

³¹ “I emphasize once and for all that I *believe* this interpretation to be authentically *orthodox*—i.e., which gives to God a truly right (*orthos*) honour and glory (*doxa*)—and to be thus fully ecclesial.” Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 6 (italics original).

³² Panikkar justifies this move by pointing out that dogmatic formulations are simply unable “to encompass the totality of the divine reality which overflows their limits on all sides to an infinite degree.” Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 41.

³³ “It is simply an unwarranted overstatement to affirm that the trinitarian conception of the Ultimate, and with it of the whole reality, is an exclusive Christian insight or revelation.” Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, viii. Elsewhere Panikkar explains that his key intuition is the “threefold structure of reality, of the triadic oneness existing on all levels of consciousness and of reality, of the Trinity. We are not saying that the idea of the Trinity can be reduced to the discovery of a triple dimension of Being, nor that this aspect is a mere rational discovery. We are only affirming that the Trinity is the acme of a truth that permeates all realms of being and consciousness and that this vision links us together.” (ibid., xi).

designations. The Absolute is completely transcendent, beyond any name. According to Christian teaching, the Absolute has a distinctive title: "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."³⁴ Although Christians refer to the Absolute as "the Father of Jesus Christ," neither "Father" nor "God" represent proper names for the Absolute. These are simply human designations. "The Father is the Absolute, the only God, *ó theós*."³⁵ It is for this reason that early Christian formulae "do not speak of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, but of the God, the Christ and the Spirit. Neither the Son nor the Spirit is *God*, but, precisely, the Son of God and the Spirit of God, 'equal' to the One God (*ó theós*) as God (*theós*)."³⁶ According to Panikkar, there is no plurality in the Absolute nor should we think of the "Divinity" as a fourth thing alongside the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.³⁷ Rather, the Father must be recognized as the "substratum" of the Divinity.³⁸

According to Panikkar, the generation of the Son by the Father is complete inasmuch as the Father gives himself away fully: "Everything that the Father *is* he transmits to the Son" with the result that "the Son is the *is* of the Father."³⁹ Thus, one

³⁴ Ibid., 44.

³⁵ Ibid., 44.

³⁶ Ibid., 45 (italics original).

³⁷ According to Panikkar, one must be careful in speaking about the Son and Spirit as "equal" to the Father inasmuch as this language suggests the Divinity as a "fourth thing."

³⁸ Panikkar explains that his approach to the Trinity builds upon the "more dynamic thrust of greek patristic tradition" as well as the "latin bonaventurian scholastic" tradition. Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 45.

³⁹ Ibid., 46 (italics original).

cannot speak of the Father *qua* Father because the Father “is not.”⁴⁰ If one asks what the Father is, the answer must be “the Son.” As the Absolute, “the Father, *is not*.”⁴¹ Hence, the Father “has no *ex-sistence*, not even that of Being. In the generation of the Son he has, so to speak, given everything. In the Father, an apophatism (the *kenosis* or emptying) of Being is real and total.”⁴² The Buddhist experience of emptiness is grounded therefore in the “Father.” In Buddhist thought, “One is led onwards toward the ‘absolute goal’ and at the end one finds nothing, because there is nothing, not even Being.”⁴³ Formally speaking, “the spirituality of the Father is not even a spirituality. It is like the invisible bedrock, the gentle inspirer, the unnoticed force which sustains, draws and pushes us. God is truly transcendent, infinite.”⁴⁴ This ultimate ground can be grasped only through an image or icon—the Son. This is the meaning of the biblical statement one can only come to the Father through the Son. Thus, the only proper response to the Father is silence.⁴⁵ Iconolatry is the religion of the Father.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 46.

⁴¹ Ibid., 46.

⁴² Ibid., 46.

⁴³ Ibid., 47. Similarly, to “speak” about the Father is impossible. Every statement about the Father can only refer to the Son.

⁴⁴ Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 50

⁴⁵ Panikkar explains that a number of religious traditions teach that “God is Silence.” Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 47.

5.1.2.2 The Son

Whereas one might describe the Father as “God-from” or “Source-of-God,” the Son is best described “of-God.” It is the Son who is. It is the Son who acts. It is the Son who creates. Everything exists in the Son. According to Panikkar, “person” is not a term that can be applied univocally to Father, Son and Holy Spirit: “Thus, strictly speaking, it is not true that God is *three* persons. ‘Person’ here is an equivocal term which has a different meaning in each case.”⁴⁶ To speak of “person” in a univocal sense would be to imply a fourth element that the Father, Son and Spirit share in common; however, no such element exists. God is *not* a quaternity consisting of Father, Son, Holy Spirit plus a “God-divine nature.”⁴⁷ The Father “is” his Son through his Spirit. Thus, “Only the Son is Person, if we use the word in its eminent sense and analogically to human persons: neither the Father nor the Spirit is a Person.”⁴⁸ We can speak of the Father and Spirit as “persons” in a weaker sense if we bear in mind that we are speaking about “real relative oppositions at the heart of the divine mystery.”⁴⁹ As a result, “it is

⁴⁶ Ibid., 51-52 (italics original).

⁴⁷ Ibid., 52.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 52.

⁴⁹ We must be careful, however, not to attempt to speak about the persons *in se*. “A person is never in himself, but by the very fact that he is a person is always a constitutive relation—a *pros ti*.” Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 52.

only with the Son than man can have a personal relationship. The God of theism, thus, is the Son."⁵⁰

The Son is the "Mystery" to which the Scriptures point and which was revealed in Christ. "Christ," in Panikkar's use, refers to the Principle or Being which is given various names in other traditions.⁵¹ "It is Christ, then, known or unknown—who makes religion possible."⁵² This Christ is the "mediator," that is to say, the link between the finite and the infinite. In speaking of "Christ" as mediator, Panikkar explains that he is not "presupposing its identification with Jesus of Nazareth."⁵³ Christians have never affirmed such an unqualified identification. They have simply claimed that Jesus of Nazareth has a special relationship to what John calls the "Logos."⁵⁴ In such a context, Jesus of Nazareth represents one manifestation of a broader Christ principle.⁵⁵ Panikkar explains that he continues to use the term "Christ" simply because it best embodies the

⁵⁰ Ibid., 52.

⁵¹ "The nomenclature that I personally would like to suggest in this connection is as follows: I would propose using the Lord for that Principle, Being, Logos or Christ that other religious traditions call by a variety of names and to which they attach a wide variety of ideas. . . . Each time that I speak of Christ I am referring (unless it is explicitly stated otherwise) to the Lord of whom christians lay no monopoly." Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 53.

⁵² Ibid., 53.

⁵³ Ibid., 53.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 53.

⁵⁵ He also explains that the Church is not the religion for all humanity but simply "the place where Christ is fully revealed." Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 55.

key characteristics of the mediator between divine and human.⁵⁶ Personalism is the spirituality of the Son.

5.1.2.3 The Spirit

Whereas the revelation of the Father is an unveiling of divine *transcendence*, the revelation of the Spirit is an unveiling of divine *immanence*: “Essentially it signifies the ultimate inner-ness of every being, the final foundation, the *Ground* of being as well as of beings.”⁵⁷ Formally speaking, the idea of “revelation” can be applied only to the Son. Neither divine transcendence nor divine immanence can be “revealed.” In the case of divine transcendence, what is revealed is “the revelation *of it*, i.e., God, the Son, the Logos, the Icon.”⁵⁸ Similarly, divine immanence is also “incapable of revealing itself, for that would be a pure contradiction of terms.”⁵⁹

Our experience of the trinitarian mystery teaches us “that in reality God is immanent to himself.”⁶⁰ At the deepest level of Divinity, there is the Spirit. Speaking

⁵⁶ “It is not my task here to discuss the other names and title that have been accorded to this manifestation of the Mystery in other religious traditions. The reason I persist in calling it Christ is that it seems to me that phenomenologically Christ presents the fundamental characteristics of the mediator between divine and cosmic, eternal and temporal, etc., which other religions call *Ishvara*, *Tathāgata* or even Jahweh, Allah and so on—at least when they are not seeking to distinguish between a *saguna* and *nirguna* brahman.” Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 54.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 58-59 (italics original).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 58-59 (italics original).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

metaphorically, one might say “that in spite of every *effort* of the Father to ‘empty himself’ in the generation of the Son, to pass entirely into his Son, to give him everything that he *has*, everything that he *is*, even then there remains in this first procession, like an irreducible factor, the Spirit, the non-exhaustion of the source in the generation of the Logos.”⁶¹ As divine immanence, the Spirit is immanent both to the Father and the Son. The Spirit “passes,” so to speak, from Father to Son and from Son to Father. Because true unity is trinitarian, there is no “Self” in the divine life. The Son is the “Self” of the Father. The Father’s “in himself” is the Spirit. The Son is the “Thou” of the Father. In this context, one cannot speak of the Spirit *in se*: “There is only the Spirit of God, of the Father and Son.”⁶² The Spirit is neither an “I” nor “Thou” but a “we” between Father and Son. *Advaita* can help us in expressing this inner-trinitarian dynamic: the Father and Son are neither two nor one. The Spirit distinguishes and unites them.

It is not possible to have a personal relationship with the Spirit: “One can only have a non-relational union with him.”⁶³ For this reason, one does not pray “to” the Spirit but rather “in” the Spirit. The spirituality of the Spirit, therefore, does not consist in discovering and dialoging with someone but in attaining a consciousness that one is

⁶¹ Ibid., 60 (*italics original*).

⁶² Ibid., 61.

⁶³ Ibid., 63.

not outside reality but already included in it.⁶⁴ This form of spirituality is marked by complete passivity: “there is no longer any *me* to save, for one has grasped that there is an I who calls one by a new and completely hidden name.”⁶⁵ Mysticism is the spirituality of the Spirit.

Panikkar offers the following summary of his understanding of the Trinity. The Father is “Source,” the Son is “Being” (Thou) and the Spirit is the “Return of Being” (we).⁶⁶ A parallel can be seen in the trinitarian structure of Ephesians 4:6. The Father is “over all” (i.e., Source of Being), the Son is “through all” (Being as the being in which all beings participate) and the Spirit is “in all” (divine immanence, the end or return of Being).⁶⁷

5.1.3 Theandric Spirituality

On the one hand, Panikkar claims that each of the spiritualities outlined above represent legitimate responses to the triune God. On the other hand, he argues that no single spirituality is sufficient in and of itself. As an *exclusive* spiritual attitude, each possesses inherent limitations. Iconolatry (the spirituality of the Father), if pursued

⁶⁴ Ibid., 64.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 64.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 68. Elsewhere Panikkar offers a similar analogy in terms of water. The Father is the source of the river. The Son is the river that flows from the source. The Spirit is the ocean into which the river flows. Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 63.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 68.

exclusively, can degenerate into “nihilism.” Nihilists are “present-day witnesses to a spirituality which was directed to the Father but to a Father ‘severed’ from the living Trinity.”⁶⁸ Personalism (the spirituality of the Son), if pursued exclusively, can degenerate into “humanism.” Finally, *advaita* (the spirituality of the Spirit), if pursued exclusively, can degenerate into “pantheism.”⁶⁹ Only a trinitarian understanding of religious experience can provide “the synthesis and mutual fecundation of the different spiritual attitudes which comprise religions, without forcing or doing violence to the fundamental intuitions of the different spiritual paths.”⁷⁰

Rather than calling the resulting triad of spiritualities “trinitarian,” Panikkar prefers to use the term “theandric.”⁷¹ The latter term was originally used to describe the union of the divine and human natures of Christ. Panikkar believes this term is helpful in expressing two constitutive elements of spirituality: the human element and the

⁶⁸ Ibid., 78.

⁶⁹ “If the spirituality of the Spirit is not anchored by being integrated in the Trinity it falls into the doctrinal error of *pantheism*. It bears witness, certainly, to our life and our existence *in* God (in him we live and move and have our being) but it has no right to ignore the fact that our life is still *in the making*, that it is *in fieri*, becoming, that there is within us a movement toward the Absolute and that we have not yet arrived at Being though Being has already come to us.” Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 82 (italics original).

⁷⁰ Ibid., 43. Elsewhere he explains that his goal is to seek a “more satisfactory equilibrium between these three essential dimensions of every spirituality that we have described above and that we may sum up as apophatism, personalism and divine immanence” (ibid., 55).

⁷¹ Not only does the term “trinitarian” suggest a sectarian perspective, but this term does not adequately capture the human element. Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 71.

“transhuman factor which gives it inner life and its transcendent result.”⁷² The central insight of “theandrim” involves the recognition that humans possess “an infinite capacity which links up to the asymptotic limit called God.”⁷³ Theandrim has been intuitively grasped by thinkers through the ages.⁷⁴ Central to Panikkar’s theandric spirituality is an assumption that reality itself is theandric: “There are not two realities: God *and* man (or the world); but neither is there one: God *or* man (or the world), as outright atheists are dialectically driven to maintain. Reality is itself theandric . . .”⁷⁵ God and humans collaborate in building this reality.

5.1.4 Panikkar and the Vestige Tradition

In a book entitled *Christ of the 21st Century*, Ewert Cousins, a Catholic theologian, commends Panikkar’s proposal and attempts to build upon it by explicitly linking it to the vestige tradition.⁷⁶ According to Cousins, the meeting of religions constitutes one of

⁷² Ibid., 72.

⁷³ Ibid., 74. Elsewhere Panikkar explains that this represents a central insight of this book: “One insight may be considered central in the pages that follow: a cosmotheandric and thus non-dualistic vision of reality” (ibid., xiv).

⁷⁴ Frequently one pole (human or divine) has been stressed to the exclusion of the other.

⁷⁵ Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 75.

⁷⁶ Ewert H. Cousins, *Christ of the 21st Century* (Rockport, Mass.: Element, 1992). Cousins’ discussion of Panikkar builds upon an earlier essay entitled “The Trinity and World Religions,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 7 (1970): 476-98. Similar discussions can also be found in Ewert H. Cousins, *Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1978), 281-84; idem, “Panikkar’s Advaitic Trinitarianism,” in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, ed. Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 119-30; and idem, “Raimundo Panikkar and the Christian Systematic Theology of the Future,” *Cross Currents* 29 (141-155). Others have followed Cousins in affirming the way he relates Panikkar’s

the most important challenges facing contemporary theology in a globalized world. This challenge calls for a new kind of systematic theology “that will encompass within its horizons the religious experience of humankind.”⁷⁷ Cousins laments the fact that Christian theologians have focused almost exclusively on the question of “divine providence in salvation history” and, for the most part, have not attempted to enter into the unique religious *experiences* of other traditions and relate these to the Christian faith.⁷⁸ To remedy this situation, the primary doctrines of the Christian theology (e.g., Trinity, Christ, redemption) “must be explored in such a way that they will be open to, in relation with, and enriched by the religious experience of humankind.”⁷⁹ This cannot be done in an “objectivist” mode. Christian theologians must enter into the “subjectivity” of other religions. This process will lead to a new kind of theology—a theology that possesses a “global consciousness.” In the past when Christian theologians attempted to encompass a broader religious horizon, they frequently appealed to Christology. Justin Martyr related Christianity to Greek philosophy by appealing to Christ as the eternal Logos. Similarly, Clement of Alexandria claimed that

proposal to the vestige tradition. See William Cenkner, “Interreligious Exploration of Triadic Reality: the Panikkar Project,” *Dialogue & Alliance* 4 (1990): 71-85. Cenkner not only follows Cousins’ reading of Panikkar but also searches for triadic structures within Chinese religions. See also Anne Hunt, *Trinity: Nexus of the Mysteries of Christian Faith*, Theology in Global Perspective Series (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2005), 150-57.

⁷⁷ Cousins, *Christ of the 21st Century*, 77.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

Plato was influenced by the eternal Logos. Although a logos Christology may provide a useful point of contact with western culture, it is not particularly helpful in building bridges to the East. On the contrary, two of the most important doctrines of the East (the Buddhist doctrine of *nirvana* and Hindu doctrine of non-duality of the self and the Absolute) are fundamentally incompatible with logos doctrine. How, then, are Christians to enter into dialogue with the East? It is here that Panikkar's proposal represents a "major breakthrough in both the theology of the Trinity and interreligious dialogue,"⁸⁰ arising both from rich engagement with the Christian theological tradition as well as Buddhism and Hinduism. Unlike Christological approaches which tend to be "imperialistic" (reducing every religious expression to a single form), Panikkar's trinitarian approach embraces diversity: "The Trinitarian model of pluralism is not a class model, in which all individuals have to be fitted together under a least common denominator; nor it is an atomistic model, in which all individuals remain eternally aloof; nor is it a unitary model, in which all individuals are absorbed into a single one. Rather it is a model of unity in diversity, of profound interpenetration and yet individual identity."⁸¹ Although the Trinity is a Christian concept, it possesses a

⁸⁰ Ibid., 82.

⁸¹ Ibid., 83.

“twofold universality.”⁸² First, it reflects core elements of religious experience in such a way that a kind of trinitarian pattern can be found in other religions. Second, it provides an overarching pattern for the unity of the individual spiritual attitudes. “With the Trinity as a model, Christians can see the great spiritual traditions as dimensions of each other.”⁸³

While Panikkar’s approach offers a “pluralistic model for dialogue,” Cousins acknowledges that it raises some important questions. “Is it,” he asks, “a radically new approach to the Trinity, or does his application of the doctrine to the world religions have at least some antecedents in the Christian tradition?”⁸⁴ One can discern two trajectories in the history of trinitarian thought: (1) a restrictive trajectory that limits the work of the Trinity to the salvific action of the Son and Spirit and (2) a universalizing trajectory that connects the Trinity the entire universe in creation and throughout history.⁸⁵ If Panikkar’s proposal is situated against the backdrop of “three universalizing currents in the history of Trinitarian theology,” namely, the medieval vestige doctrine, the trinitarian doctrine of creation in the early Greek Fathers and the scholastic doctrine of appropriations, “it can be seen to harmonize with each of them and at the same time

⁸² Ibid., 83.

⁸³ Ibid., 83.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 85.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 85.

to draw each into a new level."⁸⁶ In the discussion that follows, I will focus on Cousins' attempt to situate Panikkar's proposal within the context of the vestige tradition.

Although vestige doctrine has roots in the East, Cousins explains that it flourished primarily in western medieval thought: "Basing their position on the metaphysics of exemplarism, inherited from Platonism, theologians reasoned that if, as Christian revelation teaches, the first cause of all things is Trinitarian, then its Trinitarian stamp must have been left on the physical universe and human beings."⁸⁷ Thus, by contemplating the universe, Christians can come to know more deeply the triune God, even in the small particle of matter. Robert Grosseteste, for example, contemplated the Trinity in a speck of dust. A speck of dust comes into being by a great "power." Therefore, it reflects the Father.⁸⁸ Second, because this speck has "form," it reflects the Son who is the wisdom and image of the Father.⁸⁹ Finally, because the speck is useful for contemplation, it reflects the Spirit.⁹⁰ Hence, the power, wisdom and goodness reflected in a speck of dust represent a vestige of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 84.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 86.

⁸⁸ "Power" became associated with the Father in medieval thought in light of the fact the Father is the source and origin of divinity.

⁸⁹ The form of the speck reflects the wisdom by which it was made. Thus, it reflects the Son who is both the wisdom of the Father and the image of the Father.

⁹⁰ "Again, in an ancient theological tradition, goodness is associated with the Spirit since he is the fullness and completion of the Trinity and the Gift in whom all gifts are given." Cousins, *Christ of the 21st Century*, 86.

Contemplation of the vestiges plays a central key role in Bonaventure's *Soul Journey into God*. In the first stage of the journey, Bonaventure views the material universe as a "vast mirror" that reflects the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁹¹ Bonaventure invites his readers to contemplate the whole of creation from seven perspectives: origin, fullness, multitude, beauty, fullness, activity and order. "From each angle of vision, he sees the universe manifesting the power, wisdom and goodness of the Triune God."⁹² This reflects Bonaventure's conviction that the world is like a book in which the Trinity shines forth. In the third stage of the soul's journey, Bonaventure contemplates the divine image in the human person viewing the soul as "a mirror in which the Trinity is reflected."⁹³ God shines in soul as the light of truth. Through the mirror of the soul (specifically in the mental activities of memory, understanding and love) one can glimpse three co-eternal, co-equal and consubstantial persons.⁹⁴ One final example of the medieval vestige tradition can be seen in the writings of Richard of St. Victor. Building upon Augustine, Richard discerns a reflection of the Trinity in "human interpersonal community."⁹⁵

Cousins suggests that a "logical progression" can be seen in the vestige tradition: movement from contemplation of a speck of dust in Grosseteste to contemplation of the

⁹¹ Ibid., 87.

⁹² Ibid., 87.

⁹³ Ibid., 88.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 88.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 88.

entire universe in Bonaventure as well as movement from the human soul as image of the Trinity (Bonaventure) to interpersonal community as a reflection of the Trinity (Richard of St. Victor). In such a context,

It is not a major step, then, to rise to the larger human community and take into account its historical development to the point of its highest spiritual achievement. At this level it would not be surprising, then, to discover, as Panikkar does, a reflection of the Father, Son and Spirit. To extend the vestige tradition into the sphere of religion and philosophy is not without precedent in Christian theology. From the early centuries, Christian theologians explored what they considered to be the foreshadowing of the Trinity in the Old Testament and the reflection of the Trinity in Greek philosophy. . . . At the present time, if the Christians are to expand their horizons beyond the Mediterranean world and relate Christianity to a larger spectrum of human experience than is found in Judaism and Greek philosophy, it would not be inappropriate to encompass within this vestige doctrine humankind's religious experience as this has developed in its highest forms.⁹⁶

In this context Cousins suggests that one should view various Panikkar's three forms of spirituality (iconolatry, personalism, mysticism) as a *vestigium trinitatis*. By explicitly connecting Panikkar's proposal to the vestige tradition, Cousins provides an important clue to understanding Panikkar. Following Cousins' clue, we will examine Augustine's search for reflections of the Trinity in creation and then use the results of our investigation to evaluate Panikkar's proposal.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 88. In the last sentence in this quotation, Cousins offers an interesting qualification to his proposed extension of the vestige tradition. He suggests that the tradition encompass "humankind's religious experience as this has developed in its highest forms." It is not entirely clear what forms of religious expression would be excluded.

