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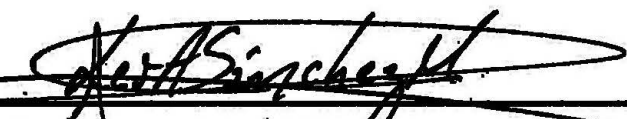
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TOWARDS A MUTUAL HIERARCHY SOCIAL MODEL OF THE TRINITY

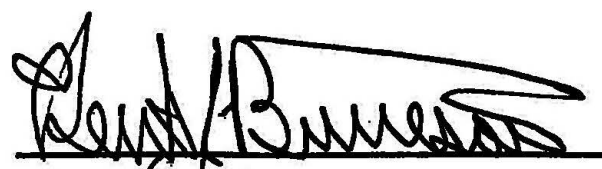
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A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of  
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Systematic Theology  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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By  
Jeffrey Dukeman  
May 2010

Approved by   
Dr. Leopoldo Sánchez Advisor

  
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**“When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may also glorify you’” (John 17:1 ESV).**

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## ABSTRACT

Dukeman, Jeffrey, A. "Problems in a Movement: Towards a Mutual Hierarchy Social Model of the Trinity." PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, 2010. 241 pp.

Many chief adherents of a social model of the Trinity, which posits community as the ultimate ontological category in Trinitarian discourse, exhibit a hierarchy-equality polarity or tension in various aspects of their Trinitarian thought. Typically, social Trinitarians "resolve" this tension by emphasizing or choosing one side of the polarity, either hierarchy or equality, over the other. This results in an inadequate accounting for full sociality among the divine persons, where such sociality requires, among other things, both the dignity and the uniqueness of each divine person.

Mutual hierarchy, on the other hand, is a framework that is capable of better accounting for this sociality than the existing social Trinitarian options. This may be seen in at least three areas of tension in the field through a comparison with the corresponding positions of Hans Urs von Balthasar, whose hierarchical Trinitarian understanding is best classified as social Trinitarian, and of Miroslav Volf with his egalitarian social Trinitarianism.

As Balthasar critiques other major Trinitarian models—namely, a person-oriented model and a substance (unity)-oriented model—he tends to argue that these models insufficiently account for hierarchy among the divine persons, but in so doing Balthasar himself does not account adequately for the dignity of the divine persons. Volf rather tends to critique these other models for insufficiently accounting for the equality of the divine persons, but in so doing Volf himself does not account adequately for their uniqueness relative to one another. But a mutual hierarchy social model of the Trinity looks more at how other Trinitarian models understand terms like hierarchy and equality so that it may acknowledge how, for example, a person-oriented Trinitarian model tends to account for the uniqueness of each divine person even while it critiques this model for not accounting adequately for the dignity of the persons.

In looking at the life of Jesus in the economic Trinity, Balthasar tends to conceive of the hierarchy of the Father over the Son in an almost "master-slave" fashion that does not account adequately for the dignity of either the Son or the Father, as may be seen in Balthasar's understanding of Holy Saturday, which for him is the chief redemptive period of salvation history. As Volf looks at the life of Jesus, he rather emphasizes the egalitarian mutual relations and perichoresis of the divine persons in such a way that he insufficiently distinguishes the divine persons from one another. But my proposal utilizing a mutual hierarchy framework argues that each divine person exercises hierarchy over the others in connection with the vocation of each, which accounts for the uniqueness of each person. And it argues that each divine person uses this hierarchy in order to serve the other persons with their vocations, which accounts for the dignity of each person. It thus accounts for the sociality of the economic Trinity.

In looking at the immanent Trinity, Balthasar again tends to conceive of the hierarchy of the Father over the Son in an almost "master-slave" fashion that does not account adequately for the dignity of either the Son or the Father. As Volf looks at the immanent Trinity, he again emphasizes what he sees as the egalitarian mutual relations and perichoresis of the divine persons in such a way that he insufficiently distinguishes the persons from one another. But a mutual hierarchy social model of the Trinity argues that each divine person exercises hierarchy over the others in connection with the personal properties of each, which accounts for the uniqueness of each person. And it argues that each divine person uses this hierarchy in order to



**serve the other persons with their personal properties, which accounts for the dignity of each person. It thus accounts for the sociality of the immanent Trinity.**

## INTRODUCTION

The waning years of the twentieth century witnessed the rise of a view of the Trinity that has become known popularly as a social model of the Trinity. A foundational work in social Trinitarianism was Jürgen Moltmann's *Trinität und Reich Gottes: zur Gotteslehre*.<sup>1</sup> In this work, Moltmann defines a social model as follows:

Here I have developed a *social doctrine of the Trinity*, according to which God is a community of Father, Son, and Spirit, whose unity is constituted by mutual indwelling and reciprocal interpenetration.<sup>2</sup>

In a social model of the Trinity, the divine persons are a community in a manner analogous to various human communities. According to Moltmann such a communal understanding of the Trinity means that each divine person is distinct from the others as they interact with and indwell one another. This means that each divine person has a center of consciousness and love. Thus Moltmann notes,

As individual substance, the person is characterized by substantiality, intellectuality and incommunicability. If we take Boethius' definition, the Trinitarian Persons are not "modes of being"; they are individual, unique non-interchangeable subjects of the one, common divine substance, with consciousness and will.<sup>3</sup>

And so Moltmann holds both that each divine person has his own interiority and yet that the divine persons always exist in relation to one another as a community. In the time that has passed

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<sup>1</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Trinität und Reich Gottes: Zur Gotteslehre* (München: C. Kaiser, 1980). This was translated into English by Margaret Kohl as Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, viii, italics original.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

since the publication of Moltmann's book, a social model of the Trinity has become a major force in contemporary theology. Even though those who utilize it often greatly differ from one another in their theological convictions,<sup>4</sup> they nevertheless are in basic agreement with the basic contours of a social understanding of the Trinity as evident in Moltmann.<sup>5</sup>

This dissertation will be a critical survey and constructive proposal in contemporary social Trinitarianism. Critically, I will attempt to show that social Trinitarians evidence a *hierarchy-*

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<sup>4</sup> On this point see Thomas Thompson, "Trinitarianism Today: Doctrinal Renaissance, Ethical Relevance, Social Redolence," *Calvin Theological Journal* 32 (1997): 26; and John Horrell, "Toward a Biblical Model of the Social Trinity: Avoiding Equivocation of Nature and Order," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47 (2004): 408. These two articles are the two main works available that attempt in a focused manner to give an overview of social Trinitarianism. Thompson's article is largely a summary of parts of his dissertation entitled *Imitatio Trinitatis: The Trinity as Social Model in the Theologies of Jürgen Moltmann and Leonardo Boff* (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1996). John Gresham also makes a similar point in "The Social Model of the Trinity and Its Critics," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 46 (1993): 325–43. See also Jae Kim, *Relational God and Salvation: Soteriological Implications of the Social Doctrine of Trinity—Jürgen Moltmann, Catherine LaCugna, Colin Gunton* (Kampen: Kok, 2008), 18–19.

<sup>5</sup> See Thompson, "Trinitarianism Today," 26; Horrell, "Toward a Biblical Model of the Social Trinity," 404; and Horrell, "The Eternal Son of God in the Social Trinity," in *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective: An Introductory Christology*, ed. Fred Sanders et al. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007): 54–55, for lists of some works in social Trinitarianism. My own list of some major works in social Trinitarianism is the following: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, 5 vols., trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988–98); Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory*, 3 vols., trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000–5); Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988); Joseph Bracken, *The Triune Symbol: Persons, Process, and Community* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985); David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1985); Millard Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995); Kevin Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006); Stanley Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001); Stanley Grenz, *The Named God and the Question of Being: A Trinitarian Theo-Ontology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005); Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three, and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge, U. K.: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997); Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1992); Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, Marc Cardinal Ouellet, *Divine Likeness: Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family*, trans. Philip Milligan and Linda Ciccone (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991–97); Cornelius Plantinga, *The Hodgson-Welch Debate and the Social Analogy of the Trinity* (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1982); Nereo Silanes, *La Santísima Trinidad, Programa Social del Cristianismo: Principios Bíblico-Teológicos* (Salamanca, Spain: Secretariado Trinitario, 1991); Thomas Thompson, *Imitatio Trinitatis: The Trinity as Social Model in the Theologies of Jürgen Moltmann and Leonardo Boff*; Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996); Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Faith, Feminism, and the Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

*equality polarity or tension* in the doctrine of the Trinity by creating a false alternative of hierarchy versus equality among the divine persons with the various social Trinitarians tending to “resolve” this hierarchy-equality tension by giving logical priority to either the hierarchical pole or the equality pole of the system. In the dissertation I will argue that social Trinitarians evidence this hierarchy-equality tension in the following three basic areas of tension: (1) the critique of other Trinitarian models; (2) the understanding of the economic Trinity with particular emphasis on the place of the Son during his life vis-à-vis the other divine persons; and (3) the understanding of the immanent Trinity.

On the one hand, I will argue that the hierarchy-equality tension that is present in social Trinitarianism in each of the three areas of tension just mentioned leads social Trinitarians with an overall egalitarian Trinitarian trajectory not to account adequately for the *uniqueness* of the divine persons. On the other hand, I will argue that this hierarchy-equality tension leads social Trinitarians with an overall hierarchical Trinitarian trajectory not to account adequately for the *dignity* of the divine persons. In contrast to these proposals, I will be developing a mutual hierarchy approach to social Trinitarianism that accounts for both the dignity and uniqueness of the divine persons.

The Athanasian Creed states that in order to hold to the catholic faith one must neither confuse the divine persons nor divide the divine substance. A mutual hierarchy framework aims to prevent both of these errors. The heresy of Sabellianism confused the divine persons by positing that the divine persons are three modes or manifestations of one divine being or person. In this way, Sabellianism did not account adequately for the uniqueness of each divine person. Arguably the chief way that the second error from the Athanasian Creed, dividing the divine substance, occurred in the early church was in the heresy of Arianism. In Arianism, the dignity

of the Son was challenged by Arius as he made him a sort of second-class God. I am certainly not saying that social Trinitarians today are either Arians or Sabellians. Nevertheless, the language of the Athanasian Creed helps lay out the basic elements of the church's Trinitarian faith that social Trinitarians should also consistently account for in their system.

By not accounting adequately for *both* the uniqueness and dignity of each divine person, social Trinitarians do not consistently account for the *sociality* of the divine persons. Many people probably think that sociality in the context of social Trinitarianism is another way of promoting an egalitarian view of the divine persons. However, I use the term 'sociality' in a more comprehensive way. In my proposal, sociality requires both the uniqueness of the divine persons, which hierarchical social Trinitarians tend to account for but egalitarian social Trinitarians do not, as well as the dignity of the divine persons, which egalitarian social Trinitarians tend to account for but hierarchical social Trinitarians do not. Having said this, we should also note that sociality can function as an even broader category. Besides referring to the uniqueness and dignity of the divine persons, sociality also requires or presupposes, for example, some 'personal' element in each divine person as well as some encounter or relations between the persons. Although sociality also refers to these sorts of things, my proposal for the mutual hierarchy of the divine persons only will focus on sociality as a category that calls for the uniqueness and dignity of the persons.

In short, I will argue for a revised social model of the Trinity that accounts for the *mutual hierarchy* of the divine persons in order to address the areas of hierarchy-equality tension or polarity present in social Trinitarian proposals.<sup>6</sup> As said before, a mutual hierarchy framework

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<sup>6</sup> A few social Trinitarians have mentioned something like mutual hierarchy among the divine persons. For example, Royce Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John*, xvi, speaks of each divine person being servant and

aims to uphold both the uniqueness and the dignity of the divine persons. To this end, my proposal will associate the uniqueness of each divine person with his *hierarchy* over the other persons in connection with his vocation in the economic Trinity or in connection with his personal properties in the immanent Trinity. Positing a hierarchy of each divine person over the others differs especially from the proposals by egalitarian social Trinitarians, which minimize Trinitarian hierarchy. On the other hand, my mutual hierarchy proposal will assert that each divine person exercises his hierarchy over the others in a *mutual* manner by seeking to foster the dignity of the other persons. Positing a mutual hierarchy of each divine person differs especially from hierarchical social Trinitarian proposals, which tend to conceive of a unilateral and almost oppressive hierarchy of the Father over the Son and the Spirit. My mutual hierarchy proposal thus will more consistently account for the sociality of the divine persons than other social Trinitarian proposals by accounting more adequately for both the uniqueness and the dignity of each divine person.

To better illuminate the three areas of tension in social Trinitarianism as well as to help guide my own constructive proposal, I will critically engage two significant social Trinitarians. The first is the now-deceased Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, a widely-

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disposable to the others in the “mutual and voluntary subordination among the persons of the Triune Family.” However, Gruenler’s proposal differs significantly from my own especially due to his tendency to choose the equality of the divine persons over hierarchical relations between them. Thus Gruenler says that Jesus’ statements in John “of subordination (he is sent, he listens, he obeys) are the language of the incarnate Son who has voluntarily assumed a subordinate role in time and space for the work of salvation. The subordination of Son and Spirit to the Father is for the time of redemption only” (ibid., xiv). Furthermore, Gruenler says that even these economic hierarchy claims must be interpreted within the Son’s claims to equality with the Father (ibid., xv–xvii). Gruenler does not see any sort of hierarchy in the immanent Trinity and even tries to absorb the little hierarchy among the persons he sees in the economy into the equality of the divine persons. To this extent, Gruenler does not account adequately for the sort of hierarchy among the divine persons that could distinguish them from one another. Similarly, see also Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, 310, 331, where Erickson cites Gruenler and speaks of a “mutual submission” of the divine persons to one another and, like Gruenler, says that the subordination of one member of the Trinity to the other in the economy is temporary and functional.

known and key Trinitarian figure who had close ties with the Vatican and whose hierarchical Trinitarian trajectory is arguably best identified as social Trinitarian. A notable strength of Balthasar's Trinitarian proposal is his stress on the uniqueness of the divine persons. The second is Miroslav Volf, a former doctoral student of Moltmann and an heir of the Free Church tradition now teaching at Yale, who likewise is a prominent social Trinitarian and who is known for his egalitarian Trinitarian trajectory. A notable strength of Volf's Trinitarian proposal is his stress on the dignity of each divine person. These two social Trinitarians are helpful for representing some key themes in the field of social Trinitarianism in general and especially for representing the three areas of tension that I argue are present in social Trinitarianism.

And so we will see that the three areas of tension are evident in Balthasar's understanding of the Trinity. We will see that Balthasar tends to critique Trinitarian models that he alleges are overly egalitarian while he gives insufficient consideration to some of the potential problems of hierarchical Trinitarian models. In his constructive understanding of the economic Trinity, Balthasar emphasizes the hierarchy of the Father over the Son, a fact brought into clear relief by Balthasar's stress on Holy Saturday as the key redemptive point of the Son's life since for Balthasar the Son is at his most passive on Holy Saturday. And finally, in his constructive understanding of the immanent Trinity, we will see that Balthasar emphasizes the hierarchy of the Father over the Son both in his begetting him and in his relating with him.

We will also see that the three areas of tension are evident in Volf's understanding of the Trinity. Volf tends to critique Trinitarian models that he alleges are overly hierarchical while he gives insufficient consideration to some of the potential problems of egalitarian Trinitarian models. In his constructive understanding of the economic Trinity, Volf emphasizes the egalitarian relations and egalitarian mutual indwelling of the divine persons at the cross. And

finally, we will see that, in his constructive understanding of the immanent Trinity, Volf emphasizes the egalitarian relations of the divine persons but inadequately integrates into his egalitarian framework what he sees as the hierarchical constituting of the Son and the Spirit by the Father.

The dissertation will be structured around three questions associated with the three areas of tension in social Trinitarianism. The first chapter will set the stage for the following three core chapters. In the first chapter I will look at some key themes and tensions in social Trinitarianism in general and will also look at how the social Trinitarian proposals by Balthasar and Volf evidence these themes and tensions. Finally, in this chapter I will also argue that studying Balthasar and Volf together is helpful since they represent, respectively, hierarchical and egalitarian trajectories in social Trinitarianism.

In chapter two of the dissertation, I will look at the question, “How does a social model of the Trinity deal with the concerns of person- and unity (substance)-oriented Trinitarian models?” Briefly put, a person-oriented Trinitarian model teaches that the relative independence of the divine hypostases (in particular, the person of the Father as cause) is the ultimate ontological category in Trinitarian discourse. And a substance (unity)-oriented Trinitarian model teaches that the one divine substance or essence is a sort of fourth entity that logically precedes the divine persons and, therefore, that the one divine substance is the ultimate ontological category in Trinitarian discourse.<sup>7</sup>

In chapter two, I will critically engage the social Trinitarian thought of both Balthasar and Volf as they critique the aforementioned Trinitarian models from a hierarchical and an

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<sup>7</sup> Person- and substance (unity)-oriented Trinitarian models will be explained further in section 1.1.1 of the dissertation.



egalitarian perspective, respectively. I will show that Balthasar's hierarchical Trinitarian critique does not account adequately for the dignity of each divine person that is necessary for the full sociality of the divine persons. And I will attempt to show that Volf's egalitarian Trinitarian critique does not account adequately for the uniqueness of each divine person that is necessary for the full sociality of the divine persons.

More constructively, in chapter two, I will argue for a mutual hierarchy critique of other Trinitarian models in such a way that *both the uniqueness and the dignity* of the divine persons will be accounted for more consistently than in Balthasar's and Volf's social Trinitarian systems. To do so, I will take a critical look at Augustine insofar as he stands, according to contemporary Trinitarian theologians, as a representative of a Latin (or Western) substance (unity)-oriented Trinitarian model. I will also take a critical look at John Zizioulas, who is considered by contemporary Trinitarian theologians as a representative of a Greek-Cappadocian person-oriented model of the Trinity. Augustine and Zizioulas play a significant role in the Trinitarian critiques of Balthasar and Volf, respectively, and choosing these two theologians for my own critique will allow me to more easily compare my own critique of Augustine and Zizioulas with the corresponding critiques by Balthasar and Volf.

In chapter three I will look at the question, "What is the place of the economic Trinity in a social model?" Here I will attempt to show that Balthasar's hierarchical understanding of the economic Trinity does not account adequately for the dignity of each divine person that is necessary for the full sociality of the divine persons. In particular, I will show that Balthasar conceives of the relationship between the Father and the Son in the economy, and particularly on Holy Saturday, as basically 'master-slave' in character. And I will show that Volf's egalitarian understanding of the economic Trinity does not account adequately for the uniqueness of each

divine person necessary for the full sociality of the divine persons. In particular, I will show that by stressing the egalitarian relations and mutual indwelling of the divine persons in the economy, and particularly at the cross, Volf does not account adequately for each divine person having a unique vocation where each is clearly the agent of his own actions.

Constructively, in this third chapter, I will utilize a mutual hierarchy framework to look at the economic Trinity during the life of Jesus as evident in John's Gospel.<sup>8</sup> Here both the uniqueness and the dignity of the divine persons will be accounted for more consistently than in Balhassar's and Volf's social Trinitarian systems. In particular, utilizing a mutual hierarchy framework, I will argue for the *differentiated kenotic vocations* of the divine persons. Kenosis has traditionally been a Christological term used to describe the Son's self-limiting of his divine power in connection with his humiliation. My proposal agrees with this but also is interested in the Trinitarian implications of the kenosis of the Son. To this end, I will argue that each divine person has a unique vocation during Jesus' life where each has hierarchy or authority over the others as well as over human beings. However, the nature of this hierarchy will be qualified by saying that it is a mutual hierarchy where each divine person exercises his hierarchy in a kenotic way so as to foster the dignity of the other divine persons and serve human beings.

In chapter four I will look at the question, "What is the place of the immanent Trinity in a social model of the Trinity?" Here I will show that Balhassar's hierarchical understanding of the immanent Trinity does not account adequately for the dignity of each divine person that is necessary for the full sociality of the divine persons. Much like in the case of the economic Trinity, Balhassar's understanding of the Father's begetting of the Son and relating with the Son

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<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references will be from the English Standard Version (ESV).

in the immanent Trinity conceives of the Father-Son relationship as basically “master-slave” in character. I will also show that Volf’s egalitarian understanding of the immanent Trinity does not account adequately for the uniqueness of each divine person that is necessary for the full sociality of the divine persons. By emphasizing the egalitarian relations and mainly egalitarian perichoresis of the divine persons, Volf’s system does not account adequately for the differentiation of the divine persons or the distinct agency of each divine person.

Constructively, in this fourth chapter, I will utilize a mutual hierarchy framework to reflect on the immanent Trinity, building on my discussion from chapter three on the economic Trinity. Here both the uniqueness and the dignity of the divine persons will be accounted for more consistently than in Balthasar and Volf. In particular, utilizing a mutual hierarchy framework, I will posit a hierarchy of each person relative to the others in the immanent Trinity in connection with the unique personal properties of each divine person. However, the nature of this hierarchy will be qualified by saying that it is a mutual hierarchy that fosters the dignity of the other divine persons with their personal properties. In doing so, I will argue for the *mutual constitution* of the divine persons, where each divine person constitutes the being and identity of the others.

Finally, in the conclusion, I will offer a summary of my main conclusions in the dissertation, assess some potential weaknesses or limitations of my proposal, and suggest other possible venues of research for the future.

I have already alluded to a few of the assumptions that I bring to my writing of the dissertation, such as the claim that full sociality requires both the uniqueness and dignity of each divine person and that the kenosis of the Son in his humiliation has broader Trinitarian implications. I will conclude this introduction with a few more assumptions relevant to our topic.

I assume that a mutual hierarchy framework is limited in that it serves merely as a tool that a theologian uses in formulating dogma. The productivity of a framework or model depends on its ability to answer certain types of questions. It is not meant to be a dogma but a model to articulate doctrine in response to some issues.<sup>9</sup>

Another assumption is that a mutual hierarchy framework as a tool to be used in formulating dogma cannot replace the biblical narrative itself. Rather, the framework should always be used in service to the narrative as a tool that points to the narrative and to a better understanding of the narrative. The biblical narrative should continually norm how we understand a mutual hierarchy framework.

I also assume the distinction between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity, especially so as not to collapse the latter into the former. For the purposes of this dissertation, I understand ‘immanent Trinity’ as the Trinity considered apart from its relation to the world and thus prior to creation. ‘Economic Trinity’ refers to the Trinity in its relation to creation. I agree with most social Trinitarians that the second half of Rahner’s rule (i.e., “The ‘economic’ Trinity is the ‘immanent’ Trinity, and the ‘immanent’ Trinity is the economic Trinity”) must not be interpreted to mean that the immanent Trinity is somehow reducible to the economic Trinity.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For some helpful commentary on the limitations of the framework of a social model of the Trinity in general, see Thompson, *Imitatio Trinitatis*, 149–56. For example, Thompson says, “A paradigm is a ‘normative model’ or ‘privileged analogy’ of an object of human knowledge or endeavor ‘that shows us what that object is like.’ Accordingly, paradigms serve hermeneutically and heuristically as whole-like patterns which both interpret and exemplify constituent parts. The reason for ‘paradigm shifts’ is that a new model is deemed better in accounting for the respective categorical facts.... This analysis is helpful in clarifying Moltmann’s and Boff’s intent, since they contend in so many words that the Trinity, interpreted socially, is the most proper paradigm for Christian belief and practice” (*italics original*).

<sup>10</sup> See sections 1.1.3 and 1.2 of the dissertation where I discuss Moltmann and Pannenberg as notable exceptions to this tendency in social Trinitarianism.

Another assumption of the dissertation is that a framework is integrally related to doing theology both 'from above' and 'from below.' Generally speaking, the core of the dissertation proceeds from below since in chapter three my constructive proposal looks at the economic Trinity based on the Johannine narrative, and then in chapter four I build off of this economic narrative in order to formulate a reflection on the immanent Trinity. Here the mutual hierarchy of the divine persons in the economy is the epistemological basis for the mutual hierarchy of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity. Doing theology from above is also important in that it allows us to see the Trinity as a model for social relations in church and society, which, moreover, is a way social Trinitarianism often functions in contemporary theology. However, the scope of the dissertation does not permit much constructive reflection on doing theology from above, other than a few suggestions for further study in the conclusion to the dissertation. The dissertation focuses on social Trinitarianism as a significant theological system in its own right, paying special attention to its inherent theological tension(s), and thus does not focus on the otherwise important ecclesial and ethical dimensions that are typically associated with the thought of social Trinitarians and are developed in other works.

I am certainly not interested in completely replacing the existing forms of a social model of the Trinity with an understanding of the Trinity completely unlike that of social Trinitarians. On the contrary, to a certain extent the dissertation is actually meant to supplement or strengthen the field of social Trinitarianism by pointing out the potential pitfalls or inconsistencies of its system(s). The reader will note, for example, how I will often appropriate certain positive contributions of Balthasar, Volf, and other social Trinitarians. The dissertation seeks to increase awareness of various positive elements in social Trinitarianism as it now stands. However, the dissertation will also seek to supplement or strengthen the field by exposing certain assumptions

with respect to Trinitarian hierarchy and equality that affect providing a full account of the doctrine of the Trinity. Otherwise stated, the dissertation is interested in reconciling or integrating what social Trinitarians currently polarize, namely, the hierarchy and equality of the divine persons, which is generally evident in a polarization between the uniqueness and the dignity of the divine persons. The dissertation thus seeks to put some of the current claims made by prominent social Trinitarians on firmer doctrinal ground.

## CHAPTER ONE

### IDENTIFYING THEMES AND AREAS OF TENSION IN SOCIAL TRINITARIANISM

This chapter seeks to identify themes and an inherent tension in social Trinitarian systems. The chapter will first look at some chief themes that are characteristic of social Trinitarianism and, in connection with these themes, identify a tension that is present in social Trinitarian systems. I will call this tension a *hierarchy-equality polarity*. Next it will look at how some of these themes and this tension are present in arguably the most prominent figure associated with social Trinitarianism: Jürgen Moltmann. Finally, I will show how Balthasar and Volf are helpful as representative figures for assessing social Trinitarianism. This chapter is important in that it sets the stage for the detailed analysis of the next three chapters.

#### 1.1. Some Key Themes and Areas of Tension in Social Trinitarianism

In what follows, I will lay out some chief themes that are characteristic of social Trinitarianism. In the process, I will also identify a hierarchy-equality polarity or tension in connection with three areas within these themes.

##### 1.1.1. Social Trinitarian Critiques of Other Trinitarian Models

The first and probably most important theme associated with social Trinitarianism is that it stresses community as the ultimate ontological category in Trinitarian discourse and critiques other Trinitarian models accordingly. Thus Boff in *Trinity and Society* distinguishes between social Trinitarianism, a Western-Augustinian understanding of the Trinity, and an Eastern-Cappadocian understanding of the Trinity. Boff sees these as teaching community, substance,

and person, respectively, as the ultimate ontological categories in Trinitarian discourse. In what follows, I will first provide examples of both person- and a substance-oriented Trinitarian models, which models likely have been influential in the history of Trinitarian discourse. I will then proceed to describe some of the general characteristics of social Trinitarian critiques of these two Trinitarian models.

A person-oriented Trinitarian model teaches that the relative independence of the divine hypostases (in particular, the person of the Father as cause) is the ultimate ontological category in Trinitarian discourse. A good example of a foundational text for this may be seen in portions of the work of Basil the Great, one of the Cappadocian Fathers associated with the church's fight against Arianism leading up to the second ecumenical council. Najeeb Awad in his article "Between Subordination and *Koinonia*: Toward a New Reading of the Cappadocian Theology" provides a helpful example of a place where Basil sets forth what I have identified as a person-oriented Trinitarian model.<sup>11</sup> Awad argues that among the Cappadocian Fathers, "the idea that 'the origination of the Godhead is by virtue of the Father alone' is found at center stage primarily in Basil's writings."<sup>12</sup> Awad makes his case based primarily on portions of Basil's *On the Holy Spirit*:

In Basil's *On the Holy Spirit*—especially chapter sixteen onwards—Basil explicates the eternal Trinity in terms of successively *linear* relationships between the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Whereas in the earlier chapters of this treatise, he states that causal prepositions (i.e. from, through) refer equally to the three persons, in the later

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<sup>11</sup> Najeeb Awad, "Between Subordination and *Koinonia*: Toward a New Reading of the Cappadocian Theology," *Modern Theology* 23 (2007): 181–204.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 182, italics original. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:279–80, also implies that among the Cappadocian Fathers especially Basil emphasized the person of the Father as cause as the ultimate ontological category in Trinitarian discourse.



chapters he rather insists that the Father *alone* remains the source and the center of the Godhead.<sup>13</sup>

Awad goes on to identify two significant features in Basil's presentation. First, Basil, although also concerned to protect the equal divinity of the persons against the *Pneumatomachoi*, nevertheless stresses the linear ordering of the divine persons. Thus, for example, Awad notes that Basil in *On the Holy Spirit* emphasizes that only the Father is the "fountain and source of all gifts" whereas the Son is the sender of the gift and the Spirit is the messenger through whom the gift is sent.<sup>14</sup> Second, Basil in *On the Holy Spirit* tends to associate the word 'God' with the Father alone. According to Awad,

This does not mean that for him [Basil] the Spirit and the Son are not expressive of God. It simply means that the Spirit and the Son are so as each is "God from God," whereas the Father alone is "God the Father." That the Spirit and the Son are "God from God" and not "God," as the Father is, is a conclusion that Basil derives from the language about the Son and the Spirit as conveyers, transmitters, of the divine gift (i.e., the Son is the sender, the Spirit is the messenger), and not, as is the Father, "the fountain and source of all gifts."<sup>15</sup>

According to Awad, Basil emphasizes the fact that the Father is the source of the Godhead and in so doing overshadows other, more relational themes in his understanding of the Trinity.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 183, italics original.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Awad also notes that letter 38, attributed to Basil at Chalcedon, also emphasizes the priority of the Father as the source of the Godhead, although Awad acknowledges that the letter has also been attributed to Gregory of Nyssa (ibid., 187–88, 200). Although Awad does not mention the following quotation from letter 38, it clearly emphasizes the priority of the Father as cause in the Trinity: "The Son, Who declares the Spirit proceeding from the Father through Himself and with Himself shining forth alone and by only-begetting from the unbegotten light, so far as the peculiar notes [personal properties] are concerned, has nothing in common either with the Father or with the Holy Ghost. He alone is known by the stated signs [personal properties]. But God, Who is over all, alone has, as one special mark [personal property] of His own hypostasis, His being Father, and His deriving His hypostasis from no cause; and through this mark He is peculiarly known. Wherefore in the communion of the substance we maintain that there is no mutual approach or intercommunion of those notes of indication perceived in the Trinity, whereby is set forth the proper peculiarity of the Persons delivered in the faith, each of these being distinctively apprehended by His own notes."