5.2 Augustine on the Vestigia Trinitatis

In Books VIII-XV of *De Trinitate* Augustine searches for reflections of the Trinity in the highest functions of the human soul. Perhaps no part of *De Trinitate* has been the subject of greater misunderstanding than these books.⁹⁷ It is important to recognize that three elements provide a crucial backdrop for Augustine's search: his quest to know God, Scriptural teaching about the Trinity, and the redemptive work of Christ.⁹⁸

The second half of *De Trinitate* should not be read as an abstract treatise on theological anthropology. It represents a vital search to know and understand the God in whom Augustine believes.⁹⁹ Psalm 105:3-4 [104:3-4, LXX] provides the impetus for Augustine's search with its invitation to seek continually the face of God. Augustine explicitly cites this text at the beginning of Book I,¹⁰⁰ the beginning of Book IX when he

⁹⁷ Lewis Ayres suggests that our difficulty in understanding these books is rooted in the fact that they involve a "conflation of genres" as well as the fact that they possess a "consciously experimental" character. See Ayres, *Augustine's Trinitarian Theology* (forthcoming), chapter six.

⁹⁸ These books also serve a polemical purpose inasmuch as Augustine has not forgotten about the Latin Homoian theologians with whom he wrestles in Books I-VII.

⁹⁹ See Cooper, "The Basic Philosophical and Theological Notions of Saint Augustine," 94 (italics original).

¹⁰⁰ "Accordingly, dear reader, whenever you are as certain about something as I am go forward with me; whenever you stick equally fast with me; whenever you notice that you have gone wrong come back to me; or that I have, call me back to you. In this way let us set out along Charity Street together, making for him of whom it is said, *Seek his face always* (Ps 105:4). This covenant, both prudent and pious, I would wish to enter into in the sight of the Lord our God with all who read what I write, and with respect to all my writings, especially such as these where we are seeking the unity of the three, of Father and Son and Holy Spirit." Augustine, *De Trin.* I.5, 68.

initiates his quest for the image of God in the *mens*¹⁰¹ and at the end of his investigation in Book XV.¹⁰² He also alludes to this text at numerous other points.¹⁰³ Augustine invites his readers to join him in this quest to seek the face of God.¹⁰⁴ Reflecting on his objective at the beginning of Book XV, he explains that his “plan” has been “to train the reader *in the things that have been made* (Rom 1:20), for getting to know him by whom they were made. . .”¹⁰⁵ Augustine specifically invites his readers to “contemplate” the triune God

¹⁰¹ “A trinity is certainly what we are looking for, and not any kind of trinity either but the one that God is, the true and supreme and only God. Wait for it then, whoever you are that are listening to this; we are still looking, and no one can fairly find fault with someone who is looking for such things as this, provided that in looking for something so difficult either to know or to express, he remains absolutely firm in faith. . . . *Look for God, it says, and your souls shall live; and in case anyone should be too quick to congratulate himself that he has got there, look for his face, it goes on, always* (Ps 105:4).” Augustine, *De Trin.* IX.1, 270.

¹⁰² “The God himself we are looking for will help us, I confidently hope, to get some fruit from our labors and to understand the meaning of the text in the holy psalm, *Let the heart of those who seek the Lord rejoice; seek the Lord and be strengthened; seek his face always* (Ps 105:3).” Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.2, 395.

¹⁰³ See Augustine, *De Trin.* I.31; II.1; VIII.14; XV.3; XV.13 and XV.51. One striking example can be found in his closing prayer: “Directing my attention toward this rule of faith as best I could, as far as you enabled me to, I have sought you and desired to see intellectually what I have believed, and I have argued much and toiled much. O Lord my God, my one hope, listen to me lest out of weariness I should stop wanting to see you, but let me seek your face always, and with ardor.” Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.51, 436.

¹⁰⁴ Ayres suggests that in his mature work Augustine employs the language of “ascent” (often with reference to Psalms of Ascent) as a way of describing the ascent of a Christian’s heart to God. In the context of ascent, Augustine adapts the elements of the liberal arts tradition: “Against this background I suggest we view the latter books of the *De trinitate*, first, as representing a stage or series of stages in his developing consideration of how (intellectually trained) Christians may adapt and rethink the techniques of the liberal arts tradition within the context of Augustine’s mature understanding of confession, grace and the role of faith.” Ayres, *Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology* (forthcoming), chapter six.

¹⁰⁵ Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.1, 395. If Psalm 105:3-4 explains the *motive* of Augustine’s search, Romans 1:20 informs the *methodology* for his search. In addition to Book XV, Augustine cites Romans 1:20 at several key points: *De Trin.* II.25; IV.21; VI.12 and XIII.24.

through the divine image in the *mens* which he believes has been created in the image of the Trinity.¹⁰⁶

Scriptural teaching about the Trinity also provides an important backdrop for Augustine's search. In Books VIII-XV Augustine is not attempting to offer a rational proof for the Trinity unaided by revelation. On the contrary, he "believes" that God is triune on the basis of Scripture (as read through the "rule of faith") and wants to "understand" this belief, insofar as this is humanly possible. As A. N. Williams rightly notes, "The *vestigia*, then, are a tool for penetrating belief and grasping it yet more fully, not a means for establishing the content of faith independently of, or prior to, Scripture."¹⁰⁷ The centrality of Scripture in his search can be seen in three ways. First, it is his reading of Scripture that prompts Augustine to see the "image of God" in the human soul as trinitarian. Second, it is scriptural teaching about the Trinity, as narrated in the first half of *De Trinitate*, that provides the blueprint for the trinitarian image in the *mens*.¹⁰⁸ Finally, it is scriptural teaching about the Trinity that provides the criterion for

¹⁰⁶ Augustine makes it clear that human effort alone will not be adequate for this task: "Let us search in this image of God for some special trinity that is *sui generis*, with the help of him who made us to his own image. Without that help we cannot safely investigate these matters or discover anything to do with the wisdom that comes from him." Augustine, *De Trin.* XIV.6, 374-75.

¹⁰⁷ A. N. Williams, "Contemplation: Knowledge of God in Augustine's *De Trinitate*," in *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, ed. James J. Buckley and David S. Yeago (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 123.

¹⁰⁸ As Edmund Hill rightly notes, "In the dogmatic sense, Augustine's doctrine about the divine processions has already been given; it is the *datum* of orthodoxy which he is investigating through the image in order to be able to understand or see it." Hill, *The Trinity*, 65. In light of this, Hill suggests that it might be best to

evaluating the viability of the various “trinities” Augustine discovers. In describing why he rejects the idea that the trinitarian image of God can be found in three persons (specifically, the union of a man and women and their offspring), Augustine explains, “The reason then why we dislike this opinion is not that we are afraid of thinking about inviolate and unchanging charity as the wife of God the Father, who comes into being from him, though not as offspring, in order to bring to birth the Word *through whom all things were made* (Jn 1:3), but that the divine scripture shows quite clearly that it is false.”¹⁰⁹

The redemptive work of Christ constitutes a third backdrop for Augustine’s search. He offers a “dramatic” account of the trinitarian image in the human soul. This becomes especially clear in Books XII-XIV where he describes the effacement of the divine image by sin (Book XII), the restoration of the image through the work of Christ (Book XIII) and the future perfection of the divine image (Book XIV).¹¹⁰ This restoration

speaks of Augustine “constructing” the trinitarian image in the human person (as opposed to merely discovering it) inasmuch he chooses psychological activities to fit “the linguistic standards” he has outlined the first half of *De Trinitate* (ibid., 54).

¹⁰⁹ Augustine, *De Trin.* XII.6, 325.

¹¹⁰ For a helpful discussion of the role of Christology in Book XIII, see Lewis Ayres, “The Christological Context of Augustine’s *De Trinitate* XIII: Toward Relocating Books VIII-XV,” *Augustinian Studies* 29 (1998): 111-39. Ayres argues that Augustine’s *scientia/sapientia* distinction must be understood in the context of his broader Christology—particularly the two natures of Christ. Ayres also explains that important links exist between Book XIII and Book IV. “In Book IV of *trin.* Augustine links together the failure of people to grasp the unity and distinction of the two natures in Christ with a failure to grasp that Christians are now being trained by and within the drama of God’s redemptive *dispensatio* to move beyond their obsession with the material and the physical. In the early books of *trin.* more generally, one who fails to understand the pro-

can only be brought about by grace.¹¹¹ As Augustine explains in Book IV, “And in the sixth age of the human race the Son of God came and was made the Son of man in order to refashion us to the image of God.”¹¹² Conversion represents the first step in the lifelong process of renewal.¹¹³ When the soul “comes to the perfect vision of God,” it will “bear God’s perfect likeness.”¹¹⁴ The image of God is increasingly actualized as the soul remembers, understands and loves God. With this background in mind, we will explore Augustine’s search in greater detail.

Nicene theology of the two natures is presented as also failing to grasp the sort of reformation and redemption we now need and as failing to grasp the stage of God’s *dispensatio* in which we now find ourselves. These arguments are made against the background of an account of the redemptive drama which clearly characterises the present stage of history as, first, marked by Christ’s drawing of Christians to the Father—the members of the ‘body’ being drawn to follow their ‘head’—and second, as characterised by the *exercitatio* that Christians individually and corporately must undergo in Christ” (ibid., 134).

¹¹¹ See Augustine, *De Trin.* XIV, 21, 387. “For Augustine, the possibility of the quest for God must ultimately fail unless it is initiated, motivated and enabled by God himself. This is the reason for his emphasis on grace. ‘Command what thou wilt, but give what thou commandest.’ Grace, for Augustine, is a free gift. It is entirely unmerited by man, and cannot be won from God but only humbly received. . . . This grace is chiefly seen in the central event of all history, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. By this means, of God becoming flesh, suffering and dying on the Cross, and triumphing over death in the Resurrection, every man that God calls (i.e. to whom He gives grace) can be saved, that is, can complete the quest and come to rest in God.” Cooper, “The Basic Philosophical and Theological Notions of Saint Augustine,” 96.

¹¹² Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.7, 158.

¹¹³ “To be sure, this renewal does not happen in one moment of conversion, as the baptismal renewal by the forgiveness of all sins happens in a moment, so that not even one tiny sin remains unforgiven. But it is one thing to throw off a fever, another to recover from the weakness which the fever leaves behind it; it is one thing to remove from the body a missile stuck in it, another to heal the wound it made with a complete cure. The first stage of the cure is to remove the cause of debility, and this is done by pardoning all sin; the second stage is curing the debility itself, and this is done gradually by making steady progress in the renewal of this image.” Augustine, *De Trin.*, XIV.23, 389.

¹¹⁴ Augustine, *De Trin.* XIV.23, 390. The two biblical texts that shape Augustine’s understanding of this process are 2 Corinthians 3:18 and 1 John 3:2.

Fundamentally, it is Augustine's doctrine of creation that prompts him to search for "traces" of the triune God in the functioning of the soul. He claims that everything in creation bears a certain likeness to its creator:

Is there anything, after all, that does not bear a likeness to God (*similitudinem Dei*) after its own kind and fashion, seeing that God made all things very good for no other reason than that he himself is supremely good? Insofar then as anything as is good, to that extent, it bears some likeness, even though a very remote one, to the highest good, and if this is a natural likeness it is of course a right and well-ordered likeness; it is faulty, then of course it is a sordid and perverted one. . . . It is true that not everything in creation which is like (*simile*) God in some way or another is also to be called his image (*imago*), but only that which he alone is higher than. That alone receives his direct imprint (*exprimitur*) which has no other nature interposed between him and itself.¹¹⁵

There are several things we should observe in this extended statement. First, the scope of this "likeness" (*similitudo*) to God is universal, reaching to all of creation. Second, "goodness" constitutes the point of connection between God and creation. Insofar as something is "good," it bears some likeness to God. Third, this likeness obtains even under the condition of sin. Finally, Augustine identifies varying degrees of "likeness" within creation. This can be seen clearly in his distinction between "likeness" (*similitudo*) and "image" (*imago*). Although everything that is "good" in creation bears some similitude to God, not everything that is "good" bears God's "image." The divine image, which "alone receives his direct imprint," bears a unique likeness to the Trinity.

¹¹⁵ Augustine, *De Trin.* XI.8, 310.

As the second half of *De Trinitate* unfolds, it becomes clear that Augustine's interest does not lie with the *vestigia* in general (i.e., the sense in which various facets of creation bear a "likeness" to the triune God) but almost exclusively with the divine image in the *mens* as it reflects—albeit dimly—the divine processions.¹¹⁶ That Augustine's interest lies with the divine image becomes quite clear when one compares the relative frequency of *vestigium* and *imago*. *Vestigium* occurs only ten times in *De Trinitate* while *imago* occurs almost two hundred fifty times.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, of the ten occurrences of *vestigium*, only two occurrences are used in reference to the triune God. The clearest example of the latter use would be the following statement in Book VI: "So then, as we direct our gaze at the creator by *understanding the things that were made* (Rom 1:20), we should understand him as triad, whose traces (*vestigium*)¹¹⁸ appear in creation in a way that is fitting."¹¹⁹ Thus, although Augustine believes that all creation in some

¹¹⁶ A helpful discussion of the divine image in Augustine's theology can be found in John E. Sullivan, *The Image of God: the Doctrine of St. Augustine and its Influence* (Dubuque: Priory Press, 1963).

¹¹⁷ These numbers were generated using the search engine in the *Library of Latin Texts* (CLCLT), (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2005). www.brepols.net; accessed on 3/14/2006.

¹¹⁸ Although the Latin text uses the singular form *vestigium*, Hill translates *vestigium* as a plural noun in his English translation.

¹¹⁹ Augustine, *De Trin.* VI.12, 213. The other example can be found in Book XI: "No one will doubt that just as the inner man is endowed with understanding, so is the outer man with sensation. Let us try then if we can to pick out some trace of trinity (*vestigium Trinitatis*) in this outer man too. Not that he is also the image of God (*imago Dei*) in the same way as the inner man; the apostle's verdict is quite clear which declares that it is the inner man *who is being renewed for the recognition of God according to the image of him who created him* (Col 3:10); since elsewhere he says, *Even if our outer man is decaying, the inner man is being renewed from day to day* (2 Cor 4:16). As best we can then let us look for some model of the trinity in this man who is decaying; even if it is not a more accurate model, it may perhaps be easier to distinguish." Augustine, *De Trin.* XI.1,

way reflects the Trinity, he restricts his search for reflections of the Trinity to the highest point in creation—the image of God in the human mind (*mens*).¹²⁰

Augustine’s belief that a reflection of the triunity of God can be found in the divine image in the *mens* is rooted in his reading of Genesis 1:26-27. It will be helpful to begin with a “misreading” of Genesis 1:26-27—at least a “misreading” from Augustine’s perspective. It was common Patristic practice to read the phrase “God created man in his image” (1:27a) as the Father created human beings in the image of the Son.¹²¹

Augustine rejects this reading and strikes out in a different direction. Notice how he reads the pronoun “our” in Genesis 1:27 in a trinitarian fashion:

God said *Let us make man to our image and likeness* (Gn 1:26), and a little later on it adds, *And God made man to the image of God* (Gn 1:27). ‘Our,’ being plural in number, could not be right in this place if man were made to the image of one person, whether of the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit; but because in fact he was made in the image of the trinity, it said *to our image*.¹²²

303. Sullivan explains that Augustine’s assumption that creation in general possesses a kind of trinitarian stamp is rooted in a trinitarian reading of Romans 11:36 and Wisdom 11:20. See Sullivan, *Image of God*, 87-89.

¹²⁰ In other words Augustine is not really interested in finding a *vestigium trinitatis* but rather *imago trinitatis*. See Augustine, *De Trin.* XII.5, 324.

¹²¹ See Sullivan, *Image of God*, 165-203.

¹²² Augustine, *De Trin.* XII.6, 325.

For Augustine, the pronoun “our” implies that human beings have been created in the image of the *three* persons of the Trinity—not just the image of the *Son* as a number of earlier interpreters had proposed.¹²³

Reading Genesis 1:26-27 alongside several New Testament texts (including Eph. 4:23 and Col. 3:9-10), Augustine concludes that the divine image must exist in the mind: “After all, the authority of the apostle as well as plain reason assures us that man was not made to the image of God as regards the shape of his body, but as regards his rational mind (*rationalis mens*).”¹²⁴ Why the mind as locus of the “image”? Augustine believed that soul, or more specifically mind (*mens*), represents the “highest” aspect of human nature.¹²⁵ Among created things, it is the most “like” God.¹²⁶ Second, Augustine

¹²³ Commenting on the work of past interpreters, Augustine explains, “What they are intending thereby is to vindicate the claim that the Son too is called God in the holy scriptures, as though there were no other perfectly plain and reliable texts in which the Son is not merely called God but also true God. As for this text which they produce as evidence, while they set about solving one problem with it, they get themselves so tied up in another that they cannot extricate themselves. If the Father, as you see, made man to the image of the Son in such a way that man is not the Father’s image but only the Son’s, then the Son is unlike the Father. But if devout faith teaches, as it indeed does, that the Son is like the Father to the point of being his equal in being, then whatever is made to the likeness of the Son must also be made to the likeness of the Father. Finally, if the Father did not make man to his own image but to the Son’s, why did he not say ‘Let us make man to your image and likeness’ instead of saying ‘our’? The reason must be that it was the image of the trinity that was being made in man, and this is how man would be the image of the one true God, since the trinity itself is the one true God.” Augustine, *De Trin.* XII.7, 325.

¹²⁴ Augustine, *De Trin.* XII.12, 328-29. With regard to the “authority of the apostle,” Augustine cites Ephesians 4:23 and Colossians 3:9 and then adds, “If then we are being renewed in the spirit of our mind, and if it is this new man who is being renewed for the recognition of God according the image of him who created him, there can be no doubt that man was not made to the image of him who created him as regards his body or any old part of his consciousness, but as regards the rational mind, which is capable of recognizing God.” Augustine, *De Trin.* XII.12, 329.

¹²⁵ *Mens* is commonly translated “mind”; however, it has a much broader semantic range in Latin.

explains that something that is made in God's image must not be perishable: "So whatever it is that must be called the image of God, it must be found in something that will always be, and not in the retention, contemplation, and love of faith, which will not always be."¹²⁷ Finally, the image of God involves the capacity to know God—a central capacity of the *mens*. It is important, however, to bear in mind that being made in God's image does not imply any kind of equality with God.¹²⁸

Armed with the conviction that the divine image exists in the mind and must reflect the three persons, Augustine commences his search for created reflections of the Trinity. Although he explores a number of "trinities" in the "inner man" and the "outer man,"¹²⁹ the most important "trinity" he identifies is the mental triad of memory

¹²⁶ "For although the human mind (*mens humana*) is not of the same nature as God (*illius naturae cuius est Deus*), still the image (*imago*) of that nature than which no nature is better is to be sought and found in that part of us than which our nature also has nothing better." Augustine, *De Trin.* XIV.11, 379.

¹²⁷ Augustine, *De Trin.* XIV.4, 372.

¹²⁸ According to Augustine, the phrase "to the image of God" (*ad imaginem Dei*) in Genesis 1:27 implies both similarity and dissimilarity in relation to God: "But that image of God was not made in any sense equal, being created by him, not born of him; so to make this point he is image in such a way as to be 'to the image'; that is, he is not equated in perfect parity with God, but approaches him in a certain similarity. . . . But as I said, man is said to be 'to the image' (*ad imaginem*) because of the disparity of his likeness to God, and 'to our image' to show that man is the image of the trinity; not equal to the trinity as the Son is equal to the Father, but approaching it as has been said by a certain likeness, as one can talk of a certain proximity between things distant from each other, not proximity of place but of a sort of imitation." Augustine, *De Trin.* VII.12, 231.

¹²⁹ In Book VIII Augustine introduces the triad of lover, beloved and love. In Book IX he suggests the possibility of mind, self-knowledge and self-love. In Book X he outlines his most important triad: memory, understanding and will. In Book XI he explores a triad in the "outer man," namely: memory, internal sight and will. Clearly not every "trinity" Augustine discovers is an image of triune God. For example, all the trinities he discovers within the "lower" functions of the human psyche are excluded from being the "image" of God.

(*memoria*), understanding (*intelligentia*) and will (*voluntas*).¹³⁰ He introduces this triad in Book X and returns to it in Book IV. What does this triad reveal if understood as a reflection of the triune God? It is helpful to remember that Augustine is looking for “trinities” in the functions of the mind that will reveal the processions he has outlined in part one. Notice how his summary of the functions of memory, understanding and will and parallels his earlier discussion of the processions:

These three then, memory (*memoria*), understanding (*intelligentia*), and will (*voluntas*), are not three lives but one life, nor three minds but one mind (*una mens*). So it follows of course that they are not three substances but one substance (*una substantia*). When memory is called life, and mind, and substance, it is called so with reference to itself; but when it is called memory it is called so with reference to another. I can say the same about understanding and will; both understanding and will are so called with reference to another. But each of them is life and mind and being with reference to itself. For this reason these three are one in that they are one life, one mind, one being; and whatever else they are called together with reference to self, they are called it in the singular, not in the plural. But they are three in that they have reference to each other. And if they were not equal, not only each to the other but also each to them all together, they would not of course contain each other.¹³¹

In this lengthy passage we see the *potential* pay-off of Augustine’s investigation. His investigation of the divine image in the *mens* potentially sheds light on the way in which the three persons of the Trinity are distinct yet also one. Memory, understanding and

¹³⁰ For a helpful discussion of this triad in Book X and its background in Latin thought, see Ayres, *Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology* (forthcoming), chapter seven. According to Ayres, Augustine creatively adapts Cicero’s triad of *memoria*, *intelligentia* and *providentia*. Augustine abandons *providentia* because humans have no ability to foresee the future. For Augustine, “The triad of *memoria*, *intelligentia* and *voluntas* identifies both the human capacity for attention to the God in whose light all good action must occur, and also the constant activity of the mind as a desiring being moving towards or away from the Creator” (ibid.).