A basic problem of a person-oriented view from the perspective of many social Trinitarians is that it tends to teach a logical subordinationism in connection with the priority that it gives to the Father as the unoriginated cause of the divine life. Many social Trinitarians, and especially egalitarian social Trinitarians, warn of a danger of Arianism in connection with this alleged subordinationism in an Eastern-Cappadocian Trinitarian understanding.<sup>17</sup> However, some social Trinitarians tend to cast the problem of a person-oriented Trinitarian model, not so much as a problem of the Father's hierarchy over the other divine persons (although they typically see this as a related problem), but more as a problem of reconciling the 'one' and the 'many' in the doctrine of the Trinity so that there is an adequate accounting for distinctness of the many. For example, after discussing what he sees as the historical problem of discussing the one God before the Trinity in the dogmatic structure, the hierarchical social Trinitarian Pannenberg says the following:

The problem of the relation between divine unity and plurality is not simply identical with that of the derivation of the Son and Spirit from the Father as in the Logos theology of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-century Apologists. By way of an eternal, nontemporal generation this train of thought led to the idea of three equal divine persons. But in the

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Awad also notes that many have also understood Gregory of Nazianzus as teaching this priority of the Father as cause, but Awad argues that in this regard Nazianzus has been misunderstood (ibid., 182).

<sup>17</sup> Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 4, says that the Greek Fathers taught that the Father is the source and origin of all divinity who communicates his whole substance to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, causing unequal hierarchy or subordination, which position Boff goes so far to say is Arianism. Pannenberg also warns of Arianism in *Systematic Theology*, 1:322–23, saying, "The Cappadocians with their thesis that the Father is the fount of deity sometimes come close to a view which threatens the equal deity because they do not expressly add that the Father is the principle of deity only from the perspective of the Son." See also ibid., 279–80. Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, 298–310, warns that seeing the eternal begetting of the Son by the Father without the mutual constitution of the persons may logically lead to Arianism. Similarly, Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John*, xviii, warns that a one-way subordination of the Son to the Father may lead in the end to Arianism.

Also relevant here is that social Trinitarians often tie a charge of 'tritheism' to the issue of subordinationism. See Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 61; Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John*, 5; Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:274, 297; Plantinga, *The Hodgeson-Welch Debate*, 224–32; and Thompson, *Imitatio Trinitatis*, 87–98. One interesting note in Plantinga is that he asserts that accusations of tritheism today against social Trinitarians do not really resemble tritheism accusations in the patristic period but rather accusations that came after the time of Augustine

Cappadocian answer to the Arian charge of tritheism the problem of God's unity in trinity arose afresh. The derivation of the Son and Spirit from the person of the Father no longer sufficed as an answer to the charge. For the Father himself is only one of the three persons in God in distinction from the unity of the divine substance. If the Father, unlike the Son and Spirit, were to be equated with the divine substance, then the Son and Spirit would necessarily be hypostases that are subordinate to the supreme God (see n. 50 above). Nor would it do merely to describe divine unity as a unity of genus, like Basil. This arouses the suspicion of triheism. Nor can one disarm the suspicion by arguing that the three persons are at one in their actions, for the constitution of their threeness already precedes their common outward activity.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast to the tendency of some egalitarian social Trinitarians to cast the problem of a person-oriented model in terms of Arianism, Pannenberg here says that the problems of this model revolve around both Arianism and tritheism and places these problems within the larger framework of the problem of the one and the many. Pannenberg's chief critique of a person-oriented model here is that in this model there is a tension between the one Father with the many that consists of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

A substance-oriented Trinitarian model teaches that the divine substance is a sort of fourth entity that, logically speaking, precedes the divine persons, and that this divine substance is the ultimate ontological category in Trinitarian discourse. It is widely recognized that the fifth chapter of Augustine's *On the Trinity* is a foundational text for this substance view. In this place, Augustine looks at what he sees as the three main categories in the doctrine of the Trinity: substance, relation, and person. Augustine here emphasizes that the divine substance is completely unchangeable, admitting no analogy from the world of creation since in creation all things are accidents and as such may either lose their qualities or have their qualities diminished. But the divine substance admits no accidents whatsoever. However, not all things in God are spoken of in reference to substance. Rather, certain things are spoken of according to relation.

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<sup>18</sup> Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:283.

Here Augustine looks at how such terms as Father, Son, begetter, and begotten are fully relational terms and in no way refer to themselves. Thus, for example, the term Father only makes sense in relation to the Son and the term Father in no way refers to the divine substance or to the Father himself. And thus we already arrive at Augustine's third chief term: person. For Augustine, there are three divine persons who each equally possess the divine substance and are relations to one another. In sum, Augustine in this chapter sets up a hierarchy between his three terms where substance receives the most attention and emphasis, relation less so, and person still less.

Social Trinitarians tend to critique a substance-oriented Trinitarian understanding to the extent that it teaches that the divine substance is a sort of fourth entity that logically precedes the divine persons.<sup>19</sup> For example, Pannenberg critiques Augustine for allegedly insufficiently conceiving the relationship between the one and the many in the Trinity by blurring the distinctness of the divine persons within the undifferentiated unity of the divine essence due to Augustine's concern to guarantee the equality of the persons.<sup>20</sup> Some social Trinitarians, such as Gunton, can even warn of a *pre-personal monism* in connection with the priority of the divine

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<sup>19</sup> A key figure in the Trinitarian Renaissance of the twentieth century who early on noted and explored some of the implications of a substance-oriented view is Karl Rahner. See Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Herder and Herder), 1970, 15–20.

Social Trinitarians seem to critique a substance-oriented Trinitarian model more vigorously than they do a person-oriented model. Often times the feeling is mutual, as it is typically those holding to a substance-oriented model that most vigorously critique a social model. For examples of critiques of a social model from those holding to a substance view, see John O'Donnell, "The Trinity as Divine Community: A Critical Reflection upon Recent Theological Developments," *Gregorianum* 69 (1988): 5–34; Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism" in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Sarah Coakley, "'Persons' in the 'Social' Doctrine of the Trinity: A Critique of Current Analytic Discussion," in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*; Ralph Norman, "Problems for the 'Social Trinity': Counting God," *Modern Believing* 41 (2000): 3–13; and Richard Cross, "Two Models of the Trinity?" *Heythrop Journal* 43 (2002): 275–94.

<sup>20</sup> See Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:282–85, 323–24.

substance in this substance-oriented view since the divine persons allegedly would be in danger of losing their freedom in their subordination to the more impersonal divine substance so that the divine persons would be absorbed into the divine substance.<sup>21</sup>

As is probably already somewhat apparent, social Trinitarian critiques of other Trinitarian models are typically marked by a hierarchy-equality polarity. On the one hand, most social Trinitarians have overall egalitarian Trinitarian trajectories—albeit with certain hierarchical elements interspersed—and chiefly critique what they see as illegitimate hierarchy in the doctrine of the Trinity. Moltmann is a foundational figure here, as will be seen shortly, since Moltmann tends to reject hierarchy in other Trinitarian models. Also relevant here, for example, are the various egalitarian social Trinitarians mentioned above who critique the person-oriented view for its alleged subordinationism.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, a few social Trinitarians have overall hierarchical Trinitarian trajectories—albeit with certain egalitarian elements interspersed—and chiefly critique what they see as illegitimate equality or homogenization in the doctrine of the Trinity. Again Pannenberg is a good example of this.<sup>23</sup> The first area of tension in social

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<sup>21</sup> See Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 58–62, 71–73, and Gunton, *The One, the Three, and the Many*, 210–13.

<sup>22</sup> Kevin Giles, an evangelical and an egalitarian social Trinitarian, also evidences this polarizing tendency in the first chapter of *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Trinity* where he gives an overview of the debate among evangelicals on the issue of Trinitarian hierarchy. According to Giles, for evangelicals the Trinitarian hierarchy debate is inseparable from the anthropological and ecclesiological debates over whether women should be subordinate to men in the church and in the home, with those favoring hierarchy saying yes and those favoring equality saying no. However, as the title of his book makes clear, Giles so favors the egalitarian trajectory that he can claim that the majority of evangelical scholars who hold to a hierarchical view of the Trinity “reinvent the Trinity.”

<sup>23</sup> Stanley Grenz in *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) is sympathetic to Pannenberg’s hierarchical social Trinitarianism and, likewise, in *Rediscovering the Trinity God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 199, seems supportive of Balthasar and his hierarchical social Trinitarianism as he asks the question, “Does the future belong to Balthasar?” John Horrell’s understanding of the Trinity also is hierarchical as he extensively critiques egalitarian social Trinitarians for being weak on distinguishing the divine persons. See Horrell, “Trinitarianism Today,” 416–17. In fact, Horrell’s entire article is organized around the debate over hierarchy versus equality within social

Trinitarianism is thus that social Trinitarians typically heavily prioritize either hierarchy or equality in their critiques of other Trinitarian models.

Besides critiquing other Trinitarian models proper, often social Trinitarians will be quite critical of some of the practical problems they see as connected with these models. For example, Boff, perhaps following the lead of Moltmann, criticizes other Trinitarian models for allegedly justifying a sort of inequality among different classes of people in society, including in the church.<sup>24</sup> Pannenberg stresses that conceptual incongruities in other Trinitarian models between the oneness and the threeness of God have caused much turmoil in the church. Gunton is similar to Pannenberg in that for Gunton the historical hindrance to the proper understanding of the Trinity was the particular understanding of the unknowability of God.<sup>25</sup> Social Trinitarians often critique other Trinitarian models in these two ways. We might conclude here that if Moltmann and Boff “protest” against certain oppressive understandings of God for justifying oppression in the church and society, Pannenberg and Gunton are concerned about certain mystifying understandings of God that lead to a certain agnosticism in the church that is also unappealing to those outside of the church.

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Trinitarianism, with Horrell favoring hierarchy. See also Horrell, “The Eternal Son of God in the Social Trinity.” Marc Cardinal Ouellet, *Divine Likeness: Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family*, also seems to evidence a hierarchical understanding of the Trinity.

<sup>24</sup> See Thompson, *Imitatio Trinitatis*, 141–43, for a summary of Boff on this issue. Cornelius Plantinga, “The Perfect Family: Our Model for Life Together Is Found in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” *Christianity Today* 32 (1988): 26, also says the following: “In the last two decades, certain Catholic and Protestant writers have presented such theories [utilizing social themes to reflect upon the Trinity] in the context of reflection on human suffering and human community in the face of it. By contrast with earlier Anglicans, these ‘suffering and solidarity’ theologians (e.g. Jan Lochman, Juan Luis Segundo, Geevarghese Mar Ostathios, and especially Jürgen Moltmann) offer ethically and even politically ambitious Trinity statements. They tend, for instance, to associate monotheism with oppression and to find in the Trinity vast implications not only for life in community but also—and particularly—for socialism.”

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 31–55.

### 1.1.2. Economic Trinity Issues

A second key theme and area of tension associated with social Trinitarianism is its understanding of the economy in the context of the biblical basis for social Trinitarianism. The tension here revolves around matters of interpretation associated with the place in the biblical narrative of the Son, who became incarnate and receives the bulk of attention in the Gospels, yet who is involved in relationships with the other divine persons in the economy. Egalitarian social Trinitarians tend to account for this emphasis on the Son in the biblical narrative vis-à-vis the Father and the Spirit by stressing the mutual indwelling of the divine persons in the economy. However this somewhat confuses the vocations of the divine persons due to the similarity between these vocations. For example, an egalitarian-leaning social Trinitarian like Erickson is typical here, as he says,

If each person of the Trinity shares the consciousness of each of the others, thinks the other's thoughts, or at least is conscious of those thoughts, then there really are no such things as separate experiences.<sup>26</sup>

Hierarchical social Trinitarians typically account for the place of the person of the Son vis-à-vis the other divine persons in the biblical narrative by stressing the Father's hierarchical sending of the Son. Pannenberg's understanding of the Trinity provides an example of this as he emphasizes the monarchy of the Father in the economy and stresses that 'God' generally refers to the Father in the economy and that the Son is characterized by human obedience, an obedience where the Son allegedly will not allow himself to be called equal to God.<sup>27</sup> By so stressing

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<sup>26</sup> Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, 224. Erickson sometimes endangers the distinctness of the divine persons: "Christ did not, apparently, have quite the direct access to the consciousness of the Father (and of the Spirit) that he had possessed previously" (ibid., 223). He also often speaks of something like the divine persons 'thinking each other's thoughts' (225–26, 236–38).

<sup>27</sup> Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:319–27.

hierarchy in the economy, Pannenberg and other hierarchical social Trinitarians make it difficult to reconcile the rather isolated vocation of Jesus with the mutual relations of the divine persons.

### 1.1.3. Immanent Trinity Issues

Another key theme in social Trinitarianism is the place of the immanent Trinity relative to creation. In general, social Trinitarians see the immanent Trinity as having a *stable existence* prior to the creation of the world. By stable existence here I am emphasizing that the divine persons prior to creation are not dependent on the world for their eternal existence. Thus social Trinitarians typically emphasize that the world was created *ex nihilo*. However, within social Trinitarianism, there arguably are a couple of notable exceptions to this stable understanding of the immanent Trinity. These exceptions actually occur in two of the most prominent social Trinitarians: Moltmann and Pannenberg. For both Moltmann and Pannenberg hold to some version of the *ontological priority of the future* coupled with *retroactive causality*. By the ‘ontological priority of the future’ I refer to the teaching that what the divine persons do in the future is most constitutive for their life together. And by ‘retroactive causality’ I refer to the teaching that future occurrences among the divine persons actually cause past occurrences between them. And so, putting the two terms together I refer to the teaching that the future occurrences among the divine persons are the most constitutive for their being and in fact cause their being, even from eternity. For example, Pannenberg evidences this sort of position in the following quotation:

But the eschatological consummation is only the locus of the decision that the Trinitarian God is always the true God from eternity to eternity. The dependence of his existence on the eschatological consummation of the kingdom changes nothing in



this regard. It is simply necessary to take into account the constitutive significance of this consummation for the eternity of God.<sup>28</sup>

This quotation shows that for Pannenberg the divine persons' decision about their identity or being comes at the eschaton and has retroactive force, even "from eternity to eternity." This has problematic effects when it comes to the proper distinction between God and creation. First, it shows that Pannenberg tends to have a rigid view of immutability since the Trinity is always the same, even if the decision for this comes only at the end. Similarly, second, it shows that Pannenberg makes the Trinity overly dependent upon the consummation of its work in the world since Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity must of necessity always entail the divine persons' real relationships to creation, even from eternity. By saying 'real relationships' here I am using the language of Aquinas (who said that God actually has no real relationships with the world) and refer to the divine persons being genuinely affected by an existing creation. In the present instance from Pannenberg, it would seem that logically he would have to say that creation exists even from all eternity since the divine persons' work in creation is what chiefly constitutes their existence, even from all eternity. Although Pannenberg explicitly speaks against such charges, numerous critics of Pannenberg point out suggestively that these conclusions logically follow from Pannenberg's central notion of the ontological priority of the future coupled with retroactive causality.<sup>29</sup> Although Moltmann and Pannenberg are foundational figures in social Trinitarianism, their followers generally do not follow them on this particular aspect of their Trinitarian doctrine so that to this extent they are not representative of the wider field of social Trinitarianism.

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<sup>28</sup> Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:331.

<sup>29</sup> Numerous commentators see Pannenberg threatening to dissolve the immanent Trinity into the economic

This discussion of the place of the immanent Trinity vis-à-vis creation in social Trinitarianism provides a good segue to a final area of tension present within the movement. This tension concerns the understanding of the immanent Trinity among various social Trinitarians. For example, as will be discussed further shortly, Moltmann distinguishes in his own Trinitarian theology between a ‘level of constitution’ where the Father constitutes the Son and Spirit in a hierarchical fashion (i.e. begetting and spirating), and a ‘level of relation’ where the divine persons relate to one another in a fully mutual and egalitarian way. The tension here is over how to reconcile the egalitarian mutual relations that Moltmann emphasizes with the hierarchical level of relation where the Father can appear “alone.” Cornelius Plantinga and Miroslav Volf are good examples of social Trinitarians who have appropriated Moltmann’s two-level solution and whose Trinitarian thought bears some significant resemblances to his in this context.<sup>30</sup>

Clearly distinguishable from Moltmann’s two-level solution are other social Trinitarians like Wolfhart Pannenberg, Leonardo Boff, Millard Erickson, Royce Gruenler, and Colin Gunton, who reject Moltmann’s two-level solution and rather view the divine processions (i.e. begetting and spirating) as mutual relations.<sup>31</sup> Pannenberg is a foundational figure here. We noted above that Pannenberg stresses what he sees as the conceptual incongruities in other Trinitarian models between the oneness and the threeness of God. Pannenberg’s solution to this problem is to view the divine processions as mutual relations and in this way stress the mutual constitution of the

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Trinity. See, for example, Grenz, *Reason for Hope*, 93–102, for a discussion of some of these objections.

<sup>30</sup> Balthasar also typically works with something like ‘two levels’ in the immanent Trinity, although his two levels evidence a clearly hierarchical trajectory in contrast to Moltmann. See further chapter four of the dissertation.

Although Thomas Thompson is harder to classify, he also seems to hold to a two-level position. See, for example, Thompson, *Imitatio Trinitatis*, 132–33, where Thompson lists five ways that the divine persons are one.

<sup>31</sup> See Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:325; Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 141–46; Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, 303–10; Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John*, x–xx; Gunton, *The One, the Three, and the Many*,

divine persons. Within this group of social Trinitarians who view the processions as mutual relations, there is a tension in the doctrine of the Trinity in connection with a hierarchy-equality polarity, as we will now see.

Similar to the tension in the two-level solution, the tension in the processions-as-mutual-relations view revolves around viewing the divine persons both as involved in mutual relations and as not being involved in mutual relations. For example, Erickson and Gruenler in connection with their egalitarian views on the Trinity stress the eternal mutual indwelling of and even the overlap of consciousness of the divine persons. Because these theologians allow little hierarchy among the divine persons in the immanent Trinity, they insufficiently account for the distinctness of the persons in this mutual indwelling. Yet both theologians also often argue that the divine persons are distinct as they mutually relate to one another. Related to the fact that Gruenler and Erickson do not allow hierarchy in the immanent Trinity, there is a tension between their statements about the overlap of consciousness of the divine persons and their statements about the mutual relations among the divine persons.<sup>32</sup>

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214; and Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 165–70.

<sup>32</sup> See also footnote six in the introduction to the dissertation where I discuss Gruenler's egalitarian understanding of the immanent Trinity. Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, 309, 331, allows that there is a "temporary subordination" of the divine persons in the economy, although this does "not indicate any intrinsic relationship between the three" in the immanent Trinity. See also Erickson, *ibid.*, 281, 331–39, for various statements that point to Erickson's overall egalitarian understanding of the immanent Trinity. See also Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity: 3 Crucial Questions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), for a brief, easy-to-read statement of Erickson's understanding of the Trinity. Although Boff is not as egalitarian as Gruenler and Erickson, he also at times appears modalistic like they do. For example, Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 89, says, "At most we can say that in the Trinity there is one substantial consciousness (nature) which is really expressed by three divine, conscious beings (Persons)." See further Boff, 84, 89, 128, 145. This modalistic tendency in Boff seems to be connected to his tendency to stress the divine persons containing each other (84) or being in one another (144). Significantly, Boff also states that he even desires to "diminish differences" between the divine persons (6). See also Boff's egalitarian statement that God the Father is trans-sexual and can equally well be referred to as maternal Father or the paternal Mother (120–21).

## 1.2. The Place of Jürgen Moltmann in the Context of the Themes and Areas of Tension Identified in Social Trinitarianism

Among the various themes associated with social Trinitarianism, we have thus identified a tension in the field that we have described as a hierarchy-equality polarity. We have also seen three areas in which such a polarity or tension manifests itself. Here it would be helpful to provide an example of how the hierarchy-equality polarity arises in these three areas in the work of a foundational figure in social Trinitarianism. Here I will choose Moltmann and briefly evaluate how the hierarchy-equality polarity or tension is evident in *The Trinity and the Kingdom*. After this, I will look at the theme of the stability of the immanent Trinity in Moltmann and give my reasoning for not choosing Moltmann as one of my chief interlocutors in the dissertation.

The first area where a hierarchy-equality polarity is at work in social Trinitarianism is in the system's critique of other Trinitarian models. Notable here is Moltmann's section "Monotheism and Monarchy" in *The Trinity and the Kingdom*.<sup>33</sup> Moltmann here points out that some of the Christian apologists in the early church emphasized the monarchy of God. According to Moltmann, the term *μοναρχία* ('monarchy') in this context was associated with "the lordship of God (Justin), the monarchical constitution of the universe (Tatian), or the singular and unique divine rule or empire (Tertullian)."<sup>34</sup> According to Moltmann, the term *μοναρχία* replaced the biblical term *Βασιλεία* and was interpreted as meaning lordship or rule.

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<sup>33</sup> The polarizing tendency within social Trinitarianism with regard to a hierarchy-equality polarity in general in many ways stems from *The Trinity and the Kingdom* itself. Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 4, notes that in offering its brief sketch of a Trinitarian ecclesiology Moltmann's book is "sharply focused on the issue of 'hierarchy' vs. 'equality.'" For further discussion, see also Volf, "The Trinity Is Our Social Program: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement," *Modern Theology* 14 (1998): 407–12.

<sup>34</sup> Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 131.

Moltmann associates this lordship or rule with what he sees as a wrongheaded intrusion of an oppressive hierarchy into Christian theology and practice. Thus Moltmann says, “Let me point out at once here that this monotheistic monarchism was, and is, an uncommonly seductive religious-political ideology.”<sup>35</sup> Again, “The Christian church was therefore right to see monotheism as the severest inner danger....”<sup>36</sup>

According to Moltmann, monarchic monotheism is the common factor at work in the two greatest Trinitarian dangers of the early church, Arianism and Sabellianism: “Christ must either recede into the series of the prophets, giving way to the One God, or he must disappear into the One God as one of his manifestations.”<sup>37</sup> Moltmann thus brings together the notion of Trinitarian hierarchy (rule, lordship, etc.) with the greatest Trinitarian heresies the church has known. Moltmann thus here evidences a Trinitarian critique that is very one-sidedly anti-hierarchical, so that we see an example of a hierarchy-equality polarity in Moltmann’s critique.

The second area where the hierarchy-equality tension is at work in social Trinitarianism is in the system’s approach(es) to economic Trinity issues—in particular, the place of Son vis-à-vis the other divine persons. Notable here is the section “The Surrender of the Son” in the *Trinity and the Kingdom* that deals with the sufferings of the divine persons in the economy. Here Moltmann acknowledges a hierarchical element between the Father and the Son at the cross where, for example, it is the Father who forsakes and casts off the Son, and not vice versa. But

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Moltmann also has a “criticism of political and clerical monotheism” and provides as examples such things as “the European absolutism of the Enlightenment period” and in the church the “monarchical episcopate” and the “theology of the papacy” (ibid., 191–202).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 131.

much more prominent for Moltmann is the more egalitarian theme that both the Father and the Son suffer at the cross.

Here Moltmann uses extreme language. There is a “breakdown of the relationship that constitutes the very life of the Trinity”; “The Father loses his fatherhood”; “The innermost life of the Trinity is at stake”; “What happens on Golgotha reaches into the innermost depths of the Godhead, putting its impress on the Trinitarian life in eternity”; and finally, “Yet on the cross the Father and the Son are at the same time so much one that they represent a single surrendering movement.”<sup>38</sup> In these statements we see that Moltmann is in danger of losing the distinctness of the divine persons in such a way that the egalitarian relations of the divine persons overshadow Moltmann’s other statements about the Father exercising hierarchy over the Son at the cross. The egalitarian elements in Moltmann’s understanding of the economic Trinity are in conflict with the hierarchical elements and threaten to eclipse them.

The third area where the hierarchy-equality tension is at work in social Trinitarianism is in the system’s understanding of the immanent Trinity. Notable here is Moltmann’s chapter “The Immanent Trinity” in *The Trinity and the Kingdom*. As already mentioned, Moltmann distinguishes in his Trinitarian theology between a ‘level of constitution’ where the Father constitutes the Son and Spirit in a hierarchical fashion, and a ‘level of relation’ where the divine persons relate to one another in a fully mutual and egalitarian way. Moltmann says,

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 starting point, inasmuch as he is understood as being the “origin of the Godhead.” But this “monarchy of the Father” only applies to the *constitution* of the Trinity. It has no validity within the eternal circulation of the divine life, and none in the perichoretic

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 80–82.

unity of the Trinity. Here the three Persons are equal; they live and are manifested in one another and through one another.<sup>39</sup>

The tension here in Moltmann is over how to reconcile the two seemingly conflicting 'levels.' For Moltmann, the egalitarian level of relation by far receives the greater emphasis in his Trinitarian theology than the hierarchical level of constitution. In fact, as is also apparent in the quotation cited above, Moltmann tends merely to use the hierarchical level of constitution in an attempt to distinguish the divine persons.<sup>40</sup> In this regard, we note that Moltmann here speaks of the "monarchy of the Father" in connection with the hierarchical level of constitution even though Moltmann in his Trinitarian critique of other Trinitarian models was very concerned about the dangers of a monarchical monotheism.<sup>41</sup> A hierarchy-equality polarity in Moltmann's understanding of the immanent Trinity is thus apparent, where it is difficult to harmonize the unilateral constituting of the Father at the hierarchical level of constitution with the completely mutual activity of the divine persons at the egalitarian level of relation.

Finally, it would be helpful here to briefly discuss why I am not using Moltmann as a representative figure for social Trinitarianism, especially due to his centrality to the movement. Moltmann's extreme language on the suffering of the divine persons at the cross evidences an egalitarian relationship between God and the world in such a way that Moltmann is in danger of making the divine persons dependent upon the world (and especially the cross) for their eternal

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 175–76, italics original.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Thompson in chapter six of *Imitatio Trinitatis* says his "principle criticism" of Moltmann and Boff is that they so oppose subordinations in society sanctioned by subordinations in the doctrine of the Trinity that they understand the egalitarian relations of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity in such a way that they leave little room for the differentiation of the divine persons.

<sup>41</sup> Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:334, also notes that there is a tension between Moltmann's call for the unity of the divine persons to be based on their reciprocal fellowship with his deriving the Son and Spirit from the Father as the source of deity.

existence. Here Moltmann's views on the economic Trinity influence what he says about the immanent Trinity in such a way that the latter is in danger of being dissolved into the former.

Thus Moltmann says,

The cross is at the centre of the Trinity. This is brought out by the tradition, when it takes up the Book of Revelation's image of "the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 5:12). Before the world was, the sacrifice was already in God. No Trinity is conceivable without the Lamb, without the sacrifice of love, without the crucified Son. For he is the slaughtered Lamb glorified in eternity.<sup>42</sup>

Here we again see how closely Moltmann eternally ties the cross from the economic Trinity with the immanent Trinity. The flip side of this is the way that Moltmann describes the creation of the world:

*Christian panentheism*, on the other hand, started from the divine essence: Creation is a fruit of God's longing for "his Other" and for that Other's free response to the divine love. That is why the idea of the world is inherent in the nature of God himself from eternity. For it is impossible to conceive of a God who is not a creative God. A non-creative God would be imperfect compared with the God who is eternally creative.<sup>43</sup>

Moltmann here again does not account adequately for the immanent Trinity having a prior existence to the world that is not dependent upon the world. Similarly, Moltmann cannot conceive of the Father-Son relationship from eternity without creation:

From eternity God has desired not only himself but the world too, for he did not merely want to communicate himself to himself; he wanted to communicate himself to the one who is other than himself as well. That is why the idea of the world is already inherent in the Father's love for the Son. The eternal Son of God is closely related to God's idea of the world.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 106, italics original.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 108.



Moltmann is not as ontological in his thinking as is Pannenberg. For Pannenberg is much more concerned to say that the divine persons constitute themselves at the eschaton, whereas Moltmann rather seems to focus on the economy and on God from eternity only being *affected* by creation and by the cross.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, by this more limited talk of the retroactive causality of the world on the immanent Trinity, Moltmann does not account adequately for the stability of the immanent Trinity. Moltmann, like Pannenberg, gives a certain ontological priority to the future, since it is here that God is able to be in a relationship with his “other,” and says that this future retroactively causes the divine persons from eternity. To this extent, Moltmann, like Pannenberg, does not characterize the larger field of social Trinitarianism.

### **1.3. Balthasar and Volf as Representative Figures for Assessing Social Trinitarianism**

In this section I will first examine some of the chief Trinitarian works by Balthasar. After this, the same procedure will be repeated for Volf. Based on this analysis of resources, I will summarize how both Balthasar and Volf represent some of the major themes and inherent areas of tension that I have argued are present in social Trinitarianism. Finally, through a comparison of Balthasar and Volf in the context of the areas of tension in social Trinitarianism, I will argue that, especially because of Balthasar’s preference for hierarchy and Volf’s preference for equality, they are complementary figures for assessing social Trinitarianism.

#### **1.3.1. The Social Trinitarian Trajectories of Balthasar and Volf**

Among Balthasar’s vast corpus, he is probably best known for his theological trilogy that consists of the seven-volume *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, the five-volume

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<sup>45</sup> On Moltmann being less ontological than Pannenberg, see especially Roger Olson, “Trinity and Eschatology: The Historical Being of God in Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg,” *Scottish Journal of*

*Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, and the three-volume *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory*.<sup>46</sup> This trilogy will now be briefly considered for its theological and especially Trinitarian value.<sup>47</sup>

In *The Glory of the Lord* Balthasar takes great effort to appreciate the less propositional side of Scripture, as the subtitle of the work clearly shows that it is a theological aesthetics. One notable instance where this aesthetical concern shines through brightly is when Balthasar considers the history of metaphysical thought beginning with the Homeric myths. John O'Donnell summarizes well Balthasar's thought here:

In the period of myth meaning was found through the action of the gods; their intervention in human affairs explained the 'why' of human events. The shift from myth to logos, which is witnessed especially in the rise of Greek philosophy, is the

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*Theology* 36 (1983): 213–27.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, 182, where Grenz mentions that interest in Balthasar has increased greatly in recent years with the translation of the trilogy and the subsequent wider recognition of his theological skill. The trilogy was originally published in German. See *Herrlichkeit: Eine Theologische Ästhetik*, 3 vols. (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1961–69); *Theodramatik*, 4 vols. (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1973–83); and *Theologik*, 3 vols. (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1985–87).

<sup>47</sup> Some helpful secondary works dealing with Balthasar's understanding of the Trinity are the following: Thomas Dalzell, "The Enrichment of God in Balthasar's Trinitarian Eschatology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 66 (2001): 3–18; Angela Franks, "Trinitarian Analogia Entis in Hans Urs von Balthasar," *The Thomist* 62 (1998): 533–59; Stanley Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, Steffen Lösel, "Murder in the Cathedral: Hans Urs von Balthasar's New Dramatization of the Doctrine of the Trinity," *Pro Ecclesia* 5 (1996): 427–39; Guy Mansini, "Balthasar and the Theodramatic Enrichment of the Trinity," *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 499–519. Margaret Turek, *Towards a Theology of God the Father: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theodramatic Approach* (New York: P. Lang, 2001); Kevin Monravin, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs Balthasar: An Irenaeus Retrieval* (New York: Crossroad, 2002); Edward Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Continuum, 1994); John O'Donnell, *Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992); John O'Donnell, *Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992); John O'Donnell, "The Trinity as Divine Community: A Critical Reflection upon Recent Theological Developments," *Gregorianum* 69 (1988): 5–34; Gerard O'Hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge, U. K.: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Cyril O'Regan, "Balthasar and Gnostic Genealogy," *Modern Theology* 22 (2006): 609–50; Marc Ouellet, "The Spirit in the Life of the Trinity," trans. David Schindler, *Communio* 25 (1998): 199–213; Alyssa Pitstick, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids: Berdmans, 2007); John Sachs, "Deus Semper Major—Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam: The Pneumatology and Spirituality of Hans Urs von Balthasar," *Gregorianum* 74 (1993): 631–57; David Schindler, "Catholic Theology, Gender, and the Future of Western Civilization," *Communio* 20 (1993): 200–39; Georges de Schrijver, "Hans Urs von Balthasar's Christologie in der Theodramatik: Trinitarische Engführung als Methode," *Bijdragen* 59 (1998): 141–53.

search for the meaning of human life through reason. Plato and Aristotle in differing ways affirmed that reality has a rational structure. This rational structure, which for them had a divine origin, is the meaning of logos.