¹³¹ Augustine, *De Trin.* X.18, 298.

will (respectively representing Father, Son and Holy Spirit) are each distinct, yet they are also one mind (corresponding to the one nature of the triune God). Just as the Father is called "God" with respect to the divine nature, so memory is called "mind" with respect to the whole. Just as the Father is called "Father" with respect to the Son, so memory is called "memory" with respect to understanding. This triad also sheds light on the processions. One might understand memory as the mind's "self-presence."¹³² One remembers oneself via this self-presence. Once the mind is activated, this self-presence generates an act of understanding through a mental "word."¹³³ As Edmund Hill explains, "from these two conjoint, co-extensive, conmental acts of minding me, and me saying me to myself, there issues the third co-extensive, conmental act, as it were joining together quasi-parent, and quasi-offspring, of me liking me, me willing me, self-willing."¹³⁴

At this point it may sound as if Augustine is quite optimistic regarding the extent to which the divine image in the *mens* reflects the Trinity that God is. We must conclude our discussion by considering two crucial qualifications to the preceding discussion. First, in Book XIV Augustine explains that the divine image is actualized only in the context of redemption: "This trinity of the mind is not really the image of God because

¹³² Here I am following Edmund Hill's summary. See Hill, *The Trinity*, 53.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

the mind remembers and understands and loves itself, but because it is also able to remember and understand and love him by whom it was made.”¹³⁵ The ability to “see” God is directly linked to the renewing of the image.¹³⁶ Second, despite the numerous similarities he identifies in earlier books, Augustine insists that an “enormous difference” exists between the triad in the *mens* and the Trinity which God is.¹³⁷ Thus, aligning memory, understanding and will with Father, Son and Holy Spirit is ultimately problematic. Humans remember nothing apart from their memory, understand nothing apart from their understanding and love nothing apart from their will. But who would want to say that the Father only understands through the Son or only loves through the Holy Spirit? Furthermore, who would want to say that the Son only remembers himself through the Father? Moreover, who would want to say that the Holy Spirit remembers the Father through the Father or understands the Father only through the Son? If the Son alone is the source of understanding then “we are back at the absurdity of the Father

¹³⁵ Augustine continues, “And when it does this it becomes wise. If it does not do it, then even though it remembers and understands and loves itself, it is foolish. Let it then remember its God to whose image it was made, and understand and love him. To put it in a word, let it worship the uncreated God, by whom it was created with a capacity for him and able to share in him. In this way it will be wise not with its own light but by sharing in that supreme light, and it will reign in happiness where it reigns eternal.” Augustine, *De Trin.* XIV.15, 383.

¹³⁶ “So then, when this image is renewed to perfection by this transformation, we will be like God *because we shall see him*, not through a mirror but *as he is* (1 Jn 3:2); what the apostle Paul calls *face to face* (1 Cor 13:12).” Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.21, 411.

¹³⁷ Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.12, 403.

not being wise with himself but with the Son” — a problem Augustine already dealt with in Books V-VII.¹³⁸

At the root of the vast dissimilarity between the divine image in the *mens* and the Trinity is the Creator/creature distinction which Augustine articulates through a grammar of divine simplicity (or divine immateriality).¹³⁹ While humans *have* memory, understanding and will, these faculties exist *in* the human being without *being* the human being. “But can we possibly say that a trinity is in God in such a way that it is something of God’s, and is not itself just God?”¹⁴⁰ The logic of divine simplicity demands that we answer this question in the negative. While a human being has the image of God, “that trinity he is the image of is nothing but wholly and simply God, nothing but wholly and simply trinity. Nor is there anything belonging to God’s nature which does not belong to that trinity; and there are three persons of one being, not, like any single man, just one person.”¹⁴¹

What does this mean for the epistemic adequacy of the triad of memory, understanding and will in revealing the *trinity* of God? On the one hand, it means that “the trinity which is God cannot just be read off from those three things which we have

¹³⁸ Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.12, 403.

¹³⁹ See Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 364-83.

¹⁴⁰ Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.12, 403.

¹⁴¹ Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.12, 403.

pointed out in the trinity of our minds.”¹⁴² Furthermore, because any of the divine perfections one can infer through creation are identical with the divine essence, it is impossible to describe directly the triunity of God through creation in terms of Romans 1:20.¹⁴³ On the other hand, Augustine believes that one can dimly perceive the triunity of God through the divine image in the *mens*.¹⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 13:12 provides language that Augustine uses to express this indirect apprehension of the triune God through the image: “We see now through a mirror (*speculum*) in an enigma (*aenigma*), but then it will be face to face (1 Cor 13:12).”¹⁴⁵ Augustine focuses on two key terms in this text: *speculum* and *aenigma*. Reading 2 Corinthians 3:18 alongside 1 Corinthians 13:12, Augustine

¹⁴² Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.28, 419.

¹⁴³ See Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.6-13, 399-405. After acknowledging that “the universal nature of things which surrounds us, to which we too belong, proclaims that it has a most excellent founder,” Augustine identifies the problem in applying this to God’s triunity. Any of the attributes of the Trinity we can infer, apply to all the persons: “But all this that I have said, and anything else that in a similarly human way of speaking may be regarded as suitable to say about God, fits both the whole trinity which the one God is and each of the persons in this trinity. Will anyone dare to say that either the one God, which is what this triad is, or the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit does not live, or does not sense or understand anything, or that any of those who are asserted to be equal in that nature is mortal or corruptible or changeable or corporeal? Will anyone deny that any of them there in the divine sphere is most powerful, just and beautiful, superlatively good and happy? If then all these things can be said both about the trinity itself and each person in it, where or how will trinity be disclosed?” Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.7, 399-400.

¹⁴⁴ “As far as we could, we have also used the creation which God made to remind those who ask for reasons in such matters that as far as they can they should describe his invisible things by understanding them through the things that are made, and especially through the rational or intellectual creature which is made to the image of God; so that through this, as a kind of mirror, as far as they can and if they can, they might perceive in our memory, understanding and will that God is a trinity. Anyone who has a lively intuition of these three (as divinely established in the nature of his mind) and of how great a thing it is that his mind has that by which even the eternal and unchanging nature can be recalled, beheld and desired—it is recalled by memory, beheld by intelligence, embraced by love—has thereby found the image of that supreme trinity.” Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.39, 426.

¹⁴⁵ Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.14, 405.

suggests that the “mirror” in 1 Corinthians 13:12 may best be understood as a reference to the image of God: “If we ask what kind of mirror (*speculum*) this might be, the thought occurs to us that the only thing ever seen in a mirror (*in speculo*) is an image (*imago*). So what we have been trying to do is somehow see him by whom we were made by means of his image (*per imaginem*) which we ourselves are, as through a mirror (*tamquam per speculum*).”¹⁴⁶ The term *aenigma* expresses the opaque character of this image.¹⁴⁷ Thus, the best we can hope for in this life is a kind of “limited inference” from this enigmatic likeness.¹⁴⁸ Full “sight” will come only when the restoration of the image is complete and Christians see God “face to face.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.14, 405.

¹⁴⁷ “As far as I can see then, by the word ‘mirror’ (*speculi*) he wanted us to understand an image (*imaginem*), and by the word ‘enigma’ (*aenigmatis*) he was indicating that although it is a likeness (*similitudinem*), it is an obscure one and difficult to penetrate (*ad perspiciendum difficilem*). Now we can indeed take it that by the use of the words ‘mirror’ and ‘enigma’ (*speculi et aenigmatis*) the apostle meant any likenesses (*similitudines*) that are useful for understanding God with, as far as this is possible; but of such likenesses none is more suitable than the one which is not called God’s image (*imago*) for nothing.” Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.16, 407.

¹⁴⁸ Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.40, 427. Augustine seems to suggest that “evidence” for the trinity of God, however limited, is available both to those who “believe” and to those who do not. Some, who do not believe, see the “mirror” (the divine image in the *mens*) but fail to “see by a mirror the one who now can only be seen by a mirror, [so] that they do not even know the mirror they see *is* a mirror, that is to say an image.” Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.44, 429. If they did recognize they were seeing a mirror, they might recognize the one whom the mirror reflects: “Faith unfeigned would be purifying their hearts in order that the one who is now being seen in a mirror might one day be seen face to face. But by despising this faith that purifies hearts, what are they doing in understanding the nature of the human mind, with their subtle discussions about it, but condemning themselves on the very evidence of their own understanding?” Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.44, 429.

¹⁴⁹ “But when the sight comes that is promised us *face to face* (1 Cor 13:12), we shall see this trinity that is not only incorporeal but also supremely inseparable and truly unchangeable much more clearly and definitely than we now see its image which we ourselves are.” Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.44, 429.

5.3 An Evaluation of Panikkar's Trinitarian Grammar

My evaluation of Panikkar will proceed from two perspectives. First, following Cousins' suggestion that Panikkar's proposal be situated against the backdrop of vestige tradition, I will offer an Augustinian evaluation of Panikkar's proposal through the lens of the vestige tradition. Next, bracketing Cousins' reading, I will offer an Augustinian evaluation of Panikkar's trinitarian doctrine focusing on the relationship of the economy and the immanent Trinity.

5.3.1 Flawed Appeal to the Vestige Tradition

By situating Panikkar's proposal against the backdrop of the vestige tradition,¹⁵⁰ Cousins provides an important clue for understanding Panikkar's project; however, rather than strengthening the latter, this move has the opposite effect. It simply brings the problems with Panikkar's project more sharply into focus.

5.3.1.1 A Methodological Problem

Although Augustine and Panikkar both believe that the reflections of the Trinity can be found in the world, their methodologies differ significantly. Augustine interprets created reality (specifically the divine image in the *mens*) in light of the doctrine of the

¹⁵⁰ At least two points of continuity exist between Panikkar and the vestige tradition: (1) an assumption that the world possesses a discernible trinitarian structure and (2) a belief that a specific human reality discernibly reflects the trinitarian persons. At the same time, several important points of discontinuity exist which merit careful scrutiny.

Trinity he has gleaned from Scripture. Moreover, Augustine believes he possesses scriptural warrant for seeing a particular created reality (the divine image in the *mens*) as an image of the triune God. In contrast, Panikkar *reinterprets* the doctrine of Trinity in light of non-Christian religious experience. One can see this quite clearly in the structure of Panikkar's argument. First, he identifies three spiritualities which are said to arise purely from an "empirical assessment" of religious experience (independent of any particular religious tradition). Then he offers a novel interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity, on the basis of these spiritualities, as constitutive ground for them. By reinterpreting the doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of non-Christian religious experience, Panikkar violates the basic theological grammar of the vestige tradition that involves reading the "book of the world" in light of the "book of Scripture."¹⁵¹

Karl Barth's discussion of the *vestigia* in *Church Dogmatics I/1* helps shed light on the problem with Panikkar's trinitarian grammar. Barth insists that the "root" of the doctrine of the Trinity is "the threefold yet single lordship of God as Father, Son and

¹⁵¹ In the introduction to Bonaventure's *Itinerarium Mentis Dei*, Stephen Brown explains that the first two chapters of the *Itinerarium* are designed to help the wayfarer rightly understand sensible things (that is, the vestiges) from the horizon of Scripture: "Before the fall into sin man had a knowledge of sensible things and through them he was carried up to God to praise, worship and love him. After he fell man lost this kind of knowledge. He no longer could read the book of the world. The book of the sacred Scriptures tells us again the divine meaning of the sensible things and is able to restore the symbolic character of the world, so that it once again leads us to the knowledge, praise and love of God." Stephen F. Brown, *Bonaventure: The Journey of the Mind to God*, trans. Philotheus Boehner (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1993), 50.

Spirit" (i.e., the biblical concept of revelation).¹⁵² "When we say that the doctrine of the Trinity grows from this root we are saying critically and polemically that it does not stem from any other root."¹⁵³ Barth views the vestige tradition as challenging this single root.¹⁵⁴ His critique of the vestige tradition is driven by the assumption that once one posits a "second root" for the doctrine of the Trinity, this "second root" will inevitably swallow up the real "root." In the language of Barth, Panikkar implicitly posits a "second root" of the doctrine of the Trinity (non-Christian religious experience) which swallow-ups the real "root" (God's self-revelation in Scripture). At this point, one might raise the following objection. Inasmuch as Augustine is the progenitor of the vestige tradition, would not Barth's criticisms apply equally to him? Barth's criticisms would apply to Augustine were he to posit a "second" root for the doctrine of the Trinity; however, it is clear from our previous discussion that Augustine posits a single "root" for the doctrine of the Trinity—God's self-revelation in Scripture.¹⁵⁵ Although important

¹⁵² Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, 334.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 344.

¹⁵⁴ Barth offers the following analysis of the vestige tradition: "This expression (*vestigium trinitatis*) seems to come from Augustine and it means an analogue of the Trinity, of the trinitarian God of Christian revelation, in some creaturely reality distinct from Him, a creaturely reality which is not some form assumed by God in His revelation, but which quite apart from God's revelation manifests in its own structure by creation a certain similarity to the structure of the trinitarian concept of God, so that it may be regarded as an image of the trinitarian God Himself." Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, 344.

¹⁵⁵ As Earl Muller rightly notes, "What Augustine believes about the Trinity will guide his quest. He does not argue from the structure of the mind to the structure of the Trinity; rather, the light derived from faith guides his exploration of the mind. It is this, for instance, that determines his description of intellectual activity as a sort of begetting." Earl C. Muller, *Trinity and Marriage in Paul: The Establishment of a*

differences exist between Barth and Augustine, the proper root of trinitarian doctrine is not one of them.¹⁵⁶ Augustine makes it clear that the search for trinitarian reflections in the created world must be guided by the “rule of faith.”¹⁵⁷

5.3.1.2 Disregarding the Creator/Creature Dissimilarity

Not only does Panikkar’s reinterpretation of the Trinity on the basis of non-Christian religious experience violate the grammar of the vestige tradition but it also fails to take into account the epistemic implications of vast dissimilarity that obtains between creature and Creator. In Book XV Augustine insists that the Trinity that God is

Communitarian Analogy of the Trinity Grounded in the Theological Shape of Pauline Thought, American University Studies, Series VII, Theology and Religion, vol. 60 (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 219. Thus, while I believe Barth is correct to be concerned about a “second root” for the doctrine of the Trinity, his criticisms do not apply to Augustine.

¹⁵⁶ For a helpful discussion of why Barth’s critique of the vestige tradition does not apply to Augustine, see David S. Cunningham, “Interpretation: Toward a Rehabilitation of the *Vestigia* Tradition,” in *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, ed. James J. Buckley and David S. Yeago (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 179-202. Cunningham argues that Barth’s wholesale rejection of the *vestigia* must be understood in the context of his concern for “Nazi-sympathizing theology” among German Christians which appealed to created order in order to undergird the mythology of the Third Reich. He also argues that Barth’s rejection of the vestige tradition turns on an inadequate distinction between “interpretation” and “illustration.”

¹⁵⁷ “But as far as concerns that supreme, inexpressible, incorporeal and unchangeable nature and the perception of it in some measure or other by the understanding, there is nothing on which the human mind could better practice its gaze (provided of course that it is governed by the rule of faith [*fidei regula*]) than on that which man has in his nature that is better than other animals, better even than the other parts of his own soul; and this is the mind to which has been allotted a kind of power to see invisible things, and to which the senses of the body also bring all things for judgment as it presides, so to say, in the innermost and uppermost place of honor, and which has nothing above it to whose government it is subject except God.” Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.49, 434. Similarly, in his closing prayer, Augustine explains, “Directing my attention toward this rule of faith (*regulam fidei*) as best I could, as far as you enabled me to, I have sought you and desired to see intellectually what I have believed, and I have argued much and toiled much.” Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.51, 436.

cannot simply be “read off” the divine image in the creature because the vast dissimilarity that exists between the triune God and the image of God in the *mens*. This fundamental difference (which Augustine explicates through a grammar of divine simplicity) means that no *vestigium* could ever adequately reflect the Trinity because the dissimilarity that obtains ultimately exceeds any similarity.¹⁵⁸

Commenting on his search for an image of the Trinity in the human person, Augustine explains that every time he attempted “to bring out some comparative illustration of this point in that created reality which we are,” he discovered that “no adequate expression followed whatever understanding I came to; and I was only too well aware that my attempt even to understand involved more effort than result.”¹⁵⁹ Although he believes he did discover an “image of that supreme trinity,” he acknowledges, nonetheless, that the “three things of one person were quite unable to match those three persons in the way our human plan requires, as we have been demonstrating in this fifteenth book.”¹⁶⁰ One of the central themes in Book XV is the inadequacy of the divine image in revealing the Trinity that God is.¹⁶¹ We must bear in

¹⁵⁸ Similarly, the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) affirmed that the dissimilarity that exists between Creator and creature always exceeds any similarity that obtains.

¹⁵⁹ Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.45, 430.

¹⁶⁰ Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.45, 430.

¹⁶¹ Edmund Hill’s title for Book XV, “The Absolute Inadequacy of the Perfected Image,” appropriately expresses this reality. Regarding the inadequacy of the created image to mirror the Trinity, Augustine offers the following warning: “To the memory, sight, and love of this supreme trinity, in order to recollect it, see it,

mind that Augustine's comments about the inadequacy of this image are not directed at the "lower" trinities he explores in the "outer man." On the contrary, they are directed at the most "adequate" trinity Augustine has discovered.

If the aspect of human nature which is most "like" God (the divine image in the *mens*) is so inadequate for revealing the Trinity, then no epistemic warrant exists for reinterpreting the doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of any potential *vestigium*. Such a move fails to take into account the Augustine's warning in Book IX: "What we have to avoid is the sacrilegious mistake of saying anything about the trinity which does not belong to the creator but to the creature, or which is fabricated by vain imaginings."¹⁶² Thus, even if, for the sake of argument, one were to grant Cousins' claim that non-Christian religious experience represents a *vestigium trinitatis* (a claim we will shortly evaluate), no epistemic warrant exists for reinterpreting the doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of non-Christian religious experience in light of the dissimilarity that exists between Creator and creature.

and enjoy it, he should refer every ounce and particle of his life. But I have sufficiently warned him, so it seems to me, that this image, made by the trinity and altered for the worse by its own fault, is not so to be compared to that trinity that it is reckoned similar to it in every respect. Rather, he should note how great the dissimilarity is in whatever similarity there may be." Augustine, *De Trin.* XV.39. 426.

¹⁶² Augustine, *De Trin.* IX.1, 271.

5.3.1.3 Iconolatry, Personalism and Mysticism as a *Vestigium*

Approaching Panikkar's proposal from a different angle, we must now consider Cousins' suggestion that the vestige tradition should be extended to include the "highest forms" of human religious experience (specifically Panikkar's three forms of spirituality—iconolatry, personalism, mysticism) and that this move represents a "logical extension" of the vestige tradition. Cousins' argument can be summarized in the following way:

- P1. The vestige tradition has recognized "traces" of the Trinity throughout the whole of creation.
- P2. The vestige tradition should be extended to encompass non-Christian religious experience.
- P3. When thus extended, an important trinitarian vestige can be found, namely "iconolatry," "personalism" and "mysticism."
- P4. The presence of these trinitarian vestiges supports the claim that non-Christian religions constitute independently valid means of experiencing and relating to the triune God.

Building upon Platonic notions of exemplarity and participation, it is true that certain strands of the Christian theological tradition have recognized "traces" of the Trinity throughout creation (P1).¹⁶³ In order to evaluate P2, P3 and P4 it will be helpful consider the criteria that implicitly guide Augustine's search for a reflection of the Trinity in the

¹⁶³ For a helpful overview of the vestige tradition, see Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 322-27.

functioning of the human soul. At least five criteria guide Augustine's search.¹⁶⁴ First, created reality represents the locus of trinitarian reflections. Second, the clearest reflection of the Trinity is to be found in that which bears the greatest likeness to God.¹⁶⁵ Third, Scripture should play a key role in the discernment and evaluation of trinitarian reflections. Fourth, the presence of "threeness" does not constitute a sufficient condition for an authentic reflection of the Trinity. Trinitarian reflections should also mirror key elements of Catholic teaching on the Trinity including the oneness of the divine substance, the consubstantiality and equality of the divine persons,¹⁶⁶ the commensurability of the persons,¹⁶⁷ exhausting the divine substance in three persons,¹⁶⁸ inseparability of the persons,¹⁶⁹ perichoresis,¹⁷⁰ relative difference¹⁷¹ and mutual relation

¹⁶⁴ Earl Muller identifies twenty different criteria that guide Augustine's search for an image of the Trinity. See Muller, *Trinity and Marriage in Paul*, 209-43. I have greatly reduced his list by grouping a number of similar elements.

¹⁶⁵ Because God is incorporeal, "bodily" analogies for the Trinity (e.g., father, mother and child) are inadequate.

¹⁶⁶ Muller, *Trinity and Marriage in Paul*, 233.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 234.

¹⁶⁸ The divine essence is exhausted in three persons. By contrast, human essence is not exhausted in three persons. Thus, communitarian analogy is inadequate. Muller, *Trinity and Marriage in Paul*, 235.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 235.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 236.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 236.

(generation and procession).¹⁷² Finally, trinitarian reflections should aid our knowledge of the triune God.¹⁷³

How does Cousins' proposal fare in light of these criteria? The first criterion (created reality as locus of trinitarian reflection) raises serious questions about extending the vestige tradition to encompass non-Christian religious "experience." Both *imago* and *vestigium* refer to a created reality. The examples Cousins cites from the vestige tradition (speck of dust, created universe, human soul, community of persons, etc.) clearly reflect this fact. "Experience," however, names a relation; experience is always "experience of." Although it makes sense to speak of experience *of* a vestige, it does not seem to make sense to speak of experience *as* a vestige.¹⁷⁴ What "relations" do Panikkar's three experiences name? Presumably, Cousins (and Panikkar) would ultimately want to say that these three spiritualities name a relation with the triune God—not merely with a created reality. This response, however, raises a further question: How do we know these experiences name a relation to the triune God? At this point one is caught in a vicious circle because it is the reading of these three spiritualities as *vestigia* that grounds the claim that these constitute experiences of the triune God (P4) but the reading of these

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 237.

¹⁷³ It is not an accident that Augustine's search for a reflection of the Trinity centers on the psychological apparatus by which we know the triune God.

¹⁷⁴ For Bonaventure the *vestigia* always refer to something in the sensible world.

spiritualities as *vestigia* arises from the assumption that they are experiences of the triune God. Inadequate warrant, therefore, exists for treating non-Christian religious “experience” as a *vestigium*.