This shift from myth to logos for Balthasar marks the rise of the Western philosophical tradition. Neo-Platonism taught that worldly realities must be left behind in one's flight toward the One, and it portrayed Christ as opposed to myth. For Balthasar, on the other hand, Christ integrates the world of myth into himself. Myth, more than logos, serves the positive function of showing that the infinite can become involved in the finite.<sup>48</sup>

This quotation points both to the Christocentrism of Balthasar associated with his exchanges with Barth as well as to the fact that Balthasar sees Christ and the other divine persons in terms of beauty, a beauty that is not merely static but that is also capable of action.

*Theo-Drama* continues the line of thought found in *The Glory of the Lord*, only now focusing on the good action of the divine persons in the economy of salvation. Here Balthasar stresses what he sees as the drama in the economy that occurs between the divine persons themselves and between the divine persons and human beings culminating in the paschal events, which drama is grounded in and hence made possible by an eternal drama between the divine persons in the immanent Trinity.

Finally, *Theo-Logic* is especially associated with the Holy Spirit and demonstrates the unity of *The Glory of the Lord* and *Theo-Drama*. Aidan Nichols summarizes this as follows,

A theological logic is concerned with salvation's intelligible structure—not its attractive radiance, which belongs to theological aesthetics, nor its power to resolve life's conflicts in favor of the good, the subject matter of theological dramatics. In this perspective, Balthasar [in *Theo-Logic*] speaks of the Spirit as 'expounding' a twofold movement—from Father to Son in the Incarnation and from Son to Father in the Resurrection of the Crucified."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> O'Donnell, *Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 33.

<sup>49</sup> Aidan Nichols, "The Theologic," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar*, ed. Edward Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 169. For more background on *Theo-*

*Theo-Logic* continues the emphasis on the drama between the divine persons both in the economic Trinity and in the immanent Trinity, only now from the perspective of a more logical analysis of these phenomena. Balthasar's trilogy thus clearly evidences a Trinitarian structure and focus, which trilogy makes room for visible beauty or glory, dramatic interpretation of goodness, as well as the more propositional and logical analysis of these phenomena.

Besides these general features of each part of the trilogy, crucial for the current dissertation is that there is a sort of development and intensification of Balthasar's Trinitarian discussion as one proceeds through the trilogy. Cyril O'Regan well notes this,

The symbol of the Trinity is not thematized in any full-blown way in *The Glory of the Lord*. Throughout Balthasar's great trilogy, the symbol of the Trinity becomes more and more important. In the second part of his trilogy, his *Theo-Drama*, Balthasar begins the move from a rich constructive Christology to its Trinitarian supposition, a move completed in *Theologik*, the third part of the trilogy.<sup>50</sup>

Balthasar thus became more consciously Trinitarian as he proceeded through the trilogy. In *Theo-Logic* one typically finds Balthasar's most developed Trinitarian views.

The second volume of the *Theo-Logic* in particular is helpful for illustrating Balthasar's Trinitarian views as they pertain to the life and work of Jesus.<sup>51</sup> Here it is helpful to quote Balthasar from about half way through this work where he discusses his method chapter by chapter:

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*Logic* see also Aidon Nichols, *Say It Is Pentecost: A Guide through Balthasar's Logic* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001).

<sup>50</sup> Cyril O'Regan, "Von Balthasar and Thick Retrieval," *Gregorianum* 77 (1996): 234. Also see Cyril O'Regan, "Von Balthasar's Valorization and Critique of Heidegger's Genealogy of Modernity," in *Christian Spirituality and the Culture of Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Berdmans, 1998), 152, where O'Regan says that Balthasar does not deal that extensively with the Trinity in *The Glory of the Lord*.

<sup>51</sup> Volume one of *Theo-Logic* is a slightly-edited republication of Balthasar's much earlier work *Wahrheit* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1947). Volume three of *Theo-Logic* is a thoroughly Trinitarian work but focuses more on how the divine persons work in the post-Easter church.

Our first step was to grope upward toward the mystery of God from Trinitarian analogies in the world (I–II)—all the while tacitly presupposing, of course, a knowledge of the Trinity in God. We then attempted, as far as was humanly possible, to circle about this mystery itself (III). From this point on, however, we will follow (in IV and V) the path that descends from the Trinity to the world.<sup>52</sup>

From this we can see that the second volume of *Theo-Logic* is a highly Trinitarian work. In this work, one can see Balthasar critiquing from his hierarchical perspective various theologians whom he sees as being overly egalitarian. Here Balthasar often argues that certain Trinitarian errors can lead to significant theological problems in general and also can cause a significant threat to the church (usually the Roman Catholic Church). In addition, reflecting Balthasar's Johannine emphasis in the trilogy in general, this volume shows how Balthasar bases his hierarchical doctrine of the Trinity especially upon the Father hierarchically sending the Son into the world as he sees it present in the Johannine narrative. Here the pinnacle of the mission of the Son is his descent into hell on Holy Saturday, which is the key redemptive event in Balthasar's soteriology. Finally, in this volume, we see the nature of Balthasar's hierarchical understanding of the immanent Trinity. The second volume of *Theo-Logic* gives a nice overall view of Balthasar's hierarchical social model of the Trinity, which volume we will deal with later on in this work.

Leaving Balthasar aside for a moment, Volf is probably best known for his views on work in *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*,<sup>53</sup> for his views on ecclesiology in *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*,<sup>54</sup> and for his views on social injustice in *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*.

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<sup>52</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, 2:169.

<sup>53</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>54</sup> *After Our Likeness* was translated from the original German *Trinität und Gemeinschaft: Eine Oekumenische*

In each of these works, Volf roots his respective views in his egalitarian understanding of the Trinity.<sup>55</sup>

Volf's most extensive Trinitarian teaching appears in *After Our Likeness*.<sup>56</sup> Volf begins this book with an extended analysis of the Trinitarian teaching and allegedly corresponding ecclesiological views of both John Zizioulas and Joseph Ratzinger. Here Volf argues that in each case, certain hierarchical Trinitarian errors lead to what he sees as significant hierarchical problems in ecclesiology. In the second, constructive half of the book, Volf returns to the Trinitarian views of these two theologians in the chapter "Trinity and Church" where Volf critically dialogues with them as he lays out his own constructive, egalitarian Trinitarian and ecclesiological views.<sup>57</sup> Here as elsewhere Volf is a Trinitarian theologian whose understanding of the Trinity informs almost all other areas of his theology, in this case ecclesiology. This "Trinity and Church" chapter of Volf's book draws heavily on John's Gospel, which Volf sees as

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*Ekklesiologie* (Mainz: Grünewald Verlag, 1996).

<sup>55</sup> Besides these three major works of Volf, the following are also notable Trinitarian works of Volf: "Being as God Is: Trinity and Generosity," in *God's Life in Trinity*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006); "Community Formation as an Image of the Triune God: A Congregational Model of Church Order and Life," in *Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today*, ed. Richard Longenecker (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002); "The Spirit and the Church," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 18 (2000): 20–45; "The Trinity and Gender Identity," in *Gospel and Gender: A Trinitarian Engagement with Being Male and Female in Christ*, ed. Douglas Campbell and Alan Torrance (London: T&T Clark International, 2003); "The Trinity Is Our Social Program: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement"; "Trinity, Unity, Primacy: On the Trinitarian Nature of Unity and Its Implications for the Question of Primacy," in *Petrine Ministry and the Unity of the Church: Toward a Patient and Fraternal Dialogue*, ed. James F. Puglisi (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999).

Some helpful secondary works are Ralph del Colle, "Communion and the Trinity: The Free Church Ecclesiology of Miroslav Volf—A Catholic Response," *Pneuma* 22 (2000): 303–27; Dennis Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology: Vision and Versions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000); Curtis Freeman, "Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Communion Ecclesiology in the Free Church," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 31 (2004), 259–72; Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Towards a Theology and Ecclesiology of the Spirit: Marquette University's 1998 Symposium, An Advent of the Spirit: Orientations in Pneumatology," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 14 (1999): 65–80; Shannon Ledbetter, "Vocation and Our Understanding of God," *Modern Believing* 42 (2001): 39–49; and Kathryn Tanner, "Kingdom Come: The Trinity and Politics," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 28 (2007): 129–45.

<sup>56</sup> See Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 24–25, for Volf's discussion of the structure of this work.

especially stressing the egalitarian relations and perichoresis of the divine persons in the economy. These two concepts are key for understanding how Volf accounts for the place of Son vis-à-vis the Father and Spirit in the biblical narrative, as Volf argues that the Father and the Spirit work together closely with the Son in an egalitarian manner. Volf in this chapter also appropriates Moltmann's two-level understanding of the immanent Trinity and places great stress on the egalitarian relations of the divine persons. Here Volf also gives reasons for rejecting the processions-as-mutual-relations view associated with Pannenberg.<sup>57</sup> Finally, in *After Our Likeness* Volf is also helpful for critiquing such notions as retroactive causality and the ontological priority of the future that appear in Moltmann and Pannenberg. Although Volf says that he has an eschatological perspective in his understanding of the Trinity in some ways similar to Moltmann and Pannenberg,<sup>58</sup> Volf also clearly differs from them in this context and explicitly critiques such things as retroactive causality as he finds present in Zizioulas and Pannenberg.<sup>60</sup>

Besides *After Our Likeness*, Volf's book *Exclusion and Embrace* is also significant with regards to its Trinitarian teaching. Volf notes that *After Our Likeness* deals with mainly the inner, formal nature of the church and not mission per se; moreover, he says that *Exclusion and Embrace* is a "necessary companion" to *After Our Likeness* and is grounded in the same view of the Trinity as *After Our Likeness*, although *Exclusion and Embrace* differs by pursuing the question of the relationship between churches and the societies they inhabit, of the way one

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 191–220.

<sup>58</sup> See *ibid.*, 215–17. For further discussion of this issue see also Volf, "The Trinity Is Our Social Program," 407–13.

<sup>59</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 128.

<sup>60</sup> See *ibid.*, 90, 102, 202, 216. For more background on Volf's views on eschatology see especially Volf, "After Moltmann: Reflections on the Future of Eschatology," in *God Will Be All in All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999); Volf, "Being as God Is"; and Volf, "Eschaton,

ought to “live in a world suffused with deception, injustice, and violence.”<sup>61</sup> In harmony with this context of living in an evil world, *Exclusion and Embrace* has much material on the self-giving of the divine persons as they work together in a generally egalitarian manner at the cross.

Thus Volf writes,

Without wanting to disregard (let alone discard) the theme of divine solidarity with victims [emphasized by Moltmann], I will pick up and develop here the theme of divine self-donation for the enemies and their reception into the eternal communion of God. Moltmann himself has drawn the social implications of his theology of the cross and of the Trinity mainly from the theme of divine solidarity: as God suffers with victims, protects them, and gives them rights of which they have been deprived, he argued, so should we. In contrast, I want to spell out the social significance of the theme of divine self-giving: as God does not abandon the godless to their evil but gives the divine self for them in order to receive them into divine communion through atonement, so also should we—whoever our enemies and whoever we may be.<sup>62</sup>

On the topic of the divine egalitarian self-giving at the cross, *Exclusion and Embrace* complements *After Our Likeness*, which does not have much discussion of this issue.

### **1.3.2. Balthasar and Volf in the Context of the Themes and Areas of Tension of Social Trinitarianism**

Based on this analysis of resources, we will now see that studying the Trinitarian thought of Balthasar and Volf together shows that, especially due to difference between the overall hierarchical Trinitarian trajectory of Balthasar compared to the overall egalitarian Trinitarian trajectory of Volf, they are complementary figures for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of social Trinitarianism. First, both spend significant time from their own significantly different perspectives critiquing other Trinitarian models, with Balthasar opposing what he sees as overly

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Creation, and Social Ethics,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (1995): 130–43.

<sup>61</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 7.

<sup>62</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 23. For a fuller description of the structure and method of the book, see *ibid.*, 28–31.



egalitarian Trinitarian trajectories and Volf opposing what he sees as overly hierarchical Trinitarian trajectories. Second, especially due to their respective understandings of the need for the stability of the immanent Trinity, both Balthasar and Volf are more representative of the wider field of social Trinitarianism than Pannenberg and Moltmann; that is, both Balthasar and Volf reject the positions of Pannenberg and Moltmann on the ontological priority of the future and retroactive causality as described above. Third, both Balthasar and Volf show the basis of their own Trinitarian views in the biblical economy. Here we note that both use the Gospel of John as a basis for their understanding of the Trinity, and both discuss significant matters of biblical interpretation in social Trinitarianism such as the significance of the vocation of the Son relative to the Father and the Spirit for understanding the Trinity. In this regard, both give a framework for showing how the hierarchy evident between the divine persons in the economy should influence our understanding of hierarchy in the immanent Trinity. And finally, Balthasar and Volf heavily emphasize hierarchy and equality, respectively, in the doctrine of the immanent Trinity. Because Balthasar and Volf share a common social Trinitarian trajectory yet understand it so differently with respect to the question of hierarchy, studying them together proves complementary and better represents the field of social Trinitarianism than only dealing with one of them.

#### **1.4. Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter we have seen that social Trinitarians have certain key themes in common. For example, social Trinitarians posit community as the ultimate ontological category in Trinitarian discourse. Social Trinitarians also note that certain Trinitarian models that they critique, namely substance-oriented and person-oriented Trinitarian models, lead to harmful effects on the church and society. For example, egalitarian social Trinitarians often warn that

other Trinitarian models are too hierarchical and that this hierarchy is connected with a view of church or society that has leaders exercising an oppressive hierarchy over the various people they lead. Again, social Trinitarians emphasize that a stable doctrine of the immanent Trinity is necessary in theology because it helps prevent dissolving God into the world, which would call into question God's power and ability to save human beings. However, Moltmann and Pannenberg are notable exceptions here in that they both tend to emphasize the ontological priority of the future and retroactive causality in their understanding of the Trinity so that the divine persons seem to be dependent on the world for their constitution or existence, even from eternity.

In this chapter I have also argued that one key tension, a hierarchy-equality polarity, in social Trinitarianism leads to a certain reading of (1) classic substance- and person (of the Father)-oriented Trinitarian models, (2) the economic Trinity, and (3) the immanent Trinity. First, social Trinitarians choose either hierarchy or equality in the doctrine of the Trinity, depending on which social Trinitarian is under consideration, and critique other Trinitarian models accordingly. Second, social Trinitarians advocate either equality or hierarchy to the neglect of the other in the economic Trinity. And finally, social Trinitarians similarly emphasize either an egalitarian or a hierarchical understanding of the immanent Trinity.

Finally, this chapter argued that Balthasar and Volf are representative figures in social Trinitarianism. Through a general analysis of certain key primary works I showed that each represents the key themes mentioned above. Similarly, I showed in a general way that they also illustrate the three tensions in the field of social Trinitarianism. Balthasar chose hierarchy over equality in his critique of other Trinitarian models, his understanding of the centering of the Johannine narrative in the person of the Son, and his understanding of the immanent Trinity.

Volf rather chose equality over hierarchy in connection with these three tensions. Finally, I argued that because Balthasar and Volf share a common social Trinitarian trajectory yet understand it so differently with respect to the question of hierarchy, studying them together proves complementary and better represents the field of social Trinitarianism than if only one or the other was studied.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **TOWARDS A REVISED SOCIAL TRINITARIAN CRITIQUE OF PERSON- AND SUBSTANCE (UNITY)-ORIENTED TRINITARIAN MODELS USING A MUTUAL HIERARCHY FRAMEWORK**

The question this chapter will be trying to answer is “How does a social model of the Trinity deal with the concerns of person- and substance (unity)-oriented Trinitarian models?” We will approach this question by taking a look at how Balthasar and Volf in their critiques of these other models tend to conceive of hierarchy and equality as opposites and correspondingly give preference to either hierarchy or equality in their respective critiques. By addressing the concerns of other Trinitarian options, social Trinitarianism tests its own viability as a Trinitarian option, showing the extent of its continuity with certain aspects of these other models and showing its potential to evaluate some of the key problems that theologians utilizing these other models are addressing.

The chapter will first present the basic contours of Balthasar’s critique of person- and substance (unity)-oriented Trinitarian models by critically utilizing relevant secondary works on Balthasar’s Trinitarian critique as well as highlighting some key features of Balthasar’s own critique as evident in portions of the second volume of his *Theo-Logic*. Next the chapter will present the basic contours of Volf’s critique of person- and substance (unity)-oriented Trinitarian models by utilizing his critiques in his work *After Our Likeness*. After this, the positions of Balthasar and Volf will be compared and evaluated for whether they account adequately for the sociality of the divine persons. Sociality here refers to how consistently the divine persons are understood as existing together as a community, where such a community requires both the

uniqueness and dignity of each divine person. I will then argue for a mutual hierarchy framework for critiquing person- and substance (unity)-oriented Trinitarian models. The chapter concludes with a comparison of my critique of other models with the corresponding critiques by Balthasar and Volf.

### **2.1. Balthasar's Critique of Other Trinitarian Models**

Balthasar tends to critique other Trinitarian models in the context of his larger, yet related, criticism of what he sees as the recurring appearance in the history of dogma of a “Gnostic” worldview that threatens the church. In harmony with this basic theological concern of Balthasar, my method in this section will be to look at Kevin Mongrain’s book *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Irenaean Retrieval* as a first step in analyzing Balthasar’s critique of various key theologians in church history. Next, the section will look at Cyril O’Regan’s article “Balthasar and Gnostic Genealogy” in order to show the limitations of Mongrain’s presentation of Balthasar’s critique as well as to supplement it. Finally, I will look at the “Negative Theology” section and the “Kata-Logical Aspects” chapter from *TL2* in order to supplement the thought of Mongrain and O’Regan especially by showing that Balthasar’s critique of other Trinitarian models extends to such notable figures as Augustine, a fact not clearly evident in Mongrain and O’Regan’s presentations.

#### **2.1.1. Balthasar as an Irenaean Opponent of Gnosticism**

Kevin Mongrain in the introduction to *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs Von Balthasar* frames the life and work of Balthasar around the figure of Irenaeus. Mongrain states the thesis of his book as follows,

**My thesis is that von Balthasar came to see Irenaeus of Lyon’s theology of the mutual glorification of God and humanity in Christ as the best articulation of the theological**

vision presented by de Lubac. Irenaeus, read through de Lubac's lens, therefore became von Balthasar's primary critical resource from the patristic archive for reforming contemporary Catholic theology and challenging various modern intellectual movements in theology, culture, and politics.<sup>63</sup>

What is especially significant about this Irenaean retrieval by Balthasar in the context of the present chapter is that Balthasar can use the thought of Irenaeus in his own reforming and apologetic efforts. To this end, Balthasar, according to Mongrain, sees himself battling modern, more anthropocentric forms of Gnosticism just as Irenaeus battled the original, more cosmological forms of Gnosticism. Here 'Gnostic' is a sort of systematic construct of Balthasar used to denote certain problematic theological positions. In Mongrain's reading, Gnosticism for Balthasar tends to be a heresy associated especially with Christology and the economic Trinity.<sup>64</sup> Here two 'epic' forms of Gnosticism are discernable for Balthasar in their confusion of God and man:

At one extreme, there is the mythological view in which God (or the gods) is embroiled in the world drama, which, with its own laws of operation, thus constitutes a third level of reality above God and man; at the other extreme, God is seen as

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<sup>63</sup> Mongrain, *Systematic Thought*, 16.

<sup>64</sup> Mongrain sometimes argues that Balthasar uses Irenaeus' conception of the economic Trinity to support the notion of the unity within distinction of the divine community in contrast to a monistic Gnosticism (*ibid.*, 6, 59–60, 97).

Mongrain identifies three main essays where Balthasar appeals to Irenaeus: "The first essay is an introduction to an anthology of passages from *Against Heresies*, the second essay is in the second volume of *The Glory of the Lord*, and the third essay is a long excursus on Irenaeus's theology in *Against Heresies* in the second volume of *Theo-Drama*" (*ibid.*, 27-28). I have just mentioned that the key Irenaean concept Mongrain sees present in Balthasar is the mutual glorification of God and man; Mongrain mainly uses *The Glory of the Lord* to support this theme. However, I have also mentioned that Mongrain supports this theme of mutual glorification by stressing the historical working of the Triune God, which historical working causes him often to appeal to the *Theo-Drama*, although it receives less attention than *The Glory of the Lord*. Only at a few places does Mongrain appeal to *Theo-Logic*. This use of sources is arguably quite significant, since, as we saw from a statement from Cyril O'Regan in section 1.3.1 of the dissertation, Balthasar's emphasis on the Trinity increases as one proceeds through the trilogy. This suggests that Mongrain's Irenaean construal of von Balthasar may have certain Trinitarian shortcomings, a theme that will be further considered later in the present chapter.

dwelling in philosophical sublimity above the vicissitudes of the world, which prevent him from entering the dramatic action.<sup>65</sup>

According to Mongrain, for Balthasar the latter epic view characterizes Gnostic thought during the period of the early church and the former epic view characterizes especially some Gnostic thought of the last two centuries or so.

According to Mongrain, for Balthasar, between the early church and the modern period, Gnosticism only really re-emerges *within* Christianity in the figure of Joachim of Fiore and his teaching of three successive historical moments in 'God's' dealing with the world. Joachim's Gnosticism "becomes a more serious and profoundly influential player on the world stage than either Marcianism or any of the purely speculative forms of ancient Gnosticism had been."<sup>66</sup> The shift to modern Gnosticism is thus highly significant:

The Gnostic explanatory ethos shifts the focus away from a static metaphysics of pantheistic monism and toward a dynamic metaphysics of historical progress. This shift results in an increasing intensity in the Gnostic desire for power over reality. It is as if Gnosticism, after centuries of repression by the Constantinian church, came to realize that it could win its war against Christianity by advocating humanity's progressive self-redemption through its self-liberation from nature, altar, and throne.<sup>67</sup>

According to Mongrain, Balthasar saw the church as largely unaffected by a Gnostic threat from within the church between the time of the early church and the modern period of the last two centuries or so, with the exception of an occasional figure like Joachim.

This brings us to the modern forms of Gnosticism and the figure that Balthasar most associates with them: Hegel. Mongrain asserts that key to Balthasar's interpretation of Hegel is

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 44, quoting *Theo-Drama*, 2:9.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 138.

that Hegel effects “a monistic equation of the divine and human.”<sup>68</sup> Somewhat reminiscent of Joachim, history for Hegel is “a three-part process of divine self-development: God’s descent into pathology and alienation, God’s moment of turning away from alienation and toward psychic wholeness, and God’s journey back toward psychic wholeness through the overcoming of God’s alienated self.”<sup>69</sup> Mongrain asserts that for Balthasar “in Hegel’s epic theology of history all finite reality is ultimately ‘absorbed in identity,’ and all personal reality is in the end overcome by ‘the impersonality of destiny.’”<sup>70</sup> As opposed to the unity-in-distinction of the divine persons evident in Irenaeus, for Balthasar the egalitarian monism present in Hegel’s Gnostic system finally threatens to deny the distinctions between the divine persons and dissolve them into the world.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 140–41.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 141, 152; see also Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, 4:11, 459; and Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, 2:423. Cyril O’Regan, “Von Balthasar’s Critique of Heidegger’s Genealogy of Modernity,” 152–58, contains a section called “Genealogy and the Meaning of Nihilism” that helps bring out the fact that the monistic Gnosticism of German Idealism for Balthasar is often nearly equivalent to nihilism.

For more on the dangers of modern Gnosticism in Balthasar, see also Steffen Lösel, “Unapocalyptic Theology: History and Eschatology in Balthasar’s Theo-Drama,” *Modern Theology* 17 (2001): 201–25, where Lösel brings out the fact that Balthasar sees in modern secularism an increased threat to the church. Although here Lösel somewhat helpfully brings out that Balthasar sees in a secularism that mimics the church a major chief modern threat to the church, Lösel is much less helpful for his tying this secularism to Jewish ethnicity rather than, as seems much more the case in Balthasar, to a form of modern Gnosticism that threatens the church largely from within. For a more balanced view than Lösel’s that sees Balthasar opposing a technocratic secularism, see David Schindler, “Catholic Theology, Gender, and the Future of Western Civilization.”

Rodney Howsare in *Hans Urs von Balthasar and Protestantism* sees in Balthasar a critique of the cosmology of the early church fathers in general as well as of the anthropology of about the last two centuries, although he does not seem to adequately bring out the greater threat of the latter for Balthasar and also does not clearly illustrate the connections to Gnosticism. Howsare says that Balthasar stresses the necessity of biblical revelation against the early church fathers and Rahner as representatives of a cosmological and an anthropological approach, respectively. Howsare’s presentation is helpful especially for capturing the extent of Balthasar’s critique of the cosmological approach of the early church Fathers. See *ibid.*, 110–17. For Howsare’s full discussion of Balthasar’s critique of the anthropological approach, see also *ibid.*, 117–30.



A final aspect of Balthasar's critique of Gnosticism as evident in Mongrain is that Balthasar tends to 'grade' various modern theologians or theologies that Balthasar finds troubling for their insufficient resistance to the pull of Gnosticism. Mongrain looks at four theologians or theological movements that he asserts that Balthasar grades. In Mongrain's presentation, loyalty to the Roman Catholic and to its chief dogmas, especially Christology, is central to the grading process of Balthasar. Here Rahner as a Roman Catholic is the most resistant to Gnosticism since he holds to the importance of the biblical revelation of Christ; next is Barth, who, although not a member of the Roman Catholic Church, is a strong ally in the cause of maintaining a strong Christology that emphasizes the need for revelation; liberation theology comes after Barth because, although it largely remains within the Roman Catholic Church, its focus on divine immanence threatens a reduction in the content of theology; least resistant to Gnosticism is Moltmann, whom I here briefly consider in a bit more detail.<sup>72</sup>

Mongrain asserts that Balthasar's critique of Moltmann is based largely on Balthasar's reading of *The Crucified God* and revolves around the charge of a monism that would deny distinctions in God and dissolve God into the world. Mongrain emphasizes what he calls a hard critique of Moltmann by Balthasar: "The hard critique is that Moltmann's theology belongs squarely in the category of Gnostic discourse. It is self-consciously Hegelian; it is primarily and intentionally—and not secondarily and accidentally—monistic; and it makes no effort to resist

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<sup>72</sup> Mongrain shows that Balthasar typically sees each of these theologians or movements as being in danger of a monism capable of denying the distinctions between the divine persons and dissolving the divine persons into the world. For Barth, see Mongrain, *Systematic Thought*, 165–66; for liberation theology, see *ibid.*, 168. Although Mongrain doesn't use the term 'monism' explicitly in the case of Rahner, there is a clear implication of it in his statement that for Rahner "one pole of epic theology demonizes the other," by which he means that Rahner has a "mythological" sort of epic theology that tends to disparage the other, more philosophical epic theology that stresses God's transcendence (*ibid.*, 160).

the influence of either Marcionist or Valentinian Gnostic thinkers.”<sup>73</sup> In the thought of Moltmann, there is a “strong parallel between Moltmann’s theology of the cross and Hegel’s epic interpretation of history as a three-part process of divine self-development.”<sup>74</sup> Balthasar worries that Moltmann’s rhetoric about the suffering and alienation of the entire Godhead “runs the risk of ontologically identifying the inner-Trinitarian suffering and alienation of God with the suffering and tragedies within the temporal order of creation.”<sup>75</sup> In summary, according to Mongrain, Moltmann for Balthasar is the major current theological figure most in danger of succumbing to a modern form of Gnosticism that threatens to be monistic in the sense that it denigrates or denies distinctions in theology, whether it be the distinctions between the divine persons or the distinction between God and the world.

We have thus far seen that Mongrain asserts that Balthasar, similar to Irenaeus, tends to locate the church’s battle with Gnosticism in the area of Christology and in the economic Trinity. Mongrain sees Balthasar opposing a modern form of Gnosticism that is ultimately monistic through its tendency to deny the distinctions among the divine persons as well as the distinction between God and the world. This modern Gnosticism is more dangerous than the ancient Gnosticism that had a certain tendency towards this sort of monism through its particular understanding of the transcendence of God. While Mongrain’s presentation is in many ways helpful, it is certainly not beyond criticism.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 177.

### **2.1.2. Balthasar as More than Irenaeus through Extensively Using the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity in Opposing Gnosticism**

In order to aid in showing some of the limitations of Mongrain's presentation of Balthasar as well as to supplement it, the thought of Cyril O'Regan from the article "Balthasar and Gnostic Genealogy" will now be adduced. O'Regan, like Mongrain, sees Balthasar mainly opposing a modern, monistic form of Gnosticism, especially as focused in "German Idealism and its theological fallout in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, O'Regan's presentation shows some significant differences from and arguably some advancements upon that of Mongrain.

Probably the chief difference between Mongrain and O'Regan is that O'Regan better captures the fact that Balthasar's critique of Gnosticism extensively utilizes the doctrine of the *immanent Trinity*. Although Mongrain at a few places can bring up Balthasar's conception of the immanent Trinity,<sup>77</sup> Mongrain's presentation does not account adequately for the place of the immanent Trinity in Balthasar's critique of Gnosticism. In contrast, O'Regan in a section called "Gnostic Return and Trinitarian Discourse" in "Balthasar and Gnostic Genealogy" says the following:

As German Idealism, and particularly Hegel, brings the Trinity back into theological circulation, after its having been made an *adiaphora* by Enlightenment and Romantic thinkers alike, the battle is now fought on the grounds of whether the more traditional

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<sup>76</sup> O'Regan, "Balthasar and Gnostic Genealogy," 618. Mongrain sees Balthasar as a sort of successor to the nineteenth century Tübingen school as seen especially in Franz Anton Staudenmaier and to a lesser extent Johan Adam Möhler as they develop "genealogies" for the re-emergence of Gnosticism in modernity. Balthasar is also influenced by Ferdinand Christian Baur, who is associated both with the privileging of the term 'Gnosticism' for labeling modern speculative discourse and with relating multiple genealogical terms to Gnosticism (ibid., 610–21).