The combination of Augustine’s third and fourth criteria prompt the following question: If iconolatry, personalism and mysticism are read as a mirror reflecting the divine persons, what does this *vestigium* reveal about the triune God and how does the resulting picture comport with Christian teaching regarding the generation of the Son and procession of the Holy Spirit? At first glance, the answer to the first half of this question may appear quite obvious. Panikkar outlines the doctrine of the Trinity that mirrors his triad of spiritualities in the second chapter of *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*. The Buddhist experience of emptiness reflects the Father who is the “emptying of Being.” The Jewish experience of a personal relationship with God reflects the Son who, strictly speaking, is the only “Person” in the Trinity. The Hindu experience of identity (non-relational union) with *Brahman* reflects the Spirit who is “divine immanence.” Upon closer inspection, however, the answer to this question is a bit more complicated. If one were to bracket the second chapter of *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* and then simply to ask what the first chapter reveals about the triune God, it is far from clear that the results would match the doctrine outlined the second chapter. One could probably sum up Panikkar’s spiritualities as (1) an experience of divine transcendence (“iconolatry”), (2) an experience of divine

relationship (“personalism”) and (3) an experience of divine immanence (“mysticism”). If these experiences are interpreted as revealing God, they seem to reveal a triad of divine transcendence, divine relationality and divine immanence. This brings us to the second-half of my earlier question: How does the resulting picture which these *vestigia* provide comport with Christian teaching regarding the generation of the Son and procession of the Holy Spirit? It is important to note that the resulting descriptions of God represent substantive predications which describe the nature of the three divine persons in an undifferentiated way. Aside from the number three (a limitation that seems somewhat arbitrary), they bear no witness to the distinction of divine persons, consubstantiality and equality of the divine persons, the commensurability of the persons, exhausting the divine substance in three persons, the inseparability of the persons, the perichoresis of the persons, relative difference nor mutual relation. In short, one cannot infer the Christian Trinity from these three spiritual experiences. Thus, Cousins’ reading of iconolatry, personalism and mysticism as a *vestigium* fails to satisfy our third and fourth criteria.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ In the following section of this chapter I will offer a detailed examination of Panikkar’s doctrine of the Trinity. In response, one might point out that if one were to start with Augustine’s description of memory, understanding and will and then ask what it reveals about the Trinity (apart from his description in Books I-VII), the result would be similar. The reason this problem exists for Panikkar and not for Augustine is that Panikkar wants to *reinterpret* the Trinity on the basis of religious experience whereas Augustine wants to interpret the image of the Trinity strictly in light of Christian teaching on the Trinity. This brings us back to the methodological problem I outlined above.

The fifth criterion reminds us what is at stake—authentic knowledge of the triune God. In light of this criterion, we must consider Cousins’ claim that the presence of *vestigia* in the religious experience of non-Christians constitutes the basis for affirming that non-Christian religions represent valid means of experiencing and relating to the triune God (P4). Here we must ask, “To what do the *vestigia* bear witness?” From Augustine to Bonaventure the answer is the same: read by the faithful through the lens of Scripture, they bear witness (albeit dimly and indirectly) to the triunity of God. It is difficult to see how this reality might, in any way, constitute the basis for the kind of pluralist view of relationship of Christianity to other religions that Cousins and Panikkar want to affirm. Even if, for the sake of argument, one were to grant P2, no warrant exists for moving from the discernible presence of a *vestigium* in some aspect of human religious experience to the soteriological efficacy of non-Christian religions.¹⁷⁶ Cousins effectively severs the *vestigia* from the economy of salvation; however, the *vestigia* cannot be separated from the economy of salvation. “Image,” for Augustine, is

¹⁷⁶ Augustine, of course, would not deny that all people—Christians and non-Christians alike—have been made in the image of the Trinity. In the functioning of the human soul *qua* soul the divine image—albeit defaced—is present: “For we have said that even when it has lost its participation in him it still remains the image of God, even though worn out and distorted. It is his image insofar as it is capable of him and can participate in him; indeed it cannot achieve so great a good except by being his image.” Augustine, *De Trin.* XIV.11, 379. Nevertheless, from the presence of this trinitarian image in a Buddhist, one cannot infer the salvific efficacy of Buddhism.

inextricably tied to the redemptive work of the triune God (as is abundantly clear in Books XII-XIV).¹⁷⁷

In sum, Cousins' appeal to the vestige tradition brings to light three problems with Panikkar's trinitarian grammar. First, Panikkar's proposal violates the basic grammar of the vestige tradition by reinterpreting the doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of religious experience. Second, in light of the vast dissimilarity that exists between Creator and creature, no epistemic warrant exists for reinterpreting the doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of non-Christian religious experience. Panikkar's proposal fails to take into account the epistemic implications of this dissimilarity. Third, there are good reasons to reject Cousins' claim that idolatry, personalism and mysticism be viewed as a *vestigium trinitatis*.

In response, one might counter that all I have really demonstrated is that Cousins' reading of Panikkar is inadequate and that Panikkar is not doing anything that should be subsumed under the vestige tradition. Although Panikkar does not *explicitly* appeal to the vestige tradition in the same way Cousins does, he *implicitly* appeals to the basic grammar of vestige tradition in speaking of the "threefold structure of reality,"¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ It is only as the soul remembers, understands and loves God that image of God can be progressively restored.

¹⁷⁸ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, xi. Elsewhere Panikkar explains that "Every bit of reality has this trinitarian imprint." Raimundo Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity: The Monk as Universal Archetype* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), 128.

“trinitarian structure of religious experience”¹⁷⁹ and world as a “divine ‘vestige’” of the triune God.¹⁸⁰ Hence, my criticisms seem to be warranted. Perhaps it might be best to acknowledge that while Panikkar’s proposal implicitly draws on elements of the vestige tradition, important discontinuities exist between the latter and the former and that *some* of these discontinuities reflect deficiencies in Panikkar’s trinitarian grammar. Although the vestige tradition does expose several problems with Panikkar’s proposal, it is important that our assessment not be limited to the lens of the vestige tradition. The ultimate confirmation of these problems can only come from a broader analysis of Panikkar’s doctrine of the Trinity. Thus, in the remaining section of this chapter, I will evaluate Panikkar’s doctrine of the Trinity with special attention to the relationship of the economic and the immanent Trinity.

5.3.2 The Economic and the Immanent Trinity

According to Panikkar, “The doctrine of the Trinity, in point of fact, is not there for the sake of satisfying our curiosity about the ‘immanent’ Trinity as an internal affair of the Divinity (*ad intra*), alone. It connects the immanent mystery with the ‘economic’ God (*ad extra*), in which the destiny of the world is at stake. It is not mere speculation

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., xiv.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 18.

about the depths of God; it is equally an analysis of the heights of man.”¹⁸¹ This statement provides an important clue regarding Panikkar’s understanding of his project. He believes that contemporary Christian theology has mistakenly focused upon the immanent Trinity to the neglect of the economic.¹⁸² One of his central goals in *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* is to reconnect the trinitarian reality (“immanent mystery”) with the world. Following this clue, we will evaluate his proposal by considering how he relates the economic and the immanent Trinity. We will see that in his attempt to reconnect the trinitarian reality with the world, Panikkar ultimately undermines the very thing he wishes to accomplish.

Before proceeding further, it will be helpful to review our earlier discussion of the economic and the immanent Trinity. In chapter three we distinguished three sequential stages in our knowledge of Trinity: the “biblical Trinity,” the “immanent Trinity” and the “economic Trinity.” In the first step, we encounter the self-revelation of the triune God in the *oikonomia* recorded in Scripture (“biblical Trinity”). In the second step, we reflect upon what must be true regarding being and nature of the divine persons in light of God’s self-revelation in the *oikonomia*. The outcome of this reflection

¹⁸¹ Ibid., xii.

¹⁸² According to Panikkar, Christian theology “has too often relegated the trinitarian mystery to the exclusive sphere of the Divinity, ‘theology’ in the greek use of the word, i.e., the study of God-in-himself totally or almost independent of the ‘economy’ or study of God in his ‘temporal manifestation’, i.e., creation and incarnation.” Panikkar, *Trinity and Religious Experience of Man*, 71.

represents a doctrine of the “immanent Trinity” (God *in se*). In the final step, we articulate a systematic conceptualization of the triune God in the *oikonomia*—a doctrine of the “economic Trinity.”

5.3.2.1 The Immanent Trinity in Panikkar’s Proposal

At the heart of Panikkar’s proposal is a particular understanding of the immanent Trinity. This account of the immanent Trinity constitutes the ground for his trinity of spiritualities. The divine “emptying of Being” that marks the life of the “Father” constitutes the basis for a Buddhist experience of divine emptiness (*Nirvana*). The divine “personality” that marks the life of the Son constitutes the basis for a Christian experience of a personal relationship with God. The “divine immanence” that marks the Spirit constitutes the basis for the Hindu experience of non-relational union with *Brahman*. In terms of his trinitarian grammar, Panikkar emphasizes the immanent Trinity as ground for the economic. Although it is true the immanent Trinity constitutes the *ontological* basis for the economic Trinity, it must also be recognized that the *oikonomia* recorded in Scripture constitutes the sole *epistemic* foundation for our knowledge of the Trinity. It is in relation to the latter point that the problems begin to emerge in Panikkar’s trinitarian grammar. When Panikkar claims that “the trinitarian conception of the Ultimate” is not “an exclusive Christian insight or revelation,” he

implicitly abandons this epistemic foundation.¹⁸³ As a result of abandoning this epistemic foundation, he offers a highly speculative account of the immanent Trinity that is inadequately rooted in the *oikonomia* revealed in Scripture.

From an Augustinian standpoint there are numerous problems with Panikkar's account of the immanent Trinity.¹⁸⁴ We will begin with his description of the "Father." His discussion leaves one with the distinct impression that the "Father of Jesus Christ" (and by extension, the Christian trinity) is not *the* ultimate reality but merely a *penultimate* manifestation of a transcendent "Absolute" which is ultimately beyond any name or description. Furthermore, Panikkar seems to imply that what uniquely constitutes the Father as Father is not a distinct property such as "unbegottenness" but rather "emptiness of being." The Father, he insists, has no "existence" from the standpoint of "Being" because his "Being" has been emptied, wholly and without remainder, in the "generation" of the Son. As a result, one cannot even "speak" about the Father. It is difficult to see how this description of the Father as "emptiness of Being" can be reconciled with the credal affirmation that the Son is *homoousios* with the

¹⁸³ Panikkar, *Trinity and Religious Experience of Man*, viii. In another context Panikkar explains, "The Trinity, we have to clarify at the outset, is neither a monopoly of Christianity nor, for our purposes of the Divinity." Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity*, 128.

¹⁸⁴ Although he appeals to many elements of the Augustinian tradition, he infuses these elements with new meaning.

Father.¹⁸⁵ Finally, although Panikkar appeals to a number of elements in the classic trinitarian tradition (particularly the notion of the Father as the “substratum” of divinity), his account of the Father as “emptiness of Being” seems uniquely tailored to ground a Buddhist experience of “emptiness.”¹⁸⁶ By reinterpreting the “Father” in light of the Buddhist teaching, Panikkar abandons the epistemic foundation of the Trinity.

Although the problems with his understanding of the Son come most sharply into focus at the level of the economic Trinity,¹⁸⁷ at least one issue merits attention in relation to the immanent Trinity. Panikkar offers a very complex explanation of why, among the Father, Son and Spirit, the Son alone should be called a “Person.” There are at least three problems with this assertion. First, it seems to be driven not by reflection on the *oikonomia* revealed in Scripture but rather by the need to ground a “relational”

¹⁸⁵ Panikkar attempts to fend off this objection by pointing out that the divine nature is not a fourth thing (i.e., there is no “God” that exists apart from the persons): “A certain popular theological language which speaks of the equality among the ‘three’ persons can certainly be accepted provided we stop short of accepting an objectified divine nature, ‘trinitarianly’ disincarnated, as it were (the famous rejected *quaternitas*).” Panikkar, *Trinity and Religious Experience of Man*, 45. Since neither Augustine nor any ecumenical Council affirms that the divine nature is a “fourth thing,” it is difficult to see how this response answers my objection. Panikkar seems to be saying that what distinguishes Father and Son is a respective absence and presence of “Being.” This undermines the equality of nature.

¹⁸⁶ Notice the influence of Buddhism on Panikkar’s description of the Father as “silence”: “Any attempt to speak about the Father involves almost a contradiction in terms, for every word about the Father can only refer to the one of whom the Father is Father, that is, to the Word, to the Son. It is necessary to be silent. The most diverse religious traditions teach us that God is Silence. This affirmation must be accepted in its unfathomable profundity. God is Silence total and absolute—the silence of Being—and not only the being of silence.” Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 47-48. Silence is simply another way to talk about “emptiness.” In his introduction to Panikkar’s thought, Harry Cargas notes that Panikkar’s doctrine of God “is closer to that of the Buddha than it is to most theologians.” Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, ix-x.

¹⁸⁷ Panikkar’s account of the economic Trinity will be discussed in the following section.

experience of God *exclusively* in the Son. Second, this claim seems to imply that what uniquely constitutes the Son as Son (distinguishing him from the Father and Spirit) is not “eternal generation” but “Personhood” (which for Panikkar is roughly synonymous with “Being”). By distinguishing Father and Son on this basis, Panikkar opens the door to the very neo-Arian position Augustine works so hard to dismantle in Books V-VII. Panikkar therefore faces a dilemma. To the extent he grounds differences between the Father and Son in what implicitly amount to differences of substance between the Father and Son in order to muster support for his theology of religious experience, he falls into the Homoian error of making Father and Son two “substances.” If, on the other hand, he follows the Augustinian tradition in recognizing that everything the Father is, the Son is, except that the Son is not the Father, Panikkar loses the basis for a “relational” experience of God *exclusively* in the Son. Finally, Panikkar’s claim that the Son alone is “Person” seems to be parasitic upon a view of Jesus Christ that he cannot accept. It only makes sense to speak of the Son uniquely as “Person” (in contrast to the Father and Spirit) in the context of a Chalcedonian Christology. Panikkar, however, rejects a strict identification between Jesus of Nazareth and the eternal Son.¹⁸⁸ In so doing he undermines the theological basis for calling the Son a “Person” in distinction to the Father and Spirit.

¹⁸⁸ See Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 53-54.

As with his discussion of the Father and Son, Panikkar's account of the Holy Spirit seems to be tailored to suit the needs of his theology of religious experience. The central link between Panikkar's third form of spirituality and his discussion of the Spirit is the Hindu concept of *advaita*.¹⁸⁹ According to Panikkar, the concept of *advaita* has been misunderstood in the West. The message of the Upanishads is not monism, dualism or theism but "*advaita*, i.e. the non-dual character of the Real, the impossibility of adding God to the world or *vice versa*, the impossibility of putting in *dvanva*, in a pair, God and the world."¹⁹⁰ God and the world are neither one thing nor two. Consciousness of *advaita* (which Panikkar describes as an experience of "divine immanence") is at the center of the third spirituality. *Advaita* also plays a central role in his understanding of the Spirit. Whereas the Father is the revelation of the "divine transcendence," the Spirit "is the revelation of the God immanent."¹⁹¹ Panikkar explains that the Spirit is the communion between the Father and the Son.¹⁹² Thus, the Spirit is "immanent to Father and Son jointly."¹⁹³ At this point it may sound as if all Panikkar is doing is offering an Augustinian account of the Spirit as the bond of love between the Father and Son.

¹⁸⁹ For a discussion of the role of *advaita* upon Panikkar's trinitarian thought, see Ewert H. Cousins, "Panikkar's Advaitic Trinitarianism," in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, ed. Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 119-30.

¹⁹⁰ Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 36.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 60.

Panikkar, however, gives this Augustinian concept a Hindu twist: “The *advaita* which helps us express suitably the ‘relation’ God-World is again a precious aid in elucidating the intra-trinitarian problem. If the Father and the Son are not *two*, they are not one either: the Spirit both unites and distinguishes them. He is the bond of unity; the *we* in between, or rather within.”¹⁹⁴ Thus, one cannot have “personal relations” with the Spirit. Rather one can only have “non-relational union with him.”¹⁹⁵ In sum, intra-trinitarian *advaita* (which is the Spirit) constitutes the ground for an experience of *advaita* (i.e., non-relational union with the Absolute). Again one must ask, “What epistemic warrant exists in the *oikonomia* revealed in Scripture for this understanding of the Spirit?” The primary foundation for this claim ultimately seems to be a particular reading of the Upanishads: “Indeed what is the Spirit but the *ātman* of the Upanishads, which is said to be identical with *brahman*, although this identity can only be existentially recognized and affirmed once ‘realisation’ has been attained?”¹⁹⁶ Turning to a second problem, Panikkar seems to imply that what uniquely constitutes the Spirit as Spirit is not “procession” but “immanence” or the “foundation of Being.” Whereas the Father is the “emptying of Being” and the Son is “Being,” the Spirit is the

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 62 (italics original).

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 63.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 64-65.

“foundation of Being.”¹⁹⁷ As I explained above, this way of distinguishing the Father, Son and Holy Spirit potentially leads Panikkar into the Homoian trap Augustine demolishes in Books V-VII. Summarizing our discussion, Panikkar (like Heim) offers a highly speculative account of the immanent Trinity (step 2) that is inadequately rooted in the *oikonomia* revealed in Scripture (step 1).¹⁹⁸

5.3.2.2 The Economic Trinity in Panikkar’s Proposal

A second problem area involves the way in which Panikkar’s proposal moves from the immanent Trinity (step 2) to the economic Trinity (step 3). The following represents a summary of Panikkar’s doctrine of the economic Trinity. The triune God is present and active among the religions of the world.¹⁹⁹ The locus of the work of the triune God is not the outer structures of “religion” but inner spiritual “experience.” Jesus Christ does not represent the definitive revelation of triune God; rather he represents one manifestation of a broader Christ-principle. The Holy Spirit is “pushing the christian forward beyond what we call ‘christianity’, beyond, I am tempted to add,

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 63.

¹⁹⁸ In light of this it is somewhat ironic that Panikkar criticizes the contemporary theologians for excessive speculation about God *in se*.

¹⁹⁹ Adherents of other religions experience the Trinity but simply describe it differently: “[M]y aim at present is simply so to enlarge and deepen the mystery of the Trinity that it may embrace this same mystery existent in other religious traditions but differently expressed.” Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 42. The Trinity also represents the “meeting place” of religions. “The Trinity, then, may be considered as a junction where the authentic spiritual dimensions of all religions meet” (ibid., 42).

even the institutional and visible Church.”²⁰⁰ The Spirit is leading Christians to abandon a particularistic perspective and to recognize the true experience of “Christ” in others.²⁰¹ “And the Son, the Lord under whatever name, is the symbol for this process.”²⁰² The goal of this process is the greater unity of humankind. Connecting Panikkar’s doctrine of the economic Trinity to his three spiritualities, we might say that Panikkar posits three economies: an economy of the Father (“iconolatry”), an economy of the Son (“personalism”) and an economy of the Spirit (“mysticism”). These are summarized in Figure 4.

Spirituality	Economy	Description
Iconolatry	Economy of the Father	Experience of divine emptiness or transcendence
Personalism	Economy of the Son	Experience of divine relation
Mysticism	Economy of the Spirit	Experience of divine immanence

Figure 4: Three Economies in Panikkar

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 57. This claim depends upon an important distinction Panikkar makes between Christian experience and the institutional form of the Church: “Let us go further: christian ‘stripping’ should be complete. The faith of the enlightened christian must strip itself of the ‘christian religion’ as it actually exists and free itself for a fecundation that will affect all religions both ancient and modern. From the sociological and external point of view christianity is only one religion among others. . . . Christian faith, however, lives within time and in the hearts of men. It requires, therefore to be ‘incarnated’ in a historical form; but what we call christianity is only one form among other possible ones living and realizing the christian faith” (ibid., 3-4).

²⁰¹ According to Panikkar, “If we remain attached exclusively to the ‘Saviour’, to his humanity and historicity, we block, in a manner of speaking, the coming of the Spirit and thus revert to a stage of exclusive iconolatry.” Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 58.

²⁰² Ibid., 58.

There are numerous problems with Panikkar's account of the economic Trinity. First, Panikkar severs the identification between Jesus of Nazareth and the eternal Son.²⁰³ This move is incompatible with a Chalcedonian Christology and undermines the very foundation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Second, by positing multiple "economies" that bypass the redemptive work of Christ, Panikkar divorces the work of the economic Trinity in the world from the redemptive *missiones* of the Son and Spirit revealed in Scripture.²⁰⁴ For Augustine (just as in the New Testament), all divine activity is focused on the one divine economy focused on Christ. No biblical warrant exists for positing economies of divine activity that bypass the salvific mission of the Son and the Spirit to restore men and women to communion with the triune God. Panikkar's three economies ultimately constitute a form of economic tritheism. Third, Panikkar offers a deficient account of the *missio* of the Spirit. He seems to imply that the "Spirit" is leading people away from Jesus Christ. This is fundamentally incompatible with scriptural teaching regarding the Spirit's unique role in bearing witness to and

²⁰³ Gavin D'Costa offers a similar criticism: "Others like Raimundo Panikkar have sought to rehabilitate a Logos Christology. However, Panikkar makes the Logos a universal revelation, of which Jesus Christ is one instantiation, and then reads other revelations in a like manner. The prioritizing of the economy of salvation in the particularity of Adam and Eve and Jesus and Mary's history is bypassed, and the series of revelations specified in the Conciliar documents is made subordinate to a higher controlling idea of 'Logos.'" D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 110. See also Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 151-52.

²⁰⁴ This is particularly striking in light of Panikkar's stated goal of connecting the mystery of the Trinity to human religious experience.

glorifying the risen Christ (e.g, John 15:26-27; 16:7-15; Acts 1:6-9; 4:24-31, etc.).²⁰⁵ Finally, the three economic manifestations of the Trinity Panikkar identifies (i.e., experience of the “Father” as emptiness, experience of the “Son” as person and experience of the “Spirit” as immanence) do not fit with the Christian experience of the triune God described in Scripture. According to Panikkar, experiences of the Father and Spirit are fundamentally impersonal while only an experience of the Son is personal. In contrast, the Christian experience of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is fundamentally *personal*. On the basis of a speculative understanding of the immanent Trinity (step two), Panikkar outlines a deficient account of the economic Trinity (step three) that ultimately undermines the divine *oikonomia* revealed in Scripture (step one).

5.3.2.3 An “Alien God”

Our discussion of the relationship between the economic and the immanent Trinity simply reinforces the impression gleaned from our examination of Panikkar’s proposal through the lens of the vestige tradition. Although Barth’s wholesale rejection of the vestige tradition is unwarranted, his concerns regarding the danger of positing a

²⁰⁵ As I noted in the previous chapter, Augustine discerns a special significance in the sign through which the bestowal of the Spirit was manifested at Pentecost (i.e., bearing witness to Christ in multiple languages). It offers a proleptic fulfillment of the goal of the Holy Spirit’s work—namely, leading people in every nation to believe in Jesus Christ. According to Augustine, the advent of the Holy Spirit “needed to be demonstrated by perceptible signs, to show that the whole world and all nations with their variety of language were going to believe in Christ by the gift of the Holy Spirit . . .” Augustine, *De Trin.* IV.29, 175.

“second root” for the doctrine of the Trinity prove to be well founded. According to Barth,

The moment it is taken seriously it leads plainly and ineluctably into an ambivalent sphere in which in a trice, even with the best will of the world, we are no longer speaking of the God of whom we want to speak and whose traces we meant to find but of some principle of the world or humanity, of some alien God. The original intention was to speak of God’s revelation. But what happened was that talk about the world and man, and this talk, understood as talk about God’s revelation, necessarily wound up being talk against God’s revelation.²⁰⁶

Barth offers a fitting description of Panikkar’s project. Panikkar posits a “second root” for the doctrine of the Trinity (non-Christian religious experience) that ultimately swallows up the first root (God’s self-revelation in Scripture) with the result that Panikkar speaks about an “alien God.” In order to garner support for his theology of religious experience, Panikkar subtly replaces a Trinity of divine persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) with a trinity of divine transcendence (or emptiness), divine relationality and divine immanence.²⁰⁷

5.4 Implications for the Christian Theology of Religions

Assuming that one follows Augustine in accepting (at least in principle) the possibility of reflections of triune God in the world,²⁰⁸ at least two implications follow for

²⁰⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, 344.

²⁰⁷ Striking similarities can be seen to Mark Heim’s theology of multiple religious ends on this point.

²⁰⁸ Obviously if one follows Barth in dismissing the vestige tradition, any appeal to discernible reflections of the Trinity will be rejected out of hand. Although Barth’s concerns about the dangers of potential misuse of the vestige tradition are clearly warranted, his wholesale rejection of this tradition is not.

the Christian theology of religions. First, no epistemic warrant exists for revising our understanding of the Trinity on the basis of discernible triadic structures—whether in religious experience or otherwise. Such a move fails to take into account the epistemic ambiguity of the *vestigia* in light of the Creator/creature distinction. Second, no epistemic warrant exists for inferring the validity of non-Christian religions from the discernible presence of various triadic structures in the world. Mark Heim seems to draw this unwarranted inference when he claims that Christians must affirm the validity of religions because “the Trinity represents a universal truth about the way the world and God actually are.”²⁰⁹ Even if one were to acknowledge, for the sake of argument, that a trinitarian vestige can be discerned in Buddhist religious experience, no warrant exists for inferring the salvific efficacy of Buddhism. Augustine would acknowledge that every human being *qua* human being possesses—albeit in a defaced form—a reflection of the triune God; however, from the presence of a triadic structure (i.e., the divine image), one cannot infer the salvific activity of the triune God. To the extent that trinitarian structures can be discerned in the world through the eyes of faith, they bear witness, dimly and indirectly, to the triune God.

²⁰⁹ Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*, 127.

6. Rethinking the “Relevancy” of Trinitarian Doctrine

The purpose of the foregoing investigation was to examine critically the claim that a proper understanding of “the Trinity” provides the basis for a new understanding of religious diversity. To this end I have offered an Augustinian assessment of the trinitarian doctrine in several recent proposals. As this investigation draws to a close, it will be helpful to retrace our steps in order to consider the implications of this study both for the Christian theology of religions and for contemporary trinitarian theology.

In chapter one I surveyed two critical developments that provide the backdrop for this investigation: the contemporary trinitarian renaissance (with its concern for re-establishing the “relevancy” of trinitarian theology) and the rise of the Christian theology of religions. After surveying the trinitarian revival in the work of Barth and Rahner, I briefly traced contemporary attempts to employ a doctrine of the Trinity as constitutive ground for a Christian theology of religions beginning with the work of Panikkar.

In chapter two I defended my appeal to the Augustinian tradition by demonstrating that contemporary criticisms of Augustine, as exemplified in the work of Colin Gunton, are unjustified. In chapters three to five I offered an Augustinian evaluation of the trinitarian doctrine in several recent proposals in the Christian theology of religions. My evaluation was structured around three principal themes: the economic and the immanent Trinity (chapter three), divine relations (chapter four), and

the *vestigia trinitatis* (chapter five). Although this is a secondary theme, it should be noted that these chapters also offer an indirect argument for the continuing value and vitality of the Augustinian trinitarian tradition.

In chapter three I explored the relationship between the economic and the immanent Trinity in Mark Heim's trinitarian theology of multiple religious ends. At the root of Heim's proposal is an assumption that the immanent life of the triune God is constituted by three dimensions: "impersonal," "personal" and "communion." These immanent "dimensions" constitute the ontological foundation for multiple religious ends. I argued that Heim's proposal gains traction only by radically severing the economic and the immanent Trinity. First, Heim offers a speculative account of the immanent Trinity as constituted by "three dimensions" that possesses no basis in the *oikonomia* revealed in Scripture. Then, on the basis of a speculative understanding of the immanent Trinity, he outlines a deficient account of the Trinity in the economy of salvation that ultimately undermines the divine *oikonomia* revealed in Scripture. Ultimately, Heim replaces the Trinity of divine persons with a Trinity of dimensions that bears little resemblance to the doctrine of the Trinity confessed in the classic creeds.

In chapter four I explored the relations of the divine persons in two proposals: Amos Yong's pneumatological theology of religions and Jacques Dupuis' Christian theology of religious pluralism. Amos Yong's "foundational pneumatology" is predicated upon a distinction between an "economy" of the Son and an "economy" of

the Spirit. Yong rejects all “subordination” of the Spirit to the Son at the ontological level in order to create space on the economic level for an “economy” of the Spirit separate and distinct from that of the Son. On the basis of a second economy of the Spirit, Yong affirms the presence and activity of the Spirit among non-Christian religions and justifies the use of non-christological criteria for discerning the Spirit’s presence. I argued that Yong’s account of a “distinct” economy of the Spirit ultimately severs the “two hands” of the Father. On trinitarian grounds, Jacques Dupuis argues that non-Christian religions mediate God’s saving grace in such a way that they may legitimately be called “channels of salvation.” In order to create theological space for other saviors and mediators, Dupuis outlines a “trinitarian Christology” in which Jesus Christ is recognized not as “absolute” savior but merely as “constitutive” savior. In the context of this distinction, he insists that God’s saving action is not limited to the Christ-event; on the contrary, an enduring work of the Logos *asarkos* (distinct from the Logos *ensarkos*) continues following the incarnation. I demonstrated that Dupuis’ proposal introduces subordinationism into the Father/Son relationship, undermines the unicity of the economy of salvation and severs the economic and the immanent Trinity.

In chapter five I explored the appeal to the *vestigia trinitatis* in Raimundo Panikkar’s trinitarian account of religious experience. Panikkar claims that the doctrine of the Trinity—an insight not limited to Christians—provides the key to reconciling three irreducible forms of religious experience: “iconolatry,” “personalism” and

“mysticism.” These irreducible forms of spirituality correspond to and reflect the divine persons of the Trinity: “iconolatry” corresponds to the Father, “personalism” corresponds to the Son, and “mysticism” corresponds to the Spirit. Ewert Cousins attempts to build upon Panikkar’s proposal by explicitly linking it to the vestige tradition. He suggests that Panikkar’s three forms of spirituality (iconolatry, personalism, mysticism) represent a *vestigium trinitatis*. Viewed from the standpoint of the vestige tradition, I argued that Panikkar’s project violates the basic theological grammar of the *vestigia*: rather than interpreting a created reality in light of the Trinity, Panikkar reinterprets the doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of an empirical analysis of religious experience. In light of the vast dissimilarity that exists between Creator and creature, I contended that no epistemic warrant exists for reinterpreting the doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of non-Christian religious experience. Moreover, I demonstrated that good reason exists to reject Cousins’ claim that iconolatry, personalism and mysticism should be viewed as a *vestigium trinitatis*. Finally, I argued that Panikkar severs the economic and the immanent Trinity by severing the identification between Jesus of Nazareth and the eternal Son, affirming multiple “economies” that bypass the redemptive work of Christ and positing economic manifestations of the triune God which are incompatible with Christian experience of the triune God described in Scripture. In order to muster support for his theology of religious experience, Panikkar

subtly replaces a Trinity of divine persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) with a trinity of divine transcendence (or emptiness), divine relationality and divine immanence.

6.1 Implications for the Christian Theology of Religions

This brings us to a crucial question: What are the implications of my Augustinian assessment for the claim that “the” doctrine of the Trinity constitutes the key to a Christian theology of religions? Inasmuch as the proposals of Heim, Yong, Dupuis and Panikkar are representative of current appeal to trinitarian doctrine in the Christian theology of religions,¹ there seems to be good reason to question seriously the claim that “the Trinity” offers the key to a new understanding of religious diversity. Although these theologians may agree that “the” Trinity offers the key to understanding religious diversity, no consensus currently exists among these theologians as to *whose* doctrine of the Trinity holds the key. Each of these theologians offers a different account of this doctrine as constitutive ground for a particular understanding of religious diversity. For this reason, it is problematic to speak about “the” doctrine of the Trinity as offering the key to understanding religious diversity. Stephen Williams notes that one of fundamental problems with current appeal to “the” Trinity in the Christian theology of

¹ In chapter one I argued that the proposals of Heim, Yong, Dupuis and Panikkar do indeed provide a representative cross-section of current appeal to the trinitarian doctrine in the Christian theology of religions.

religions is the absence of any substantive discussion of criteria for what constitutes a legitimate (i.e., orthodox) understanding of the Trinity.²

Furthermore, from an Augustinian perspective, current use of trinitarian theology in the Christian theology of religions appears to be having a deleterious effect upon the doctrine itself. Under pressure to accommodate religious pluralism, Heim, Dupuis, Yong and Panikkar reinterpret trinitarian doctrine in order to support their constructive accounts of religious diversity. To argue for the validity of other religious ends, Heim substitutes a trinity of dimensions for the Trinity of persons. To argue that non-Christian religions are channels of salvation, Dupuis posits subordination in the immanent life of the triune God. To argue for a distinct economy of the Spirit, Yong severs the two hands of God. To argue for the validity of three irreducible forms of religious experience, Panikkar replaces the Trinity of divine persons with a trinity of divine emptiness, divine relationality and divine immanence. An inverse relationship exists between the orthodoxy of the trinitarian doctrine employed in these proposals and the degree to which trinitarian doctrine can be used to support the independent validity of other religions. A more blatant form of this problem can be seen in the work of John Hick. In an essay entitled, "Rethinking Christian Doctrine in Light of Religious Pluralism," Hick suggests that in order for Christians to address the challenge of

² See Williams, "The Trinity and 'Other Religions,'" 27-30.

religious diversity, they do not have to abandon any of the great teachings of the Christian faith.³ Rather, these “themes” simply need to be “reinterpreted” in ways that are consistent with the affirmation that other religions represent independent ways of experiencing “salvation/liberation.” Christians, for example, need not reject “Son of God” language; they simply must understand this language as describing a special servant of God rather than denoting the ontological incarnation. Similarly, “We do not need to reject the idea of the Trinity, but to understand it in its modalistic rather than ontological sense.”⁴ When we think of the “Trinity” as describing “three ways in which the one God is humanly thought and experienced,” no problem exists with affirming “the idea of the Trinity” alongside the validity of non-Christian religions.⁵ I am not suggesting that the theologians I have examined hold a view of the Trinity similar to that of Hick. Unlike Hick, each of these theologians would want to understand themselves as operating within the norms of Christian orthodoxy as represented in the classic creeds. Rather, I am pointing out that a similar methodological process seems to

³ “In order to continue to be Christians in a religiously plural world, we do not have to reject any of the great traditional themes of Christian thought; but we do need to use them in ways that are appropriate to our own situation in a world which has become consciously one.” John Hick, “Rethinking Christian Doctrine in the Light of Religious Pluralism,” in *Christianity and the Wider Ecumenism.*, ed. Peter C. Phan (New York: Paragon House, 1990), 101. Although Hick refers to them as “doctrines” in the title of this essay, in the above quotation, he simply refers to them merely as “themes.”

⁴ Hick, “Rethinking Christian Doctrine in the Light of Religious Pluralism,” 101.

⁵ “The other kind of trinitarianism, and the one that coheres better with a non-absolutist Christology sees the ‘persons’ of the Trinity, not as ontologically three but as three-fold from our human point of view—as three ways in which the one God is humanly thought and experienced.” Hick, “Rethinking Christian Doctrine,” 98.

be at work—namely, revising trinitarian doctrine in order to ground a theology of religious diversity. The trinitarian problems I have documented in this investigation are not limited to the Christian theology of religions. Briefly reflecting on this reality will serve to contextualize the problems I have already identified and pave the way for rethinking the “relevancy” of the Trinity.

6.2 Similar Problems in Contemporary Theology

In the discussion that follows I will briefly explore two important parallels that exist between use of trinitarian doctrine in the Christian theology of religions and broader trinitarian theology: (1) similar *claims* regarding the doctrine of the Trinity as providing the key to some aspect of Christian doctrine or practice and (2) similar methodological *problems* that arise from employing trinitarian doctrine to these ends.

6.2.1 Similar Trinitarian Claims

Just as a number of Christian theologians insist that the doctrine of the Trinity holds the key to a Christian theology of religions, other theologians assert that the Trinity provides the key to a proper understanding human personhood, marriage, church government, societal relations, ecology, etc.⁶ For example, building upon the

⁶ On the one hand, this assumption can be traced back to Barth when he says that the doctrine of the Trinity must shape all of dogmatics: “In giving this doctrine a place of prominence our concern cannot be merely that it have this place externally but rather that its content be decisive and controlling for the whole of

work of John Zizioulas, Colin Gunton argues that the doctrine of the Trinity provides the key to a proper understanding of what it means to be a “person.” Two competing accounts of personhood vie for allegiance in the modern world. The first can be traced to Descartes who identified the person with the mind.⁷ An alternative (and clearly preferable) understanding of personhood can be found in the work of John Macmurray. In his Gifford Lectures entitled “Persons in Relation,” Macmurray suggests that persons are constituted by their relations: to be a “person” is to be in “relation” with others. Although Macmurray makes no reference to God as triune, Gunton suggests that Macmurray’s account of person as “constituted by relation” has deep roots in Scripture (particularly the Gospel of John).⁸ Moreover, antecedents to Macmurray’s work can also be seen in the trinitarian theology of Richard of St. Victor who understands Father, Son and Holy Spirit as “persons in relation.”⁹ According to Gunton, these competing understandings of personhood (person as individual and person as constituted by relation) are rooted in two competing accounts of the Trinity.¹⁰ The former is modeled on a (deficient) “Augustinian” understanding of the Trinity while the latter is modeled

dogmatics.” Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, 303. On the other hand, it seems difficult to believe that the examples that follow represent the kind of “decisive” influence Barth had in mind.

⁷ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 91. According to Gunton, Descartes’ dualistic understanding of personhood supports an individualist understanding of what it means to be human.

⁸ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 91.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

on a “Cappadocian” understanding of the Trinity: “The Cappadocian tradition is saying about the persons in God what John Macmurray said about (human) persons in community: ‘the other remains essentially other. Each realizes himself in and through the other.’ The uniqueness of each person is thus preserved, but without the destructive lapse into individualism.”¹¹

Gunton also asserts that the doctrine of the Trinity provides the key to a proper understanding of the Church: “[T]he manifest inadequacy of the theology of the church derives from the fact that it has never seriously and consistently been rooted in a conception of the being of God as triune.”¹² According to Gunton, ecclesiology has largely been dominated by monistic and hierarchical conceptions of the church that are rooted in a Neoplatonic ontology. A more satisfactory ontology is needed in order to arrive at a proper understanding of the church. The latter can be found in the doctrine of the Trinity: “the sole proper ontological basis for the church is the being of God, who is what he is as the communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”¹³ The “being” of church analogically mirrors the immanent being of the triune God: “[T]he church is what it is by

¹¹ Gunton continues, “The logically irreducible concept of person as one whose uniqueness and particularity derive from relations to others was developed by the Eastern Fathers in the heat of their concern for the loyalty of the Christian Church to the biblical understanding of God.” Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 97-98.

¹² *Ibid.*, 58.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 72.

virtue of being called to be a *temporal echo* of the eternal community that God is.”¹⁴ The church echoes the “perichoretic interrelation” of the divine persons.¹⁵ As a result, no subordination should mark relationships in the Christian community. On the contrary, structures of equality should exist that reflect “the free personal relations which constitute the deity.”¹⁶ Similar claims regarding the Trinity as model for the church can also be found in the writings of Daniel Migliore,¹⁷ Catherine LaCugna,¹⁸ John Zizioulas¹⁹ and Miroslav Volf.²⁰

¹⁴ Ibid., 79 (italics mine). Similarly, “In the previous section there has been attempted an ontology of the church, in which it was suggested that a movement, carefully controlled by an apophatic doctrine of the immanent Trinity, can be made between a doctrine of God and a doctrine of the church. The relation between the latter and the former has already been described as an ‘echoing’: the being of the church should echo the dynamic of the relations between the three persons who together constitute the deity. The church is called to be the kind of reality at a finite level that God is in eternity. Can further account be given of this analogy? Most obviously, it can be said that the doctrine of the Trinity is being used to suggest ways of allowing the eternal becoming of God—the eternally interanimating energies of the three—to provide the basis for the personal dynamics of the community” (ibid., 81).

¹⁵ Ibid., 82.

¹⁶ Ibid., 80.

¹⁷ According to Migliore, “The thesis is that trinitarian doctrine provides the key to a proper theology of community. Genuine human community has its ultimate basis in the communion of the triune God.” Daniel L. Migliore, “The Communion of the Triune God: Towards a Trinitarian Ecclesiology in Reformed Perspective,” in *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity*. Edited by Wallace M. Alston, Jr. and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 140.

¹⁸ Although trinitarian doctrine may not specify the exact forms of structure and community appropriate to the church, it does provide a critical principle to evaluate them: they should be “structured according to the model of *perichoresis* among persons.” Catherine M. LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 402.

¹⁹ “[T]he Church must reflect in her very being the way God exists, i.e., the way of personal communion. . . . The fact that God reveals to us His existence as one of personal communion is decisive in our understanding of the nature of the Church. It implies that when we say the Church is *koinonia*, we mean no other kind of communion but the very personal communion between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It also implies that the Church is *by definition incompatible with individualism*; her fabric is communion is and

In *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God*, Eugene Rogers argues that Christian marriage—gay and straight—should mirror the love of the Father for the Son to which the Spirit bears witness.²¹ Within creation, God “enables distant but appropriate correlates to the trinitarian love-in-freedom also for human love, structured by space and time.”²² Marriage, therefore, “bears an analogy to the trinitarian life” within the confines of time and space.²³ Because the ultimate analogue for marriage is the life of the triune God, straight and gay marriages should be recognized as legitimate:

The ‘family resemblance’ by which same-sex marriages deserve to be called marriages is not primarily their resemblance to opposite-sex unions, although the family resemblance is close enough, with children or without. The family resemblance by which same-sex unions deserve to be called marriages is the same resemblance by which Christians justify calling opposite-sex unions marriages: their resemblance to the marriage of Christ and the Church.²⁴

Similarly, in an essay entitled “The Trinitarian Vocation of the Gay Community,” Daneil Helminiak argues the “intra-trinitarian life of God” constitutes the model for gay and lesbian Christians.²⁵ Helminiak suggests that four parallels exist between the intra-

personal relatedness.” John D. Zizioulas, “The Church as Communion,” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 38 (1994): 7-8 (italics original).

²⁰ Miroslav Volf. *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 191-220.

²¹ Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

²² *Ibid.*, 202-203.

²³ *Ibid.*, 201.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 211.

²⁵ Daniel A. Helminiak, “The Trinitarian Vocation of the Gay Community,” *Pastoral Psychology* 36 (1987): 100.

trinitarian relations of the Father, Son and Spirit and gay/lesbian relations: (1) relations in which gender is not an issue, (2) relations which constitute persons as persons, (3) relations in which persons are equal, and (4) relations in which personal identity is not lost.²⁶ Gay and lesbian persons are called “to contribute to the fulfillment of a central aspect of Christ’s work, to reproduce on earth the inner-trinitarian life of God in heaven.”²⁷

In *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, Leonardo Boff presents the “perfect community” of the divine persons as the blueprint for societal relations.²⁸ Boff wants to see an earthly society developed that will reflect the “perichoretic” unity of the divine persons: “We seek a society that will be more an image and likeness of the Trinity, that will better reflect on the earth the trinitarian communion of heaven, and that will make it easier for us to know the mystery of communion of the divine three.”²⁹ He believes that the longing for egalitarian forms of society finds its basis in the communion of the divine persons.³⁰ Similarly, Thomas Scirghi asserts that “the Trinity provides a model for

²⁶ Ibid., 105-107.

²⁷ Ibid., 109.

²⁸ Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2000), 66.

²⁹ Ibid., xiv.

³⁰ “We likewise observe in social processes today an immense desire for participation, democratization, and change, aiming at forging a more egalitarian, participatory, pluralistic, and family-spirited society. This yearning is in tune with a trinitarian understanding of God. Indeed, it finds in Christian faith in God as communion of three divine persons the transcendent utopia of all human strivings for forms that are more participatory, communal, and respecting of diversity.” Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, xiii. Naturally,

belonging to a community, specifically the communities of the church as well as for society as a whole.”³¹ Greater awareness of trinitarian doctrine “will help expose the inherent individualism of the current consumer ideology, and foster a genuine means of belonging.”³² Reflecting on the relationships of men and women in society, Margaret Farley argues that “the very life of the Trinitarian God” should be the “ultimate normative model” for male/female relationships.³³ In the latter context, “equality, mutuality and reciprocity” serve as “a norm against which every pattern of relationship may be measured” as well as a goal toward which every relationship moves.³⁴ Similar themes regarding the Trinity as model for societal relations are echoed in the writings of other contemporary theologians.