<sup>77</sup> See Mongrain, *Systematic Thought*, 35, 57, 113–14.

view as sketched in Irenaeus—and as fully elaborated in Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, and Bonaventure (especially the latter)—is the authentic one.<sup>78</sup>

Note here that Irenaeus' level of influence on Balthasar as far as the doctrine of the Trinity is concerned is reduced to that of a mere sketching in comparison to the full elaboration that came from elements of the medieval Roman Catholic tradition. Although O'Regan is not explicit here as to what the difference between Irenaeus and these medieval fathers is, the context seems to point to the clearer place of the immanent Trinity in the latter.<sup>79</sup> For example, O'Regan goes on to argue that German Idealism and its successors have subjected "to developmental torsion" three key Trinitarian themes: love, pathos, and kenosis. Concerning the theme of kenosis, for Balthasar 'Urkenosis' in the immanent Trinity occurs among the divine persons rather than, with Hegel, in the divine substance, which in Hegel undermines the persons and tends to make God dependent on creation for his constitution.<sup>80</sup> Such a Hegelian construction is a form of modalism, reminiscent of Sabellianism, and this 'dialectical monism' "cannot find a place for the

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<sup>78</sup> O'Regan, "Balthasar and Gnostic Genealogy," 626–27.

<sup>79</sup> That this is likely the case is also strongly supported by the following statement in O'Regan, *Gnostic Return in Modernity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 163: "As Irenaeus presents his rendition of biblical narrative grammar, he is variously reserved and expansive, theologically indeterminate and superdeterminate. For example, Irenaeus is reserved with respect to the divine Trinity, outside of activity in salvation history (1). He does insist that together Father, Son, and Spirit exhaust divine perfection (2.1, 2.4, 3.8–9, 4.1) and that in their activities they function as identifiably determinate entities. In addition, in all the events in which they are involved they function exclusively in agential fashion by contrast with the pathos that haunts the personifications that articulate Valentinian perfection. None of this amounts to making explicit the distinction between the Trinity *in se* and the Trinitarian missions that will become *de rigueur* from Nicea on, although I should point out that the determinacy of attribution and the agential emphasis aids rather than hinders the distinction. Again, from a post-Nicene perspective Irenaeus is relatively indeterminate, or underdetermined, with respect to the relations that hold between Father, Son, and Spirit. He satisfies himself by expostulating on the relations as they are disclosed in the economy. And what he does say by way of addressing the issue at a relatively more structural level, namely, what is summed up in his image of the Son and the Spirit as the two hands of the Father, is from the post-Nicene vantage point determinate in the wrong way because it is subordinationist in its implications. At the very least, Irenaeus' articulation of the Trinity is just one of many possible articulations and by no means the most sophisticated at that. Thus, it requires supplementation. In the theological tradition this supplementation comes in many forms, for example, in the form of the Cappadocians, Augustine, Aquinas, Bonaventure, Barth, Rahner, and Balthasar."

<sup>80</sup> O'Regan, "Balthasar and Gnostic Genealogy," 628.

irreducible plurality of the divine persons.”<sup>81</sup> Balthasar thus opposes a monistic Gnostic version of kenosis, which does not account adequately for the distinctions between the divine persons and the distinction between the divine persons and the world, with a teaching on kenosis based on the relations between the persons in the immanent Trinity. In summary, O’Regan presents Balthasar as opposing especially a Gnostic German Idealism marked by monism through utilizing the immanent Trinity.

Likely related to the fact that O’Regan accounts for the place of the immanent Trinity in Balthasar’s critique of Gnosticism more adequately than Mongrain is the fact that O’Regan expands the scope of Gnosticism in Balthasar’s critique through noting that Balthasar frequently relates the worldviews of Neoplatonism and apocalypticism to Gnosticism.<sup>82</sup> In this regard, whereas for Balthasar the designation ‘Gnostic’ unambiguously marks invalidity in a theologian or a theology, ‘Neoplatonic’ and ‘apocalyptic’ “usually function critically,” but not always.<sup>83</sup> Elsewhere O’Regan notes that for Balthasar ‘Neoplatonic’ often refers to a tendency in theology to deny distinctions between things in favor of the transcendent ‘One.’<sup>84</sup> ‘Apocalyptic,’ on the other hand, for Balthasar refers to a worldview that sees God immanent in creation as it focuses on such things as historical progress and the inbreaking of God’s eschatological kingdom.<sup>85</sup> For Balthasar, Neoplatonism thus matches up with what Mongrain refers to as the older form of Gnosticism, and apocalyptic matches up with what Mongrain refers to as the newer, more

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 629.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 616.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 617.

<sup>84</sup> See O’Regan, “Von Balthasar and Thick Retrieval: Post-Chalcedonian Symphonic Theology,” *Gregorianum* 77 (1996): 227–60.

<sup>85</sup> For more on the meaning of apocalypticism for Balthasar, see Lösel, “Unapocalyptic Theology: History and Eschatology in Balthasar’s Theo-Drama.”

dangerous form of Gnosticism. Because O'Regan recognizes the explicit connection of Neoplatonism and apocalypticism with Gnosticism in Balthasar's theology, O'Regan sees better than Mongrain that Balthasar often critiques various prominent figures in church history due to certain allegedly Gnostic elements within their thought. For example, according to O'Regan Balthasar early in his career worries about the 'Gnostic' danger of a Neoplatonic monism in Pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory of Nyssa, and later in his career he has a similar worry about Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa.<sup>86</sup> For Balthasar, "history provides the ongoing lesson that a 'Neoplatonic' strain can function mischievously in Christian discourses."<sup>87</sup> O'Regan's presentation thus advances on that of Mongrain in that it better captures the extent of Balthasar's critique of Gnosticism.

A final difference between Mongrain and O'Regan is related to the first two and concerns how Balthasar 'grades' various Trinitarian theologians or theological movements. Mongrain said that Balthasar critiques various early church heretical figures for holding to Gnosticism and is even more intense in opposing those in the wake of German Idealism who have insufficiently resisted a more dangerous, modern form of Gnosticism. O'Regan would agree with this. However, rather than seeing basically no Gnostic threat within the church during the medieval and Reformation periods as in Mongrain, O'Regan says that Balthasar sees many Gnostic dangers in these periods. However, here we may point out that not even O'Regan captures the extent of Balthasar's critique, especially with regard to Balthasar's critique of what he sees as more 'accepted' figures associated with the Roman Catholic Church, such as Augustine. While we are closer to the full picture of Balthasar's critique of Gnosticism with O'Regan than we were

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<sup>86</sup> O'Regan, "Balthasar and Gnostic Genealogy," 622.

with Mongrain, it nevertheless remains to evaluate two portions of the *Theo-Logic* to complete the picture of Balthasar's critique.

### **2.1.3. Balthasar's Trinitarian Critique of Gnosticism in Volume Two of *Theo-Logic***

In the present section I will supplement the presentations of the critique of Gnosticism by Balthasar as evident in Mongrain and O'Regan by utilizing the second volume of the *Theo-Logic*. In my presentation, I will look especially at how Balthasar critiques certain 'mainstream' Trinitarian theologians in church history since Mongrain and O'Regan do not much mention this sort of critique by Balthasar and since it is highly relevant for our current topic. First, I will look at the section "Negative Theology" in order to analyze Balthasar's critique of theologians who, according to Balthasar, in their particular manner of arguing 'from below' have certain 'Gnostic' elements in their theology. Second, I will then utilize the "Kata-Logical Aspects" chapter in order to analyze Balthasar's critique of certain theologians who, according to Balthasar, in their particular manner of arguing 'from above' (only in the end to be in danger of arguing 'from below,' according to Balthasar) have certain 'Gnostic' elements in their theology.<sup>87</sup>

**2.1.3.1. Balthasar's Critique in the "Negative Theology" Section.** Balthasar has a significant critique of the medieval Roman Catholic Church in "Un-Word and Super-Word" within the "Negative Theology" section. After having closely associated Neoplatonism and Gnosticism in the sections preceding this,<sup>88</sup> Balthasar makes the following stark statement:

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> See also section 1.3.1 of the dissertation where I quote Balthasar's description of his chapter-by-chapter methodology in volume two of *Theo-Logic*.

<sup>89</sup> In his introductory comments in the "Negative Theology" section, Balthasar states, "negative (philosophical) theology... is the strongest bastion against Christianity" (95).

It both makes sense from the nature of the case and is a historically proven fact that Neoplatonism and Christian theology were able to travel a good part of the way together. On the other hand, their paths diverged from their very origin. The contrast between the biblical and nonbiblical “concepts” of God already suggests this, and Christian thought came to realize it at the latest by the time of the Council of Nicea. Now, this divergence has left open two possible outcomes: Christians have either fundamentally reinterpreted the theoretical and practical methods of Neoplatonism or else have ignored, or, at least, insufficiently corrected, the divergence itself—a move that has taken a bitter toll in the history of Christian theological theory and mystical praxis.

Let us begin with what is most fundamental, with the axiom, enunciated both by Bonaventure and by Thomas, that (derived, worldly) otherness vis-a-vis God presupposes an (original, Trinitarian) otherness in God, an otherness that, as such, is supreme positivity. We can immediately infer from this basic axiom that anyone who reckons the world’s otherness as purely negative in comparison with the sheer divine One will ipso facto take a path radically divergent from that of Christianity.<sup>90</sup>

In one sense, this quotation seems to be in harmony with the presentation on Balthasar by O’Regan, for we note that Bonaventure and Thomas appear at the pinnacle of those opposed to a sort of Gnostic (a)Trinitarianism, and we note that their “fundamental axiom” for this opposition to Gnosticism is that the otherness of the divine persons in the *immanent Trinity* grounds the otherness associated with creation. Furthermore, in agreement with O’Regan, Balthasar here uses the term ‘Neoplatonism’ in a clearly negative way to describe certain Gnostic elements that have “taken a bitter toll” on the church throughout its history. However, Balthasar’s strong language about the presence of Neoplatonism *within the church* already suggests a much greater presence of the threat of Gnosticism within the Roman Catholic Church itself than what either O’Regan or especially Mongrain suggests.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 107.



Balthasar continues in “Un-Word and Super-Word” by further warning of the dangers of Neoplatonism. What is striking is that Balthasar again finds a harmful sort of Neoplatonic influence pervasive in church history:

Even prescinding entirely from the “heavenly ladder spirituality” of Byzantium (of which John Climacus is merely one exponent), this spiritualizing doctrine of perfection wrought the greatest havoc throughout the Middle Ages and on into the modern era (a John of the Cross cannot be excepted on this point). Contrarily to Christianity’s basic incarnational thrust, a gradual unbodily became the model, not only for asceticism, but especially for mystical theory. This tendency continued, with few exceptions, all the way up to the time of Ignatius of Loyola’s Exercises, which, however, were unable to break the Neoplatonic trend effectively enough. It would be good to think back on Augustine, who, while vigorously denouncing the Neoplatonists’ lack of Christ’s descending humility in the *Confessions*, sets forth in his treatise on mysticism a decidedly ascending model—from bodily to imaginative to purely spiritual visions—which remained authoritative for the whole period that followed.... An extreme outgrowth of this tendency is Eckhart’s mystical teaching. For Eckhart, the creature as a whole does not have its truth in itself but in God’s idea of it, so that, as a whole, it has to un-be or un-do itself as image in order, by losing itself, to find itself in God.<sup>91</sup>

In this quotation Augustine can be associated with a Neoplatonic negative theology that focuses on God’s transcendence and was to be found in more extreme form in Eckhart, whom Balthasar often heavily criticizes in his writings.<sup>92</sup> We also note here that Balthasar seems to associate this Neoplatonism with a God-world monism where the creature is absorbed into the one, transcendent, and ultimately undifferentiated God. This Neoplatonic tendency, of which Augustine is a source, “wrought the greatest havoc throughout the Middle Ages.” Balthasar goes on to explicitly associate this Neoplatonism with Gnosticism and with a denial of multiplicity in theology:

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 110–11.

<sup>92</sup> For example, see Cyril O’Regan, “Balthasar and Eckhart: Theological Principles and Catholicity,” *The Thomist* 60 (1996): 1–37.

Our inquiry goes beyond the starting point of the dialogicians, in that it asks what a religion based on biblical revelation can offer as an alternative to the *fascinosum* [fascination] of Buddhism, of Gnosis, and of Neoplatonism, that is, the priority of silence (*sigē, hēsychia*) over the word, its multiplicity, and its noisiness.<sup>93</sup>

This quotation in conjunction with the previous one shows that Balthasar associates a Neoplatonism that threatens to deny distinctions, or “multiplicity,” in theology with some of the major figures of the medieval Western church, perhaps most notably Augustine.<sup>94</sup> In contrast to the presentations of O’Regan and especially Mongrain, Balthasar sees Gnosticism as a Trinitarian threat present at the heart of the medieval Roman Catholic Church and even in its great father, Augustine, where in an egalitarian manner some in the church were in danger of denying the distinctions necessary for true multiplicity both among the divine persons themselves and in the God-world relationship.<sup>95</sup>

The present “Negative Theology” section also contains some critique of theologians that Balthasar more associates with the “Eastern” church, which critique in turn harmonizes with Balthasar’s corresponding critique elsewhere. In the preceding paragraph, I quoted Balthasar as saying in the context of a critique of a certain Neoplatonic negatively theology focusing on God’s transcendence that

even prescinding entirely from the “heavenly ladder spirituality” of Byzantium (of which John Climacus is merely one exponent), this spiritualizing doctrine of

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<sup>93</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, 2:111.

<sup>94</sup> That Balthasar can connect this Neoplatonism with Gnosticism may also be seen in his comparing Neoplatonism to Hegel in this section. See Balthasar, *ibid.*, 120.

<sup>95</sup> In the chapter “Logos and Logic in God” of volume two of *Theo-Logic* that will be discussed in the fourth chapter, Balthasar also associates Augustine and after him Anselm with a tendency to consider the divine essence as a sort of transcendent “fourth entity” in the Trinity that threatens to absorb the divine persons. See Balthasar, *ibid.*, 128–29.

perfection wrought the greatest havoc throughout the Middle Ages and on into the modern era (a John of the Cross cannot be excepted on this point).<sup>96</sup>

Here Balthasar can associate the “Byzantine” church with a Neoplatonism understood as a very harmful reality. Even more prominent in the current section of volume two of *Theo-Logic* is that the figure within the church that Balthasar seems to most associate with this harmful Neoplatonism is Pseudo-Dionysius, whom Balthasar identifies as “Proculus’ disciple,” who “definitively elaborated” the “formidable apparatus of negative theology.”<sup>97</sup> Balthasar’s critical comments about theologians or theology that Balthasar classifies as ‘Eastern’ remind one of Balthasar’s comments in the section “The Father’s Two Hands” in the third volume of *Theo-Logic*; here Balthasar asserts that some in the East, such as Photius, began seeing the Spirit as from the Father alone due to “a residue of Hellenistic philosophy according to which the absolutely One is the truly Divine, whereas what is ‘caused’ by him...is subordinate.”<sup>98</sup> Similar to as in our present section, here Balthasar associates the Eastern tradition as represented by Photius with a harmful Neoplatonism where the Father is identified as the transcendent One and all else is subordinate to him. Based on all of this, it seems that Balthasar senses a danger of subordinationism in key elements in the Eastern tradition and that this subordinationism is often linked with a Neoplatonism that Balthasar can associate with Gnosticism. Ironically, this charge of subordinationism for Balthasar ultimately seems to be due to the fact that, as we have seen, a Gnostic Neoplatonism that focuses on the transcendence of God for Balthasar is an *egalitarian*

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 104. For other statements in the present section that associate Pseudo-Dionysius with negative theology and Neoplatonism, see *ibid.*, 104, 109–10.

For much more on Balthasar’s critique of Pseudo-Dionysius, see Cyril O’Regan, “Von Balthasar and Thick Retrieval: Post-Chalcedonian Symphonic Theology.”

<sup>98</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, 3:215. For more context on Photius’ views, see Photius, and Joseph P. Farrell, *The*

threat to the church, which Neoplatonism denigrates or denies distinctions and true multiplicity among the divine persons and between the divine persons and the world.