In *Trinity and the Kingdom* Jürgen Moltmann argues that the doctrine of the Trinity provides the model of and basis for egalitarian political structures.³⁵ According to Moltmann, early Christians won over educated members of the Roman Empire by

Boff locates the Church within this vision as well: “If, however, we take as our starting point that the Blessed Trinity is the perfect community, and that the communion of the divine Three makes them one God, then we will see another type of church emerge. It is fundamentally community. . . . Each one, insofar as he or she creates community and becomes part of that communion, represents the Blessed Trinity” (ibid., 66).

³¹ Thomas J. Scirghi, “The Trinity: A Model for Belonging in Contemporary Society.” *Ecumenical Review* 54 (2002): 333.

³² Ibid., 341.

³³ Margaret A. Farley, “New Patterns of Relationship: Beginnings of a Moral Revolution,” *Theological Studies* 36 (1975): 645.

³⁴ Ibid., 646.

³⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

proclaiming a form of “philosophical monotheism.”³⁶ Theologians like Justin, Tatian and Tertullian spoke of God’s rule in term of *monarchia*. This “monotheistic monarchianism” proved to be a “seductive religious-political ideology” when it was used to support the hegemony of the Roman Empire: “The universal ruler in Rome had only to be the image and correspondence of the universal ruler in heaven.”³⁷ Arianism and Sabellianism represent the most significant examples of “monotheistic monarchianism.” Rather than starting with a philosophical account of divine oneness, trinitarian reflection must begin with the three divine persons.³⁸ According to Moltmann, the unity of the three divine persons should not be sought in “the homogeneity of the one divine substance” or “the identity of the absolute subject.”³⁹ Rather, it “must be perceived in the *perichoresis* of the divine Persons.”⁴⁰ By means of their eternal love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in one another to such a degree that they are “one.”⁴¹ “Perichoresis” provides a link between threeness and unity without reducing one divine person to another.⁴² Properly understood, “perichoresis” rules out

³⁶ Ibid., 130.

³⁷ Ibid., 131.

³⁸ Ibid., 149.

³⁹ Ibid., 150.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 150 (italics original).

⁴¹ Ibid., 175.

⁴² Ibid., 175.

any form of subordinationism within the divine life.⁴³ Having established “perichoresis” as that which constitutes the unity of God, Moltmann turns to the implications of this doctrine for political and clerical structures. The doctrine of the Trinity is a “doctrine of freedom” inasmuch as it counters political and clerical monotheism: “It is only when the doctrine of the Trinity vanquishes the monotheistic notion of the great universal monarch in heaven, and his divine patriarchs in the world, that earthly rulers, dictators and tyrants cease to find any justifying religious archetypes any more.”⁴⁴ Thus, a political theology which is explicitly Christian will support political structures that reflect the perichoretic unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁴⁵ Similarly, a clerical theology that reflects the perichoretic unity of the divine persons will not allow the unity and authority of the church to be concentrated in a single person (e.g., a Pope).⁴⁶ In contrast, “the doctrine of the Trinity constitutes the church as a ‘community free of

⁴³ “Finally, through the concept of perichoresis, all subordinationism in the doctrine of the Trinity is avoided. It is true that the Trinity is constituted with the Father as the starting point, inasmuch as he is understood as ‘the origin of the Godhead’. But this ‘monarchy of the Father’ only applies to the *constitution* of the Trinity. It has no validity with in the eternal circulation of the divine life, and none in the perichoretic unity of the Trinity. Here the three Persons are equal; they live and are manifested in one another and through one another.” Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 175-76.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 197.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 198-200.

⁴⁶ Moltmann argues that the “theological justification of papal authority and unity of the church it guarantees is visibly dominated by the monotheistic way of thinking.” Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 201

dominion."⁴⁷ The forms of church government that best reflect the social Trinity include "the presbyterial and synodal church order based on brotherly advice."⁴⁸

Wanting to connect Trinity and political thought, Michael Himes and Kenneth Himes argue that the doctrine of the Trinity constitutes the basis for human rights.⁴⁹ When the Trinity is presented as a description of the inner life of God, "the central Christian symbol is robbed of its depth and transformative power."⁵⁰ The central insight of the Trinity is that "to be" is to be "in relationship." In such a context, "loving" and "being" are identical.⁵¹ Within the divine life, existence does not precede relationship: "Thus the doctrine of the Trinity is an essentially and radically political statement: it maintains that not only is human existence social but that the ground of all being is relationship."⁵² A public theology which is grounded in this doctrine "provides the deepest foundation possible within the Christian tradition for the rejection of the individualistic bias which can distort the ethic of human rights as it is commonly

⁴⁷ Ibid., 202.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 202.

⁴⁹ Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, *Fullness of Faith: The Public Significance of Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 55-73.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 56.

⁵¹ Ibid., 59.

⁵² Ibid., 59.

understood."⁵³ "Human rights" are grounded in the trinitarian life which is characterized by "self-giving."⁵⁴

From a different angle, Neil Pembroke presents the Trinity as a model for the therapeutic relation of a counselor to a client.⁵⁵ More specifically, he argues that three forms of love ("agape," "eros" and "philia") that are expressed toward a client through a technique called "pastoral mirroring" analogically reflect the divine persons of the Trinity.⁵⁶ In arguing that agape, eros and philia image the triune God, Pembroke claims that he is building upon the work of Augustine and Aquinas.

Wanting to relate Trinity and mission, David Bjork explores the implications of the doctrine of the Trinity for Christian mission in post-Christian lands (specifically

⁵³ Ibid., 59.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 73.

⁵⁵ Neil F. Pembroke, "Trinity, Love, and Pastoral Mirroring," *Pastoral Psychology* 53 (2004): 163-173.

⁵⁶ "The unity in the meaning of the divine love is found in God's gift of God's self for the world. This loving self-communication is, however, expressed in three ways: the Father is the Originating Lover; the Son the incarnation of that Love; and the Spirit is the living power of that Love available in the world. In making the analogical move, I will suggest that human love is also one and three. Our love is always a communion between lover and beloved in which each one wants the best for the other. While there is this unity in the meaning of human love, it also has three distinct forms: agape, eros, and philia. With this in mind, I want to argue the thesis that positive mirroring is an act of love in which agapic, erotic, and filial elements are all expressed. The fullness of divine love is expressed in and through the participation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is no division or separation in divine loving, but there is particularity. Each person manifests the divine love in a particular way. In the agapic, erotic, and filial love expressed by the pastoral counselor in and through her mirroring, we see an image of the love of the triune God." Pembroke, "Trinity, Love, and Pastoral Mirroring," 164.

France).⁵⁷ “My thesis is that a proper understanding of how the one, living and true God has manifested himself as a trinity of persons within a fundamental and absolute unity (as described by the Greek word *perichoresis*) furnishes us with a paradigm which might inform missionary endeavors in post-Christendom lands.”⁵⁸ Bjork suggests that the perichoretic unity of the divine persons provides a model for how Protestant missionaries (such as himself) should relate to Catholics in post-Christian France.⁵⁹ To this end, Bjork identifies five missional implications that follow from a proper understanding of the unity of the divine persons. First, unity between evangelicals and Catholics in France must be “interpersonal, not organizational.”⁶⁰ Second, unity between evangelicals and Catholics should be marked by “constantly interacting cooperation.”⁶¹ Just as Father, Son and Spirit work together in the economy of salvation, so also Catholics and evangelicals should work together. Third, the form of unity that exists must “preserve intact the identity and properties of each other.”⁶² As a result, two distinct forms of witness in France (Catholic and evangelical) are both legitimate.

⁵⁷ David Bjork, “Toward a Trinitarian Understanding of Mission in Post-Christendom Lands,” *Missiology* 27 (1999): 231-244.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁵⁹ “I submit that the perichoretic unity of the Trinity is an example, pattern, or model that provides an unmistakable source of contextuality, comprehensiveness, and coherence to missional endeavors in post-Christendom lands.” Bjork, “Toward a Trinitarian Understanding of Mission, 242, note 3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 237.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 239.

Fourth, unity between evangelicals and Catholics must “build interdependence whereby the members are defined based on their relationships with the others.”⁶³ One group (e.g., evangelicals) should not try to define itself apart from another (e.g., Catholics). Finally, unity reflecting divine *perichoresis* should involve “pouring ourselves into the other.”⁶⁴

In an essay entitled, “Trinitarian Ecology,” David Williams explores the implications of trinitarian belief for a Christian understanding of environment.⁶⁵ According to Williams, “God’s very being as immanent Trinity also has ecological implications.”⁶⁶ Reasoning from the assumption the creation should reflect its triune Creator, he explains that trinitarian doctrine provides a model for the proper functioning of the environment. Although it may be too much “to expect to see every facet of Trinitarian belief as reflected in ecology,” the “essential nature of the Trinity is to be found, and is indeed valuable in understanding how the world should interrelate.”⁶⁷ The insight of the doctrine of the Trinity is that both “unity” and “distinctiveness” must

⁶³ Ibid., 239.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 240.

⁶⁵ David T. Williams, “Trinitarian Ecology,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 18 (2000): 142-59.

⁶⁶ “The doctrine of the Trinity however provides far more than evidence of God’s care for the world, and a motivation for human care for it, however much this would otherwise be little more than empty hope. If the world is a creation of the triune God, what may be expected is that this triunity would be reflected in the way things are. Not only does God’s action as the economic Trinity provide an example for human action, but God’s very being as immanent Trinity also has ecological implications.” Williams, “Trinitarian Ecology,” 148.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 149.

co-exist in the divine life.⁶⁸ Just as “distinctiveness” and “oneness” are equally essential in the Trinity such that “neither may be affirmed at the expense of the other,” so “the heart of a correct ecology” is found in a proper balance between unity (inter-relationship) and diversity. Just as interrelatedness exists among the divine persons, so interrelatedness must obtain among living things. Furthermore, just as inter-trinitarian relationships are “stable and eternal,” so also the world should have a stable ecosystem.⁶⁹ Williams suggests that important parallels exist between the two great trinitarian heresies (Arianism and Sabellianism) and improper ecological attitudes. Just as Arianism improperly subordinated the Son to the Father, “Ecological Arianism” improperly subordinates the creation to human beings.⁷⁰ “Ecological Arianism” fails to recognize that human beings and the rest of creation “share an equality of essence” inasmuch as all things share “life.”⁷¹ Just as Sabellianism views Father, Son and Holy Spirit as a single entity acting in different ways according to particular circumstances, so “Ecological Sabellianism” possesses a deficient understanding of change (e.g., viewing

⁶⁸ Ibid., 149.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 153.

⁷⁰ “Ecologically, the Arian subordination of the Son to the Father is paralleled in the dominion of human over the rest of the created order.” Williams, “Trinitarian Ecology,” 154.

⁷¹ Ibid., 154.

changing circumstances as justification for exploitation of the environment).⁷²

“Ecological Sabellianism” also assumes wrongly that change must involve loss.⁷³ A

correct view of the Trinity can lead to a proper perspective on the environment that will

benefit the latter rather than harming it.⁷⁴

Finally, K. Helmut Reich argues that the doctrine of the Trinity provides a model for relating theology and science.⁷⁵ The relationship between theology and science, notes Reich, is particularly difficult. Some understand the relation of these two disciplines in terms of perpetual conflict while others view these disciplines as completely independent of one another; many see a need for some form of integration. One promising approach to the integration of theology and science involves what Reich calls “multilevel/multilogical” analysis based on the recognition that science and theology offer complementary explanations.⁷⁶ Reich suggests that an analogy exists between the complex multilevel thought process required to explain the doctrine of the

⁷² Ibid., 157. From a different perspective, “Ecological Sabellianism” may assume that “outside the ecosystem there is then no other reality.” Williams, “Trinitarian Ecology,” 158. This form of “Ecological Sabellianism” fails to realize that God intervenes in the world.

⁷³ Williams, “Trinitarian Ecology,” 159.

⁷⁴ “A correct view of the Trinity gives a correct perspective on each and so when paralleled in the environment would benefit rather than harm it. Indeed, a Trinitarian attitude, respecting the value of every part of the environment, its diversity and interdependence, will benefit each part, and so ultimately humanity.” Williams, “Trinitarian Ecology,” 159.

⁷⁵ K. Helmut Reich, “The Doctrine of the Trinity as a Model for Structuring the Relations Between Science and Theology,” *Zygon* 30 (1995): 383-405.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 396.

Trinity and the complex forms of analysis required to relate theology and science. In addition, significant parallels exist between concepts employed in explaining the doctrine of the divine persons and concepts employed in explaining scientific phenomena including “diversity in unity, multiplicity of relationships, nonseparability and nonclassic logic.”⁷⁷ Finally, he points out that parallels may exist between the unity and diversity of the Trinity and the unity and diversity of theological and scientific explanations.⁷⁸ Also wanting to relate Trinity and science, Colin Gunton asserts that a parallel exists between “concepts generated by theology, and particularly trinitarian theology” and the forms of conceptuality “in some of the discoveries of modern science.”⁷⁹ For example, an important parallel exists between Michael Faraday’s account of the mutual interrelation of atoms (which represented an important shift away from simply viewing atoms as discrete substances), and the classic Christian understanding of the Trinity: “What we have in Faraday is a kind of doctrine of perichoresis, the interpenetration, of matter. As the three persons of the Trinity interpenetrate the beings

⁷⁷ Ibid., 383.

⁷⁸ “For instance, the unity of the three personae in spite of their diversity is a permanent reminder that unity does not mean uniformity (e.g., Welker, 1992, 33-34). If Trinitarian thinking is present, a search for a balance between diversity and unity should be a continuing undertaking (cf. MacFague, 1993, 91-97). Furthermore, the Trinity is a model for relationships which differ widely from one another . . .” Reich, “The Doctrine of the Trinity as a Model for Structuring the Relations Between Science and Theology,” 397-98.

⁷⁹ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 145.

of others, so it is with the matter of which the world has been made.”⁸⁰ Gunton suggests that three elements of trinitarian doctrine find “echoes” in contemporary scientific thought: the concept of relation, the concept of freedom and the concept of energy (which parallels a “dynamic” rather than “static” understanding of the being of God).⁸¹ Relativity theory applies to the physical universe a concept of “relations” that parallels trinitarian relations.⁸² In addition, the universe possesses a dynamic structure that reflects the energies of the divine persons. As a result, the whole universe “becomes conceivable as a dynamic structure of fields of force in mutually constitutive relations.”⁸³

6.2.2 Similar Methodological Problems

Not only does one encounter similar trinitarian *claims*, but similar methodological *problems* also arise from attempts to relate trinitarian doctrine to a variety of contemporary concerns. I will explore these problems under three headings: Trinity and Scripture, appeals to the immanent Trinity, and the notion of the Trinity as a methodological principle.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 145.

⁸¹ Ibid., 148-50.

⁸² Ibid., 156-57.

⁸³ Ibid., 157.

6.2.2.1 Trinity and Scripture: Severed Moorings

As Alister McGrath rightly notes, problems inevitably arise anytime trinitarian speculation “los[es] its moorings in the language of Scripture.”⁸⁴ This problem can be seen in many of the proposals outlined above. Moorings to Scripture are severed, for example, when theologians build an entire social project upon a speculative account of the unity of the divine persons (e.g., “perichoresis”). Another example of severed moorings can be seen in the attempt to use trinitarian doctrine to ground the legitimacy of same-sex unions. Since both same-sex and opposite-sex unions can mirror perichoretic love of the Father, Son and Spirit (who themselves are beyond gender), both types of unions are said to be legitimate. Within the theology of religions, the problem of severed moorings can be seen most clearly in the work of Panikkar and Heim. Both ground a theology of religions in a highly speculative account of the Trinity that is inadequately rooted in the Scriptural revelation of the triune God. Moreover, Panikkar and Heim use a speculative conception of the Trinity to subvert the teaching of Scripture.

Sometimes these severed moorings are far more subtle. Within contemporary discourse the terms “Trinity” and “trinitarian” sometimes do not refer to anything

⁸⁴ Alister McGrath, “The Doctrine of the Trinity: An Evangelical Reflection,” in *God the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice*, ed., Timothy George (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 30.

“christological” or “pneumatological.”⁸⁵ This problematic state of affairs stands in sharp contrast to Augustine who (along with all early Christian theologians) makes no methodological distinction between “trinitarian theology” and “christology.”⁸⁶ When “trinitarian” doctrine is used to undermine key “Christological” or “pneumatological” claims we are encountering severed moorings. Another example of severed moorings can be seen in a development that took place within the ecumenical movement in the late sixties. There was a conscious shift away from a “Christocentric” understanding of mission toward a “trinitarian” understanding of mission. In response to Konrad Raisers’s endorsement of the latter shift, Lesslie Newbigin expresses the following concern: “What gives ground for anxiety here is the positing of a trinitarian model *against* the model of Christocentric universalism.”⁸⁷ Newbigin points out that the doctrine of the Trinity was not developed to provide a model for “participatory democracy” but rather to account for the facts “that constitute the substance of the gospel.”⁸⁸ Hence, “To set a trinitarian paradigm over against a Christological one, and

⁸⁵ “When ‘trinitarian’ occurs in titles these days, it is almost never a signal that anything about divine triunity is in view, or even anything christological or pneumatological.” Fred Sanders, “Trinity Talk, Again.” *Dialog* 44 (2005): 264.

⁸⁶ For a helpful discussion of this reality along with its implications for how one should read patristic theology, see John Behr, *The Formation of Christian Theology*, vol. 2, *The Nicene Faith* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), 1-17 and 475-81.

⁸⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, “The Trinity as Public Truth,” in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 7 (*italics original*).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

to commend it as corresponding to an egalitarian climate of opinion, would surely be a disastrous mistake.”⁸⁹ It was only through its recognition that Jesus is “Lord” that the church eventually came to recognize that God is Trinity.⁹⁰ Similar problems can be seen in the work of Dupuis and Yong. Dupuis uses “trinitarian” claims to undermine Christian teaching regarding the person and work of Christ while Yong uses trinitarian claims to undermine Christian teaching about the unity of the “two hands” of the Father in the economy of salvation.⁹¹

To the contrary, only when theological reflection is “bound by the actual details of God’s self-revelation in economy” will the kind of problems outlined above be avoided.⁹² To frame this problem in terms of the relationship between the economic and the immanent Trinity, we must recognize that while the immanent Trinity constitutes

⁸⁹ Ibid., 7.

⁹⁰ “The Church learned to worship God as Trinity only because through the atoning work of Christ men and women have been brought to know Jesus as Savior and Lord and have been enabled by the gift of the Holy Spirit to be incorporated into the eternal offering of love and obedience of the Son of the Father. A trinitarian understanding of God cannot become part of public truth except through the acknowledgement of the universal lordship and saviorhood of Jesus Christ. To posit a trinitarian model as an alternative to the model of Christocentric universalism would surely be a grave mistake.” Newbiggin, “The Trinity as Public Truth,” 8.

⁹¹ Perhaps the most blatant attempt to use “trinitarian” doctrine to undermine key “Christological” claims can be seen in John Hick’s call for a “Copernican revolution” in which Christians to move from being “Christocentric” to “theocentric.” See John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1973), 120-32.

⁹² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 365. LaCugna points out that “Theology derives its freedom and limits from its character as doxology. In one sense the theological mode of speaking of God is far more proscribed than any other way of speaking about God, for example, philosophically, because the theologian is bound by the actual details of God’s self-revelation in the economy. The economy places limits upon the kinds of conclusions the theologian may draw.” LaCugna, *God for Us*, 365.

the *ontological* basis for the economic, we must never forget that the economic revelation of the triune God constitutes the sole *epistemological* foundation for our knowledge of the immanent Trinity.

6.2.2.2 Problematic Appeal to the Immanent Trinity

For Gunton, the immanent Trinity offers a model for the ecclesial structure of the church. For Boff, the immanent Trinity offers a model for egalitarian societal relations. For Moltmann, the immanent Trinity offers a model for egalitarian political structures. For Pembroke, the immanent Trinity is a model for counselor-client relations. For Bjork the immanent Trinity offers a model for relations between Protestant missionaries and Catholic leaders in France. For Williams, the immanent Trinity offers a model for the proper balance between unity and diversity in the environment. For Reich, the immanent Trinity offers a model for relationship of theology and science. For Panikkar, the immanent Trinity offers a model for the three types of religious experience. The examples could be multiplied. This tendency to treat the immanent Trinity as “model” is ubiquitous in contemporary theology. Although the vast majority of these proposals which treat the Trinity as “model” make no explicit reference to the vestige tradition, they implicitly appeal to the basic logic of the vestige tradition—namely that assumption that some created reality (church, person, etc.) substantively reflects the triunity of God. We will see shortly that this state of affairs provides an important clue for evaluating

them. There are at least four problems with employing a doctrine of the immanent Trinity as “model” in the examples cited above.

First, the appeal to the doctrine of immanent Trinity in these proposals is highly selective. It is not the entire doctrine which constitutes a “model” but rather some specific aspect of the doctrine such as the “equality” of the divine persons or their “perichoretic” unity. Other aspects of the doctrine—such as the “threeness” of God or the processions—are simply ignored.⁹³ The selective nature of contemporary appeal to the immanent Trinity can be seen most clearly in relation to medieval vestige tradition. When contemporary thinkers look back on the medieval search for vestiges of the triune God in creation, they sometimes find it odd that medieval thinkers thought they could find instances of the “threeness” everywhere. That many moderns find this odd simply reflects the selective nature of contemporary appeal to the immanent Trinity. What justifies such a selective appeal? Who determines which aspects of the doctrine are to be

⁹³ For example, how many proposals which treat the immanent Trinity as “model” for ecclesial structures ever appeal in any substantive way to the “threeness” of God? Contemporary theologians frequently argue that there should be no ecclesial hierarchy in the church because of the “equality” that exists among the divine persons. But why not argue that the “threeness” of God constitutes the model for a church with three “equal” yet “distinct” branches of governing authority: an executive branch (corresponding to the Father), a legislative branch (corresponding to the Word) and a judicial branch (corresponding to the Spirit who is described in John’s gospel as “Counselor”)? In response, a critic might point out that my notion of “threeness” is too abstract: the doctrine of the Trinity is not about numerical “threeness” but about the Father, Son and Spirit. The problem with this criticism is that it cuts both ways: the notion of “equality” employed in many appeals to “perichoresis” is equally abstract. Thus, in response, one could similarly argue that the doctrine of the Trinity is not about “equality” but about relations of origin that obtain between the Father, Son and Spirit.

ignored? One striking feature about Augustine's search for reflections of the triune God in creation is the way in which the *entire doctrine* provides the blueprint for his search for a reflection of the triune God in the divine image in the *mens*. One example of highly selective appeal to the immanent Trinity in the Christian theology of religions would be Heim's appeal to precisely *three* "dimensions" of the triune life which ground his theology of multiple religious ends. The primary continuity between Heim's "dimensions" and orthodox trinitarian teaching is essentially the number "three."

Second, these theologians wrongly assume that the *immanent* Trinity offers a ready-made blueprint for marital, societal, ecclesial, political ecological and even inter-religious structures. To construe a doctrine of the immanent Trinity as providing such a blueprint rests on a distorted understanding of what it means for a doctrine of the Trinity to be "relevant." In an essay entitled, "Is the Trinity a Practical Doctrine?" Ola Sigurdson argues that the doctrine is not "practical" in the sense that one can "construe a more or less complete social program" from it.⁹⁴ Even Catherine LaCugna who championed the "practical" nature of trinitarian doctrine acknowledges, "The practical nature of the doctrine of the Trinity does not mean it is a pragmatic principle that furnishes an easy solution to war or violence, or yields a blueprint for a catechetical

⁹⁴ Ola Sigurdson, "Is the Trinity a practical doctrine?" in *The Concept of God in Global Dialogue*, ed. Werner G. Jeanrond and Aasulv Lande (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2005), 121.

program, or settles vexing disagreements over the church's public prayer."⁹⁵ It is important to recognize that Scripture does not exhort Christians to imitate the *immanent* life of the triune God apart from the economy of salvation. Rather, imitation takes place on the economic level: it is a redemptive relation with the triune God precisely *in* the economy of salvation that constitutes the "model" for Christian imitation.⁹⁶ Thus, Paul exhorts Christians to imitate him not as he imitates the *intra-trinitarian life* of the triune God but rather to imitate him as he imitates the *incarnate* Christ (1 Cor. 4:15-16; 11:1; 1 Thes. 1:6; and Phil. 3:17). Similarly, the model for Christian love in the New Testament is the self-giving of the Son *on the cross*: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:1-2, ESV). The model for Christian marriage is not the immanent life of the triune God but the love of Christ *for the church* as expressed in the cross (Eph. 5:21-33). The model for Christian humility is not some form of intra-trinitarian kenosis (*à la* von Balthasar) but the economic self-emptying of the Son "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the

⁹⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 379.

⁹⁶ Notice how Augustine emphasizes modeling our lives after Christ: "Thus, to conclude, it is not surprising that scripture should be speaking about the Son when it speaks about wisdom, on account of the model which the image who is equal to the Father provides us with that we may be refashioned to the image of God; for we follow the Son by living wisely." Augustine, *De Trin.*, VII.5, 223.

likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:6-8, ESV). Similarly, the intra-trinitarian relations of the divine persons do not provide a blueprint for Christian mission. Thus, to suggest that Protestants and Catholics should work together while maintaining distinct ecclesial identities because the Father, Son and Spirit work together while maintaining distinct hypostatic identities is unwarranted. Christian mission is constituted by imitating some aspect of the intra-trinitarian life but by *participating* in the continuing mission of the Son and Spirit in the economy of salvation: "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21b, ESV). Returning to the theology of religions, the immanent life of the triune God should *not* be seen as a model for the unity and distinction between Christianity and other religions.⁹⁷

In response to the previous point, one might argue that several New Testament texts do appear to treat the immanent life of the triune God as a "model" for human

⁹⁷ The following statements exemplify the assumption that the immanent life of the triune God should be seen as a blueprint for unity and distinction between Christianity and other religions: "God has something to do with the fact that a diversity of independent ways of salvation appears in the history of the world. This diversity reflects the diversity or plurality within the divine life itself, of which the Christian doctrine of the Trinity provides an account. The mystery of the Trinity is for Christians the ultimate foundation for pluralism." Peter C. Hodgson, "The Spirit and Religious Pluralism," in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2005), 136. Similarly, "It is impossible to believe in the Trinity *instead* of the distinctive claims of all other religions. If Trinity is real, then many of these *specific* religious claims and ends must be real also. . . . The Trinity is a map that finds room for, indeed requires, concrete truth in other religions." Mark Heim, "The Depth of the Riches: Trinity and Religious Ends," *Modern Theology* 17 (2001): 22 (italics original).

relations. One possible example might be Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17.⁹⁸ Three times Jesus prays that his followers—both present and future—may be one “just as” (καθώς) he and the Father are one: John 17:11 (ἵνα ὧσιν ἔν καθὼς ἡμεῖς); John 17:21 (ἵνα πάντες ἔν ὧσιν, καθὼς σύ, πάτερ, ἐν ἐμοὶ καγὼ ἐν σοί); and John 17:22 (ἵνα ὧσιν ἔν καθὼς ἡμεῖς ἔν). In this prayer, it appears that an intentional parallel is being drawn between the intra-trinitarian unity of the Father/Son relationship and the unity of the church. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that the divine unity which Christ prays might be reflected the lives of his followers is not merely economic (i.e., a unity of will and purpose between the Father and Son) but also intra-trinitarian. Does such an acknowledgement militate against my claim in the previous paragraph? Three factors suggest it does not. First, no exhortation can be found in these verses for Christ's followers to imitate the Trinity *in se*. Second, the unity for which Christ prays is not constituted as such by being a platonic reflection of the intra-trinitarian unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Rather, this unity is constituted by a *relation with* and *participation in* the salvific work of the triune God through the mission of the Son and Spirit.⁹⁹ Participation—not imitation—is the central focus. Finally, the precise nature of

⁹⁸ Another possibility might be 1 Corinthians 11:3 which appears to draw some kind of parallel between God/Christ and man/woman.

⁹⁹ Ironically, treating the immanent Trinity as “model” for the Church ends up severing Trinity and Church. John Behr argues that this problem can be seen in the trinitarian ecclesiology of John Zizioulas who treats the communion of the church as an image of the communion of the divine persons. Behr outlines an

the parallel in John 17 is not spelled out. It is one thing to affirm, in some general sense, that the unity of the church somehow analogically reflects the unity the divine persons. It is quite another to specify the precise ontological content of that divine unity and then draw a straight line from this speculative conception to a specific ecclesial structure.

This brings us to a third problem with treating the immanent Trinity as “model” —namely, the problem of “projection.” Karen Kilby suggests that this problem can be seen most clearly in the work of contemporary “social” trinitarians who treat the perichoretic unity of the divine persons as a “resource for combating individualism, patriarchy and oppressive forms of political and ecclesiastical organization.”¹⁰⁰ Kilby suggests that appeals to “perichoresis” among “social” trinitarians frequently involve three steps.¹⁰¹ First, “perichoresis” is identified as that which constitutes the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Next, “perichoresis” is defined by projecting some specific

alternative way of relating Trinity and Church which grounds the Church in the economic work of the triune God: “The three primary scriptural images for the Church—that is, the Church as the people of God, the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit—offer us, as suggested by Bruce Marshall, a way of looking at the trinitarian being of the Church in a way that integrates the Church directly and intimately to the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Moreover, each of these images links the Church in a particular way to one member of the Trinity without undermining the basic Cappadocian point, that the actions of God are differentiated but not divided: it is the one God, the Father, who calls the Church into being as the body of Christ indwelt by the Holy Spirit; and in return, the Church is conceived in terms of communion, but communion with God, as the body of his Son, anointed with his Spirit, and so calling upon God as Abba, Father.” John Behr, “The Trinitarian Being of the Church,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 48 (2004): 70.

¹⁰⁰ Karen Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity,” *New Blackfriars* 81 (2000): 438.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 442.

aspect of human relatedness into God's immanent life. Finally, "perichoresis" is commended as an exciting resource Christians have to offer the broader world. "Projection, then, is particularly problematic in at least some social theories of the Trinity because what is projected onto God is immediately reflected back onto the world, and this reverse projection is said to be what is in fact *important* about the doctrine."¹⁰² The problem of projection can also be seen in the theology of religions. Whereas "social" trinitarians project aspects of human relatedness into the immanent life of the triune God, Panikkar projects human religious experience into the immanent life of the triune God and then reinterprets the Trinity on this basis. These examples represent at least one instance in which Ludwig Feuerbach's critique was on target: when this kind of "projection" takes place, *theology* is ineluctably reduced to *anthropology*.¹⁰³ We are no longer speaking about God but merely about ourselves. Karl Barth rightly recognized

¹⁰² Ibid., 442 (italics original). Interestingly, Catherine LaCugna offers a similar analysis: "In the desire to remedy some of the great problems of the day, the temptation is to use the doctrine of the Trinity as 'an autonomous datum and even premise for theology' that is applied to a particular problem, for example, unequal distribution of resources. It is as if the goal is to figure out God '*in se*'—the number of persons, relations and processions and how they are configured—and then project this 'intradivine' structure onto human community, or vice versa. But as we have seen, this strategy, whether it supports a hierarchical or egalitarian vision, inevitably appears to be a transcendental projection of human preferences onto God." LaCugna, *God For Us*, 379-80. Readers will need to decide for themselves whether LaCugna adequately takes this problem into account in her own constructive proposal.

¹⁰³ See Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957).

the significance of Feuerbach's critique.¹⁰⁴ It requires very little creativity to imagine what Feuerbach would do with some of the theological material outlined above.

Finally, many of the proposals which treat the immanent Trinity as a "model" also fail to take into account the implications of the creator/creature distinction. In Book XV of *De Trinitate*, Augustine concludes that the Trinity that God is cannot simply be "read off" the divine image in the creature because the vast dissimilarity that exists between the triune God and the divine image in the *mens*. This fundamental difference (which Augustine explicates through a grammar of divine simplicity) implies that no vestige could ever adequately reflect the Trinity because the dissimilarity that obtains will always exceed any similarity that exists. The creator/creature distinction, therefore, disallows any direct move from the immanent relations to human relations. In principle, many contemporary theologians acknowledge this. Miroslav Volf, for example, insists that there can be no "straight line" from Trinity to church or Trinity to society.¹⁰⁵ Certain "mediations" are required because human beings, as creatures, "can correspond to God only in a *creaturely* fashion."¹⁰⁶ According to Volf, this creaturely correspondence is "dynamic" inasmuch as it exists between baptism (which brings humans into

¹⁰⁴ See Barth's introductory essay to the 1957 edition of Feuerbach's book. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, x-xxxii. Discussions of Feuerbach's critique can also be found in his *Church Dogmatics*. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, *The Doctrine of God*, trans. T.H.L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, Harold Knight and J.L.M. Haire (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 292-93, 448-50, 467.

¹⁰⁵ Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 194.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 199 (italics original).

communion with God) and final new creation (in which this communion realizes its fullest potential).¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Colin Gunton, acknowledges that it is not appropriate to argue directly from the immanent Trinity to the church: "But caution has also been advised about arguing directly to the church from the immanent Trinity. That is particularly important when appropriations are attempted from the supposed patterns of relationship between the persons of the Godhead."¹⁰⁸ Any correspondence that exists between the Trinity and the Church must, therefore, be analogical: "If there is one, it should be of an indirect kind, in which the church is seen as called to be a, so to speak, finite echo or bodying forth of the divine personal dynamics."¹⁰⁹ Although Gunton and Volf both acknowledge these limitations *in principle*, they appear to abandon them at crucial points *in practice*. Volf's critique of the ecclesiologies of Joseph Ratzinger (Catholic) and John Zizioulas (Orthodox) appears to draw a straight line from particular conceptions of the immanent Trinity to particular understandings of the church. Note carefully: Volf does not argue that Ratzinger and Zizioulas are wrong to argue from Trinity to church.¹¹⁰ On the contrary, he argues that a direct parallel exists between

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 199.

¹⁰⁸ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 73-74.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 74.

¹¹⁰ Ratzinger, in point of fact, does not explicitly ground his ecclesiology in the doctrine of the Trinity. Volf, however, argues that trinitarian assumptions exert a determinative influence on Ratzinger's understanding of the church: "Ratzinger has written little about the Trinity, though key passages in his argumentation contain brief references to the relations between the triune God and human beings. These references,

inadequate conceptions of the Trinity and inadequate conceptions of the church.

According to Volf, Ratzinger's account of the church possesses the same weakness as his trinitarian theology: it privileges unity over plurality. Zizioulas' account of the church is deficient for a different reason. Zizioulas' (problematic) account of the priority of the bishop over the congregation is rooted in a deficient understanding of the monarchy of the Father.¹¹¹ In contrast to Ratzinger and Zizioulas, Volf asserts that proper ecclesial structures should reflect the perichoretic unity of the divine persons. In his critique, Volf appears to draw a straight line from a purportedly inadequate account of the Trinity to an inadequate account of the church.¹¹² Similarly, in his discussion of the ecclesiology, Colin Gunton draws a straight line from two conceptions of the immanent Trinity ("Augustinian" and "Cappadocian") to two forms of ecclesiology (monistic/authoritarian and communal/egalitarian).¹¹³ Furthermore, Gunton appeals directly to the immanent Trinity to ground his claim that relations of "permanent subordination" in the church should be "replaced by a pattern more reflective of the free

however, reflect what closer examination confirms, namely, that *all* the crucial elements in his ecclesiology and entire theology are rooted in the doctrine of the Trinity. The entire life of the church, including its spirituality and structures, is shaped in correspondence to a certain understanding of the Trinity." Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 67.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 73-123.

¹¹² Moreover, it is difficult, to see how Volf's critique of Ratzinger and Zizioulas can gain any force without a direct link between the immanent Trinity and the church.

¹¹³ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 74-80.

personal relations which constitute the deity.”¹¹⁴ Moreover, in his discussion of human personhood, Gunton draws a straight line from two conceptions of the immanent Trinity (“Augustinian” and “Cappadocian”) to two conceptions of what it means to be human (“individualism” and “person-in-relation”).¹¹⁵ Thus, both Volf and Gunton appear to abandon in practice what they affirm in principle.

6.2.2.3 Trinity as a Methodological Principle

Contemporary theology is shaped by an assumption that the Trinity offers a methodological key to a variety of issues. This assumption explains the inflated claims that are often made regarding the significance of the doctrine of the Trinity (including those we have encountered in the Christian theology of religions). On the one hand, there is no question that the doctrine of the Trinity is a central Christian doctrine inasmuch as it secures the identity of God and summarizes the gospel. On the other hand, while acknowledging the centrality of this doctrine, one must question the claim that the doctrine of the Trinity constitutes a methodological key to contemporary theology as if it holds the answers to every kind of question.¹¹⁶ Against the direction of a

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 80.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 92.

¹¹⁶ Through an engagement with Zizioulas and Gunton, Richard Fermer challenges the assumption that the doctrine of the Trinity offers a single methodological principle. See Richard M. Fermer, “The Limits of Trinitarian Theology as a Methodological Paradigm,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 41 (1999): 158-86.

growing consensus, I have argued that no road exists from the Christian doctrine of the Trinity to a theology of religions; thus, a doctrine of the Trinity does not hold the key to a new understanding of religious diversity. Issues surrounding religious diversity are better inflected through the doctrines of creation, fall and redemption.¹¹⁷ A similar point could be made regarding marriage. Are not the doctrines of creation (which provides the pattern for marriage) and fall (which highlight distortions of this pattern) more relevant to questions regarding the legitimacy of same-sex unions than the doctrine of the Trinity? In addition, are not the doctrines of creation and fall more relevant to a Christian understanding of ecology than the immanent life of the triune God? Furthermore, why must every ethical claim be reducible to or grounded on some aspect of trinitarian ontology? In many of these proposals the assumption seems to be that if Christians can only understand some aspect of trinitarian doctrine (e.g., that the Trinity is loving community) they will live differently (e.g., be more loving toward others). This assumption rests on a deficient anthropology. According to the New Testament, love arises not from *understanding* some aspect of divine ontology (e.g., “perichoresis”) but from a redemptive *relation* with the triune God. Why is it not adequate to ground human rights in a doctrine of creation? As Richard Fermer rightly notes, in many cases

¹¹⁷ One sometimes senses that appeal is made to the doctrine of the Trinity precisely to avoid inflecting the discussion through these doctrines.

the words and actions of Christ seem far more suitable for promoting many of these virtues rather than a direct appeal to the immanent Trinity.¹¹⁸

6.3 Rethinking the “Relevancy” of the Trinity: Augustinian Reflections

Contemporary theology is driven by a quest to make the Trinity “relevant.” Unfortunately this quest for relevancy is rooted in a problematic understanding of what it means for trinitarian doctrine to be “relevant.” In this final section, I want to consider how Augustine (whose trinitarian theology has—somewhat ironically—been dismissed as “irrelevant”) challenges us to rethink what it means for a doctrine of the Trinity to be “relevant.” In conversation with Augustine, I will outline six positive purposes for trinitarian doctrine.

6.3.1 Reconsidering Augustine

Before outlining these six purposes, it is important to offer a final word regarding the ongoing value of the Augustinian trinitarian tradition. There is no question that Augustine’s teaching on the Trinity has exerted a tremendous influence upon the church in the West. What is disputed is whether Augustine’s teaching on the Trinity and its subsequent influence should be viewed positively or negatively. Colin Gunton, Catherine LaCugna and others would have us believe that Augustine’s teaching on the

¹¹⁸ Fermer, “The Limits of Trinitarian Theology as a Methodological Paradigm.” 186.

Trinity possesses a deficient character and that these deficiencies account for its (allegedly) problematic influence upon the church. Building upon the work of Lewis Ayres and Michel Barnes, I argued in chapter two that Gunton's criticisms are rooted in multiple misunderstandings of Augustine's trinitarian teaching. There is no need to rehearse those points here. It is important, however, to recognize that chapters three to five build upon chapter two not by answering additional criticisms of Augustine but rather by setting forth Augustine's trinitarian teaching and then demonstrating the kind of critical work the latter is able to do. Hence, this investigation offers an inductive argument for the continuing value of the Augustinian trinitarian tradition. As writings on the Trinity continue to multiply, contemporary theologians need to re-engage the tradition that has shaped the church for sixteen centuries.¹¹⁹ The trinitarian teaching of Augustine has value not only in helping evaluate current "use" of the Trinity in the theology of religions but also in rethinking what it means for a doctrine of the Trinity to be "relevant." With this in mind we will consider six positive purposes of trinitarian doctrine.

¹¹⁹ It was only through an in-depth engagement with the trinitarian teaching of Augustine that I began to see the problems with contemporary "use" of the trinitarian doctrine in the Christian theology of religions.

6.3.2 Six Purposes of Trinitarian Doctrine

6.3.2.1 Theological Purpose

First and foremost, the doctrine of the Trinity is a teaching about God. We might describe this as the *theo*-logical purpose of the doctrine. It summarizes biblical teaching about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the form of ontological claims and thus provides a regulative “grammar” that guides Christian speech addressed *to* God (e.g., worship, prayer) as well as Christian speech *about* God (e.g., theology, preaching, evangelism).¹²⁰

The “theological” purpose of this doctrine is fundamentally obscured when its “true significance” is located in its ability to provide a “model” for ecclesial, societal or inter-religious structures. Many of the proposals examined earlier in this chapter subtly

¹²⁰ By invoking the image of doctrine as “grammar,” I am not suggesting that the doctrine of the Trinity should merely be seen as a “second-order” doctrine that only structures Christian belief. According to Karen Kilby, we “should renounce the very idea that the point of the doctrine is to give insight into God.” Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection,” 443. The doctrine of the Trinity “does not need to be seen as a descriptive, first order teaching—there is no need to assume that its main function must be to provide a picture of the divine, a deep understanding of the way God really is” (ibid.). For Kilby the primary significance of the doctrine is “grammatical.” It provides a syntax that describes “how various aspects of the Christian faith hold together” (ibid.). In contrast to Kilby, I am suggesting that doctrine of the Trinity should also be seen as a first-order doctrine that makes ontological claims about the nature of the triune God. The theological purpose of this doctrine is undermined when it is reduced to a second-order grammar. For a critique of Kilby, see Matthew Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology Series (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2004), 236-41; and idem, “Friendship and Trinitarian Theology: Response to Karen Kilby,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9 (2007): 39-54. It is clear in *De Trinitate* that Augustine is not merely interested in articulating a coherent trinitarian grammar; he views his trinitarian teaching as making first-order claims about God (without in any way undermining the ultimate incomprehensibility of God). Even in this life, humans are able to know the triune God—albeit in a limited way. Regarding the limited nature of this knowledge, see my discussion of the “doxological” purpose below.

obscure the theological purpose of trinitarian doctrine. Notice, for example, how Michael Himes and Kenneth Himes introduce their discussion of Trinity and human rights by pointing readers toward the real significance of this doctrine: “When the Trinity is presented in preaching and catechesis as information—odd but authoritative—about the inner life of God, the central Christian symbol is robbed of its depth and transformative power.”¹²¹ As their explanation unfolds, it appears the real “power” of this doctrine is to be found not in what it teaches us about God but rather its ability to address pressing contemporary problems such as human rights.

6.3.2.2 Doxological Purpose

A second purpose of trinitarian doctrine is *doxological* inasmuch as careful attention to trinitarian doctrine enables us rightly to worship God.¹²² Trinitarian teaching shapes the liturgical practices of the church including gospel proclamation, baptism, prayer, worship, preaching, and communion (Eucharist).¹²³

¹²¹ Himes and Himes, *Fullness of Faith: The Public Significance of Theology*, 56.

¹²² As Claude Welch rightly notes, the doctrine of the Trinity “has importance in determining the pattern of worship so that it shall be truly directed to him who is known to us in Christ.” Claude Welch, *In This Name: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), 292.

¹²³ For discussion of trinitarian nature of the liturgical practices of the church, see Geoffrey Wainwright, *Worship with One Accord: Where Liturgy and Ecumenism Embrace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 237-50; and *idem*, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). For a discussion of the trinitarian nature of baptism, see Kathryn Greene-McCreight, “When I Say God, I Mean Father, Son and Holy Spirit: On the Ecumenical Baptismal Formula,” *Pro Ecclesia* 6 (1997): 289-308.

One of the central points of dispute between pro-Nicene and anti-Nicene elements in the Greek-speaking church of the fourth century was the proper nature of worship. Alongside the doxology “Praise to the Father through (διὰ) the Son in (ἐν) the Holy Spirit,” Basil of Caesarea (and other Pro-Nicene Christians) also used the following form: “Praise to the Father with (μετὰ) the Son together with (σὺν) the Holy Spirit.”¹²⁴ Anti-Nicenes asserted, on a variety of grounds, that the latter doxology was inappropriate and should not be used in public worship. In response, Basil argues that both doxologies are necessary in order to express suitable honor to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The first doxology (using the prepositions διὰ and ἐν) is helpful in expressing the economic activity of the divine persons while the second doxology (using the prepositions μετὰ and σὺν) is helpful in expressing their intra-trinitarian relations.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ In his introductory comments to Amphilochios, Basil explains, “Lately while I pray with the people, we sometimes finish the doxology to God the Father with the form ‘Glory to the Father *with* the Son, *together with* the Holy Spirit,’ and at other times we use ‘Glory to the Father *through* the Son *in* the Holy Spirit.’ Some of those present accused us of using strange and mutually contradictory terms. But your wish certainly is to help these people, or, if they should prove completely incurable, to safeguard those who associate with them; that is why you think that clear teaching concerning the force underlying these prepositions is desirable. I will write as concisely as possible, hoping to present a suitable beginning for this discussion.” St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit* I.3, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), 17-18.

¹²⁵ Notice in the following statements how, according to Basil, the preposition “in” (ἐν) best expresses the economic activity of the Spirit while the preposition “with” (σὺν) aptly expresses the intra-trinitarian relation of the Spirit to the Father and the Son: “The Spirit is said to dwell *in* created things in many and various ways, but as far as His relationship to the Father and Son is concerned, it is more appropriate to say that He dwells *with* them, rather than *in* them. Those who are worthy receive His grace, and He works within them. However, we cannot contemplate His pre-eternal existence and permanent presence with the Son and the Father unless we search for words which suitably express such an everlasting union. Truly precise co-existence can only be predicated of things which are mutually inseparable. . . . Therefore, when we

In an essay entitled, “The Point of Trinitarian Theology,” Robert Jenson explains that in its doxological mode, “trinitarian theology does not have a point; it *is* the point.”¹²⁶ Notice how Augustine, in his introduction to Book V, underscores the *necessity* of praising God while, at the same time, acknowledging the *difficulty* of speaking about God: “Now since we ought to think about the Lord our God always, and can never think about him as he deserves; since at all times we should be praising him and blessing him, and yet no words of ours are capable of expressing him, I begin by asking him to help me understand and explain what I have in mind and to pardon any blunders I may make.”¹²⁷ That trinitarian doctrine ultimately serves a doxological purpose can be seen quite clearly in *De Trinitate*. For Augustine, the triune God is *the* ultimate end. This reality can be seen quite clearly in Augustine’s distinction between *frui* (“enjoy”) and *uti* (“use”). God alone is to be enjoyed: “For the fullness of our happiness, beyond which there is none else, is this: to enjoy God the Trinity (*frui Trinitate Deo*) in whose image we

consider the Spirit’s *rank*, we think of him as present *with* the Father and the Son, but when we consider the working of His grace on its recipients, we say that the Spirit is *in* us” (*On the Holy Spirit*, XXVI.63, 95-96). Also, “The preposition *in* expresses the relationship between ourselves and the Spirit, while *with* proclaims the communion of the Spirit with God. Therefore we use both words: the latter expresses the Spirit’s dignity, while the former describes the grace we have been given. We glorify God both in the Spirit and with the Spirit” (*On the Holy Spirit*, XXVII.68, 102). For an analysis of Basil’s trinitarian theology, see Stephen M. Hildebrand, *The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea: A Synthesis of Greek Thought and Biblical Truth* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007).

¹²⁶ Robert W. Jenson, “What is the Point of Trinitarian Theology?” in *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*, ed. Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 31. In this essay, Jenson draws a helpful distinction between the church in its mode of speaking *for* God (gospel proclamation) and in its mode of speaking *to* God (doxology).

¹²⁷ Augustine, *De Trin.* V.1, 189.

were made.”¹²⁸ Other things are to be “used” properly for the purpose of loving God.¹²⁹ The doxological purpose of this doctrine is fundamentally obscured when it is “used” (not in the legitimate Augustinian sense of enjoying God as the ultimate “good” but in a problematic Kantian sense) as a means to some “greater” end (e.g., combating individualism, bringing greater unity among religions, etc.).

6.3.2.3 Hermeneutical Purpose

Third, the doctrine of the Trinity serves a *hermeneutical* purpose in as much as it helps us rightly read the canonical Scriptures. In Books I – IV Augustine is helping his community rightly read Scripture (especially in response to Latin Homoian readings of the same). To this end, he outlines a series of “canonical rules” that should shape Christian reading of the Scriptures. One of his most important rules is that one must distinguish between the Son in the “form of God” and the Son in the “form of a

¹²⁸ Augustine, *De Trin.*, I.18, 77. A similar theme can be found in *de Doctrina Christiana*: “The things which are to be enjoyed are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, a single Trinity, a certain supreme thing common to all who enjoy it, if, indeed, it is a thing and not rather the cause of all things, or both a thing and a cause.” Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson (Upper River Saddle, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1997), 10.

¹²⁹ Augustine’s distinction between *frui* and *uti* has been the subject of much misunderstanding. Augustine is not suggesting that things are to be “used” in modern Kantian sense of exploiting them. See Helmut D. Baer, “The Fruit of Charity: Using the Neighbor in *De doctrina christiana*,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 24 (1996): 47-64. Baer argues that Augustine’s notion of “using” one’s neighbor represents a way of describing “acts of charity that imitate Christ’s love for the sinner” (*ibid.*, 48).

servant.”¹³⁰ Problems arise when people confuse these two “forms”: “This has misled people who are careless about examining or keeping in view the whole range of the scriptures, and they have tried to transfer what is said of Christ Jesus as man to that substance of his which was everlasting before the incarnation and is everlasting still.”¹³¹

According to Augustine, New Testament references to Christ can generally be grouped into three categories: (1) texts that refer to Son in the “form of God” in which he is equal to the Father (e.g., Phil 2:6), (2) texts that refer to the Son in the “form of a servant” in which he is “less” than the Father (e.g., John 14:28) and (3) texts which describe the Son as being “from” the Father (e.g., John 5:19, 26).¹³² One interesting example of the hermeneutical function of trinitarian doctrine can be seen in Augustine’s discussion of the theophanies. Reading the Old Testament in light of trinitarian doctrine, Augustine rejects the claim that all theophanies must be christophanies. He suggests instead that in many cases the matter remains ambiguous.

¹³⁰ “Provided then that we know this rule for understanding the scriptures about God’s Son and can thus distinguish the two resonances in them, one tuned to the form of God in which he is, and is equal to the Father, the other tuned to the form of a servant which he took and is less than the Father, we will not be upset by statements in the holy books that appear to be in flat contradiction with each other. In the form of God the Son is equal to the Father, and so is the Holy Spirit, since neither of them is a creature, as we have already shown. In the form of a servant, however, he is less than the Father, because he himself said *The Father is greater than I* (Jn 14:28); he is also less than himself, because it is said of him that *he emptied himself* (Phil 2:7); and he is less than the Holy Spirit, because he himself said, *Whoever utters a blasphemy against the Son of man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever utters one against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him* (Mt 12:32).” Augustine, *De Trin.* I.22, 82.

¹³¹ Augustine, *De Trin.*, I.14, 74.

¹³² See Augustine, *De Trin.*, II.3, 98.

6.3.2.4 Anthropological Purpose

A fourth purpose of trinitarian doctrine might be described as *anthropological*. A reciprocal relationship exists for Augustine between the knowledge of oneself and the knowledge of the triune God. The *imago Dei* (which Augustine understands to be trinitarian) constitutes the ontological basis for this reciprocal relationship.¹³³ By reflecting on the Trinity, humans come to know themselves better as those who are made in God's image.¹³⁴ Conversely, through the divine image in the *mens* (which has been fashioned in the image of the triune God) humans come to know the triune God and share in God's life.¹³⁵ The latter represents the central focus of Books VIII-XV. In chapter five I argued that Augustine's search for "traces" of the triune God in the divine image in the *mens* must be seen fundamentally as an expression of his quest to seek God's face (cf. Psalm 105:3-4) in the context of Christ's redemptive work. In *De Trinitate*, anthropology is never divorced from soteriology—a point to which I will return shortly.

¹³³ "God said *Let us make man to our image and likeness* (Gn 1:26), and a little later on adds, *And God made man to the image of God* (Gn 1:27). 'Our,' being plural in number, could not be right in this place if man were made to the image of one person, whether of the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit; but because in fact he was made in the image of the trinity, it said *to our image*." Augustine, *De Trin.* XII.6, 325.

¹³⁴ In the latter context, the Creator/creature distinction is particularly important.

¹³⁵ "This trinity of the mind is not really the image of God because the mind remembers and understands and loves itself, but because it is also able to remember and understand and love him by whom it was made. And when it does this, it becomes wise. If it does not do it, then even though it remembers and understands and loves itself, it remains foolish. Let it then remember its God to whose image it was made, and understand and love him. To put it in a word, let it worship the uncreated God by whom it was created for a capacity for him and able to share in him." Augustine, *De Trin.*, XIV.15, 383.

It should be noted that the anthropological purpose is deeply abused in contemporary theology. Numerous contemporary theologians make simplistic appeals to “image” doctrine to ground a wide variety of claims. Earlier in the chapter, I documented problems with treating the immanent Trinity as “model” for church structure, societal relations, mission, etc.¹³⁶ Perhaps the greatest abuse of the anthropological purpose of trinitarian doctrine can be seen in Panikkar’s proposal. Contemporary theologians need to pay greater attention to the theological grammar which shapes Augustine’s search for reflections of the triune God in the human soul, especially the qualifications Augustine outlines in Book XV that are grounded in the Creator/creature distinction.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ These proposals go astray because they conceive of the relationship between Trinity and church, society, etc. in terms of *reflection* rather than *participation*. To cite a specific example, many contemporary theologians treat the perichoretic unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as a *model* for the unity of the church; however, the unity of the church is not constituted as such by being a platonic reflection of the perichoretic unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Rather the *koinonia* of the church arises from (and is grounded in) *participation* in the life of the God.

¹³⁷ Similarly, in his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas insists that a proper understanding of the divine persons is necessary for a proper understanding of the creator/creature distinction: “There are two reasons why the knowledge of the divine persons was necessary. It was necessary for the right idea of creation. The fact of saying that God made all things by His Word excludes the error of those who say that God produced all things by necessity. When we say that in Him there is a procession of love, we show that God produced creatures not because He needed them, nor because of any other intrinsic reason, but on account of the love of His own goodness. . . . In another way, and chiefly, that we may think rightly concerning the salvation of the human race, accomplished by the Incarnate Son, and by the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, Q. 32, a.1, ad. 3.

6.3.2.5 Soteriological Purpose

A fifth purpose of trinitarian doctrine is *soteriological*.¹³⁸ One of the central themes in *De Trinitate* is “contemplation” (*contemplatio*). The centrality of contemplation can be seen in at least two ways. First, contemplation of the triune God represents the ultimate goal of the economy of salvation: “Contemplation (*contemplatio*) in fact is the reward of faith, a reward for which hearts are cleansed through faith, as it is written, *cleansing their hearts through faith* (Acts 15:9). Proof that it is that contemplation for which hearts are cleansed comes from the key text, *Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God* (Mt 5:8).”¹³⁹ Augustine interprets the promise of Matthew 5:8 eschatologically: the “pure in heart” will be brought into a direct contemplation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit only when Christ hands the kingdom over to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). Mary sitting at Jesus’ feet offers a proleptic picture of the future joy of this *visio Dei*.¹⁴⁰ Second, “contemplation” plays a central role in Christian growth. In order to share in God’s life, we must grow in “contemplation” of God; however, because of our love for temporal

¹³⁸ Others have noted the soteriological purpose of trinitarian doctrine in Augustine. See Lewis Ayres, “The Christological Context of Augustine’s *De Trinitate* XIII: Toward Relocating Books VIII-XV,” *Augustinian Studies* 29 (1998): 111-39; idem, “Augustine on God as Love and Love as God,” *Pro Ecclesia* 5 (1996): 470-87; Mary T. Clark, “Augustinian Spirituality,” *Augustinian Studies* 15 (1984): 83-92; C. C. Pecknold, “How Augustine Used the Trinity: Functionalism and the Development of Doctrine,” *Anglican Theological Review* 85 (2003): 127-141; A. N. Williams, “Contemplation: Knowledge of God in Augustine’s *De Trinitate*,” in *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, ed. James J. Buckley and David S. Yeago (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 121-46.

¹³⁹ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.17, 77.

¹⁴⁰ Augustine, *De Trin.* I.20, 79-80.

things we are “incapable of grasping eternal things, and weighed down by the accumulated dirt of our sins.”¹⁴¹ To overcome this problem our minds must be “purified.”¹⁴² According to Barnes, “Theological language has no other ultimate purpose than to strip from the mind the material form and content of its thinking about God and to shape the heart in love for God; together these actions constitute the purification of the heart.”¹⁴³ Augustine’s investigation of the divine image in the *mens* in Books VIII to XV must, therefore, be seen in this context of the necessity of contemplation for Christian growth.¹⁴⁴ It is by means of the divine image in the *mens* that we remember, understand and love God. In order to remember, understand and love God, the divine image must be refashioned.¹⁴⁵ An important soteriological relationship exists for Augustine between “seeing” and “becoming.” Commenting on 1 Corinthians 13:12, 2 Corinthians 3:18 and 1 John 3:2, Augustine explains, “From this it is clear that the image of God will achieve its

¹⁴¹ Augustine, *De Trin.*, IV.24, 169.

¹⁴² “So then it is difficult to contemplate and have full knowledge of God's substance, which without any change in itself makes things that change, and without any passage of time in itself creates things that exist in time. That is why it is necessary for our minds to be purified before that inexpressible reality can be inexpressibly seen by them; and in order to make us fit and capable of grasping it, we are led along more endurable routes, nurtured on faith as long as we have not yet been endowed with that necessary purification.” Augustine, *De Trin.*, I.2, 66-67.

¹⁴³ Barnes, “The Logic of Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology,” 12.

¹⁴⁴ Thus, a strong case could be made that the “anthropological” purpose I described above should be seen as a subset of the soteriological purpose.

¹⁴⁵ For a discussion of Augustine’s understanding of *theosis*, see Allan D. Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), s.v. “Deification, Divinization,” by Gerald Bonner.

full likeness of him when it attains to the full vision of him—though this text from the apostle John might also appear to be referring to the immortality of the body.”¹⁴⁶

Among contemporary theologians, Ellen Charry has drawn significant attention to this “soteriological” function of trinitarian doctrine.¹⁴⁷ Commenting on *De Trinitate*, Charry explains, “A central goal of Augustine’s treatise is to persuade the reader that revelation and doctrine work together to reshape our minds and affections and thereby our identity.”¹⁴⁸

6.3.2.6 Kerygmatic Purpose

Finally, trinitarian doctrine serves a *kerygmatic* purpose in that it provides the key to explicating the gospel message.¹⁴⁹ In *The Drama of Doctrine*, Kevin Vanhoozer nicely captures this purpose of trinitarian doctrine:

¹⁴⁶ Augustine, *De Trin.*, XIV.24, 390. Similarly, “So then, when this image is renewed to perfection by this transformation, we will be like God *because we shall see him*, not through a mirror but *as he is* (1 Jn 3:2); what the apostle Paul calls *face to face* (1 Cor 13:12).” Augustine, *De Trin.*, XV.21, 411. Thus, it should not be surprising that in his closing prayer at the end of Book XV, Augustine prays, “Let me remember you, let me understand you, let me love you. Increase these things in me until you refashion me entirely.” Augustine, *De Trin.*, XV.51, 436.

¹⁴⁷ See Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing of your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 121-52; eadem, “The Soteriological Importance of the Divine Perfections,” in *God the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice*, ed. Timothy George (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 129-47.

¹⁴⁸ Charry continues, “In this sense, the mechanisms by which God chooses to convey himself to us are agents of spiritual cleansing that allow us to arrive at our true destiny: enjoyment of God and ourselves.” Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds*, 133.

¹⁴⁹ “The gospel can neither be truly stated, nor the Word truly proclaimed,” writes Claude Welch, “without affirming what is made explicit in the doctrine of the Trinity.” Welch, *In This Name*, 290. This sixth purpose

In sum, the gospel is ultimately unintelligible apart from Trinitarian theology. Only the doctrine of the Trinity adequately accounts for how those who are not God come to share in the fellowship of the Father and Son through the Spirit. The Trinity is both the Christian specification of God and a summary statement of the gospel, in that the possibility of life with God depends upon the person and work of the Son and the Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity thus serves both as an identification of the *dramatis personae* and as a précis of the drama itself. 'He is risen indeed!'¹⁵⁰

Vanhoozer notes that behind the church's identification and condemnation of heresy is a recognition that the truth of the Christian message depends upon a proper identification of the *dramatis personae*.¹⁵¹ Only if the Son is God can he reveal the Father and atone for sin. Similarly, only if the Spirit is God can he unite humans to the Father and Son.¹⁵² In short, the gospel requires a triune God. Distorted understandings of *dramatis personae* undermine the gospel. Arian theology, for example, "made it impossible to affirm that Jesus is 'God with us' or 'God for us,'" and this represented a direct challenge to the gospel message."¹⁵³ This kerygmatic purpose of trinitarian doctrine accounts for the polemical concern that drives much of Augustine's discussion in *De Trinitate*. In Books

might also be characterized as the "evangelical" purpose of trinitarian doctrine as it represents a key premise of the *euangelion*.

¹⁵⁰ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 43-44.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 83. "Failure to identify the divine persons correctly leads to a misconstrual of the divine action, which in turn impedes our ability to participate in it. Heresies are dangerous because they are unable to proclaim the gospel—'God in Christ; Christ in us'—coherently and do not draw us into the saving action of the triune God. Heresies keep us from the way, the truth and the life. The early church was therefore right to deem heresy harmful to one's spiritual health." Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 83.

II – IV, he devotes extensive attention to the *missiones* (sendings) of the Son and the Spirit within the drama of salvation. It is clear that a reciprocal relationship exists for Augustine between a proper understanding of the identity of the Son and Spirit and a proper understanding of their salvific work.¹⁵⁴ This kerygmatic purpose also explains why the preceding critique of the trinitarian theologies of Heim, Dupuis, Yong and Panikkar is important. One might be tempted to dismiss this critique: “Why does it really does it matter if these theologians present speculative accounts of the Trinity that are not completely in accord with classical theology?” Such a conclusion would be disastrous. Augustine rightly understood that distorted accounts of the divine persons necessarily lead to distorted understandings of the gospel. By reinterpreting the Trinity, Heim, Dupuis, Yong and Panikkar, in various ways and to varying degrees, undermine the gospel. Finally, this kerygmatic purpose sheds proper light on the “integrative” nature of trinitarian theology. The centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity should not be seen in its function as a “methodological principle” that informs (in a general way) every aspect of theology. Rather, the centrality of this doctrine should be seen in the constitutive role it plays in helping articulate the “good news” of Jesus Christ. In as

¹⁵⁴ Augustine moves in both directions. On the one hand, he argues that the sending of the Son and Spirit does not imply an inferiority vis-à-vis the Father. On the other hand, he interprets these sendings on the basis of his understanding of the identity of the Son and Spirit.

much as all theology is oriented to the gospel, all theology possesses a “trinitarian” character.

From an Augustinian perspective, these six overlapping purposes circumscribe the “relevance” of trinitarian doctrine. The “relevancy” of this doctrine (if one must use such a term), should be seen in the way it enables us rightly to speak to and about God, the way it helps us read Scripture, the way it helps us understand ourselves, the way it draws us into the life of the triune God, and finally in the way it helps explicate the gospel. The doctrine of the Trinity, therefore, is a “mystery of salvation” not in the sense that it provides a ready-made blueprint for ecclesial, societal, political and even inter-religious structures but in the sense that it enables us rightly to reflect and enjoy the glory of the one who called us “out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

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Biography

Keith E. Johnson was born on February 16, 1965 in Spokane Washington to Bill and Marian Johnson. Along with his brother Steve, he grew up in Temperance, Michigan. In 1987 he graduated from the University of Michigan with a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering (*cum laude*). In 1994 Keith graduated from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School with a Master of Arts in Christian Thought (*summa cum laude*). His M.A. thesis was entitled “Problems of Epistemology in the Integration of Psychology and Theology.” He was married to Rhonda Olson in 1996. In 2002 he graduated from Duke Divinity School with a Master of Theology. His Th.M. thesis was entitled “Toward a Theology of Religions via the Doctrine of the Trinity.” Keith was awarded a Lilly Fellowship and commenced doctoral studies at Duke University in 2002. From 2002 to 2007, he also served as a teaching assistant at Duke Divinity School. In 2007 he received a Doctor of Philosophy (Christian Theology and Ethics) from Duke University.

Keith’s publications include the following: “Why is Religious Pluralism Fun—and Dangerous?” (co-authored with Harold A. Netland) in *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 47-67; “Theology of Religions,” in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2d ed., ed. Nicholas Lossky *et al.* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), 1126-1128; Review of *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* by Gavin D’Costa, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45 (2002): 748-750;

"Do All Paths Lead to the Same Destination?" in *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in Religion*, ed. Daniel K. Judd (Guilford, C.T.: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2002), 76-85; "Divine Transcendence, Religious Pluralism and Barth's Doctrine of God," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5 (2003): 200-224; Review Essay, *Trinity in Aquinas* by Gilles Emery, *Pro Ecclesia* 13 (2004): 101-105; Review of *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives* by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48 (2005): 419-22. Keith is a member of the Evangelical Theological Society and read the following paper at the 2006 meeting: "Does Creation Reveal the *Triunity* of God? Augustine on the *Vestigia Trinitatis*."