**2.1.3.2. Balthasar's Critique in the "Kata-Logical Aspects" Chapter.** As far as the "Kata-Logical Aspects" chapter is concerned, it too gives examples of Balthasar critiquing theologians for how well they resist Gnosticism, albeit here he critiques theologians who he says believe are working 'from above' (although Balthasar believes that some of them are in danger of actually working 'from below'). In this "Kata-Logical Aspects" chapter Balthasar can warn about an "apocalyptic" worldview where God is immanent in the world, whereas in the "Negative Theology" section just considered he seemed to deal mostly with Neoplatonism, and associated it with God's transcendence.

In the "Kata-Logical Aspects" chapter, it is noteworthy that Aquinas and Bonaventure again seem to serve as positive figures for Balthasar. For example, in "Divine and Creaturely Difference," Aquinas is clearly the central figure. Balthasar here shows that for Aquinas the distinctness of the divine persons in their relations to one another in the immanent Trinity grounds the otherness of creation relative to God, grounds the distinction between essence and existence in the creaturely realm, and grounds the multiplicity of beings in creation.<sup>99</sup>

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*Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1987).

<sup>99</sup> For other significant places in the trilogy where Balthasar discusses the immanent Trinity in relation to creation, see especially "Infinite Freedom" in *Theo-Drama*, 2:243–84, and "The World Is from the Trinity" in *Theo-Drama*, 5:61–109.

On the topic of Trinity and creation in Balthasar, see also Angela Franks in "Trinitarian Analogia Entis in Hans Urs von Balthasar," *The Thomist* 62 (1998): 533–59, where she argues that the real distinction between essence and existence is the best starting point for beginning to understand Balthasar's use of the theology of Aquinas. See also Howsare, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and Protestantism*, 150–53.

Balthasar's interpretation of Aquinas on the topic of Trinity and creation seems to agree with that of Gilles Emery. Emery in his chapter "Trinity and Creation: The Trinitarian Principle of the Creation in the Commentaries of Albert the Great, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas on the *Sentences*" in *Trinity in Aquinas* (Ypsilanti, MI:

Bonaventure is discussed in “Christ: The Consummator of the Sciences” and again Balthasar emphasizes the foundational role of the immanent Trinity in Bonaventure’s thought. For Bonaventure, “The difference within God grounds not only creation as such, but also the differences that ground creation, whether it be the difference between being and essence or Maximus’ essential polarities.”<sup>100</sup>

Leaving aside these two medieval figures that Balthasar sets forth as highly laudable, in the “Kata-Logical Aspects” chapter Joachim of Fiore and Nicholas of Cusa appear as the chief medieval culprits of a Gnosticism that felt itself to “be inspired from above,” albeit falsely.<sup>101</sup> I have already treated the basics of Balthasar’s critique of Joachim above in my presentation of Mongrain, where Mongrain argued that Joachim was a transitional figure who prepared the way for the modern, more dangerous form of Gnosticism, which focuses on God’s immanence in the world and is arguably more associated with apocalypticism than Neoplatonism for Balthasar

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Sepientia Press of Ave Maria College, 2003), 33–70, argues that Aquinas is the central figure of the three studied (Albert, Bonaventure, and Aquinas) for establishing the connection between the Trinity and creation. Emery writes, “in terms of dignity and causality, distinction and relation in God is greater than all other distinctions or relations. Thomas shows on the one hand that the distinction between the divine hypostases is the *first* distinction by highlighting its causality: The procession of the persons is the *cause* of the procession of creatures. He shows on the other hand that the divine distinction/relation is greater in terms of causality than any other distinction/relation for, as he explains, ‘the procession of the distinct divine persons is the cause of the procession and multiplication of all creatures’” (ibid., 67, italics original). Emery’s understanding of Aquinas here seems inseparable from his teaching in the chapter “Essentialism or Personalism in the Treatise on God in St. Thomas Aquinas?” in *Trinity in Aquinas*, 165–208, that Aquinas does not believe that the divine substance is “above” the persons as a sort of “fourth” entity but rather that it is an abstraction and that the divine substance only subsists in the concrete persons. On both of these points of interpreting Aquinas, Balthasar and Emery are in agreement.

For a contrary argument that sees Aquinas tending to derive the divine persons from the divine substance, see Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:277–88.

<sup>100</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, 2:194. Balthasar elsewhere associates Bonaventure (rather than Aquinas) with Richard of Saint Victor and his love analogy for the Trinity (ibid., 42–43, 217). I argue that if for Balthasar Aquinas was perhaps the central figure for properly understanding the relation between the Trinity and the otherness of creation (as we have seen, Emery in fact says this), Bonaventure is the central figure for understanding the divine persons in a more social way (numerous Trinitarian commentators have noted the greater prominence of social analogies in Richard and Bonaventure than in Aquinas).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 205.

(although Balthasar also can identify Neoplatonic elements in it). Further showing the strong connection between Joachim and this more modern form of Gnosticism is the following:

No one will dispute Joachim's zeal for the cause of Christendom and of revelation in general. Yet, in spite of this zeal, he unsuspectingly opened the door to all those who have since sought a Church of the Spirit to supersede the Church of Christ, whether politically (Cola di Rienzo, Michelet, Marx), morally (the Rosicrucians), or speculatively (from Lessing to Schelling and Hegel). Of significance for theo-logic is Joachim's reduction of the Logos to Jesus' *Pneuma*, of Christ's in-spiration of his own Spirit into the Church to a precursor of the eschatological truth. The result: the Cross and Resurrection no longer play any decisive role in salvation. Although Dante places Joachim next to Bonaventure in his *Paradiso*, just as he puts Siger of Brabant next to Thomas Aquinas, both Thomas and Bonaventure distanced themselves from him.<sup>102</sup>

That Balthasar says that Joachim "opened the door" for a new religion of the Spirit validates Mongrain's point that Joachim was a transitional figure from an ancient form of Gnosticism marked more by divine transcendence to a modern form marked more by divine immanence that Balthasar most associates with Hegel. This also harmonizes with Balthasar's genealogical term 'apocalyptic.' Moreover, in the quotation we note the presence of the two Western medieval champions of the immanent Trinity, Aquinas and Bonaventure, distancing themselves from an egalitarian Gnosticism present in Joachim and others who end up making God too immanent in the world and "reduce" distinctions in Trinitarian theology.<sup>103</sup>

Joachim, Nicholas of Cusa, and Hegel and his successors are the chief dangers of Gnosticism in this "Kata-Logical Aspects" chapter. This prominence of Hegel points to the

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>103</sup> Balthasar in this section also has a significant critique of Nicholas of Cusa that he, like Joachim, seeks to work from above only in the end to invert the perspective of theology radically from below. Nicholas, although perhaps to a lesser extent than Joachim, seems to be a transitional figure between what Balthasar sees as a Neoplatonic Gnosticism and an apocalyptic Gnosticism. It is worthy of note that Balthasar's opposition to the Gnostic elements he sees present in Nicholas is integrally related to Nicholas' tendency to remove "every threeness from God" (ibid., 214).

chapter's warning against what Balthasar considers an apocalyptic, modern Gnosticism. In this regard, it is highly significant that Balthasar also has some significant critiques in this chapter of what he would consider as mainstream figures from the medieval Roman Catholic Church. Augustine is again probably the most notable figure here. For example, consider the opening sentences of the chapter under consideration:

The descent [by doing theology "from above"] must be planned out with a great deal of caution, lest it start—and stop—with anything secondary. Under no circumstances may it begin ("existentially"), like the Augustinian "*imago Trinitatis in mente*" [image of the Trinity in the mind], with the individual subject, for there is no such thing as an individual without a social context.<sup>104</sup>

In this quotation, it is highly significant that Balthasar so cautions against Augustine's placing the image of the Trinity in the human soul in the midst of a discussion of doing theology from above. It seems as though Balthasar is warning that although Augustine believed he was firmly arguing from above when he said that the soul is the image of the Trinity, he was in significant danger of actually arguing from below. Again we recall that the current chapter has a significant warning against a modern, more dangerous form of Gnosticism that tends to collapse God into the world; the effect of Balthasar placing a critical discussion of Augustine here is to suggest some sort of connection between Augustine and the transition to the modern, apocalyptic form of Gnosticism. A similar critique of Augustine's teaching on the soul as the image of the Trinity appears a few pages later as Balthasar considers the social nature of humanity as an image of the Trinity:

The essence of man unfolds for the child only in a communion of love—yet another index of the insufficiency of Augustine's location of the *imago Trinitatis* in the individual soul's "self-love." To be sure, Augustine also considered certain social approaches ("amans et quod amatur et amor" [the lover, the object of love, and love];

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 173.

notice, too, that God is always implicitly loved in “amor”). In the end, however, he thought it necessary to confine himself to self-love in order to protect the unity of God’s essence.<sup>105</sup>

Here Balthasar again may imply that what Augustine saw as doing theology from above, namely seeing the soul as the chief image of the Trinity, is in danger of actually being too much from below. In the present instance, it is significant that Balthasar suggests that this is related to Augustine’s “confining himself” in connection with stressing God’s unity, which again suggests that for Balthasar Augustine did not sufficiently distinguish the divine persons. A final notable critique of Augustine in this section comes within Balthasar’s critique of Nicholas of Cusa. In analyzing how Nicholas “handles the *imago Trinitatis* that has been at the center of the present chapter,” Balthasar groups Pseudo-Dionysius, Nicholas, and Augustine closely together:

The overall structure of his [Nicholas’] *imago*-doctrine is shaped by his philosophy, which implies that his doctrine of the immanent Trinity—influenced most powerfully by Dionysius—stands under the sign of negative theology. God’s unity in its triune fullness is beyond number. The triply self-positing one (to which the Bonaventurian *imago* is reduced) remains a mere phantom, even though Cusanus musters all the *imagines* provided by the tradition in order to enliven it. Nevertheless, the Trinity, as an item of faith, remains the background for the numerous *imagines Trinitatis* that present themselves in the creaturely world. However numerous and subtly Cusanus differentiates these intraworldly images (his first effort to find such an image in the ontological structure of the world—*materia-forma-connexio* [matter—form—connection] is unconvincing), the Augustinian image, refashioned and further developed in diverse ways, stands at the center. Nevertheless, Cusanus characteristically enlarges the Augustinian image in two ways. The mind that comes to know its ternary structure can do so only in a double movement toward the divine archetype and toward the world the mind recapitulates; only thus is the mind a *viva imago* [living image]. Now, this duality has two consequences, one negative and the other positive. Cusanus, like Augustine, “hardly ever” consciously asks whether the distinctions made in God are only attributions or notional distinctions, especially because the Areopagite’s negations dominate his doctrine of God....<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 216–17.



Here Balthasar associates Augustine's unity-oriented Trinitarian understanding with other theologians whose Trinitarian understanding Balthasar has explicitly found inadequate. The quotation deals primarily with Nicholas, whom we have seen that Balthasar identifies as a transitional figure on the path to the modern, apocalyptic Gnosticism. In the present instance we see how Balthasar connects both Augustine's doctrine of the immanent Trinity and Nicholas' doctrine of the immanent Trinity, "which is most powerfully influenced by (the chief Neoplatonic figure) Pseudo-Dionysius," with God's immanence in the world. Balthasar here also closely connects Augustine and Nicholas, both of whom couple the doctrine of the immanent Trinity and the image of the Trinity in the soul.<sup>107</sup> We may conclude that Balthasar sees Augustine as mainly one who was, like other church Fathers, too influenced by Neoplatonism, which for Balthasar had a danger of a less dangerous form of Gnosticism; Balthasar also seems to see Augustine as a sort of transitional figure to what he sees as modern, apocalyptic Gnosticism, although the connection with apocalypticism is far less strong than with Neoplatonism. But whether Balthasar connects Augustine with Neoplatonism or apocalypticism, it is highly significant for the present dissertation that in both cases Balthasar portrays Augustine as in an egalitarian manner insufficiently distinguishing the divine persons.

#### 2.1.4. Conclusion

Balthasar's critique of other Trinitarian models is integrally related to his critique of Gnosticism in church history. In this regard Balthasar understands "Gnosticism" in a particular, systematic way as opposed to merely a reference to second-century Gnosticism. Corresponding to Kevin Mongrain's assessment of Balthasar, Balthasar sees himself as also opposing a modern,

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<sup>107</sup> In the context of Balthasar's extensive critique in this chapter of the image of the Trinity in the human soul,

more dangerous form of Gnosticism (having some continuity with the older Gnosticism) that places greater explicit stress on the immanence of God in creation than the older version opposed by Irenaeus in the second century that tended to explicitly emphasize God's transcendence. In agreement with Mongrain's evaluation of Balthasar, it is clear that for Balthasar both of these forms of Gnosticism ultimately threaten to be destructive of hierarchies and multiplicity in Trinitarian theology.

In contrast to Mongrain and in agreement with Cyril O'Regan's assessment of Balthasar, Balthasar in his opposition to modern Gnosticism emphasizes the immanent Trinity, i.e., the divine persons in their relation to one another apart from the world. Furthermore, again in contrast to Mongrain and in agreement with O'Regan, Balthasar sees Gnosticism as a continual threat to the church throughout its history as may be seen especially in Balthasar's connection of such worldviews as Neoplatonism and apocalypticism with Gnosticism. Balthasar tends to associate Neoplatonism with the older version of Gnosticism opposed by Irenaeus in the second century that tended to explicitly emphasize God's transcendence. Neoplatonism for Balthasar tends to deny the distinctions between the divine persons (as well as the distinctions between the divine persons and things in the world) in favor of the transcendent 'One.' As far as apocalypticism is concerned, Balthasar associates it with what he sees as the more modern form of Gnosticism that has especially been evident in the last two centuries or so. Apocalypticism for Balthasar thus explicitly focuses on God's immanence in the world through emphasizing such things as historical progress and the inbreaking of the Spirit's eschatological kingdom.

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it is critical to remember that Balthasar most associates modern, apocalyptic Gnosticism with German Idealism.

Apocalypticism for Balthasar is even more dangerous in terms of denying distinctions among the divine persons (as well as the distinction between the divine persons and things in the world).

In contrast to Mongrain and in general agreement with O'Regan, according to Balthasar various theologians in the history of the church were more or less affected by Gnosticism in their doctrine of the Trinity, usually with those condemned by the Roman Catholic Church being more affected and those more in the mainstream of Catholicism less affected but not wholly insulated, with Aquinas and Bonaventure seeming to be the least affected since, according to Balthasar, they clearly distinguish among the divine persons in the immanent Trinity. In general agreement with O'Regan, Balthasar opposes some theologians of the "Eastern" tradition that hold to a person-oriented Trinitarian model to the extent that they allegedly had a strong Neoplatonism in their theology. Here Balthasar opposes a 'hyper-personal monism' where there is a danger that the 'One' transcendent Father will absorb the Son and Spirit into himself, in effect homogenizing the divine persons. However, in contrast to both Mongrain and O'Regan, and as evident in the second volume of *Theo-Logic*, for Balthasar even a mainstream Roman Catholic theologian like Augustine with his substance-oriented understanding of the Trinity shows significant Gnostic influence in his doctrine of the Trinity. In this context Balthasar warns of a sort of 'pre-personal monism' that has two possible forms. On the one hand, Balthasar most associates Augustine with the older, Neoplatonic form of Gnosticism that stresses God's transcendence. In this case, Balthasar opposes a pre-personal monism where the transcendent One, in this case the divine substance logically preceding the divine persons, threatens to absorb the divine persons into itself, in effect homogenizing them with itself. On the other hand, Balthasar to a lesser extent associates Augustine with the more recent, apocalyptic form of Gnosticism that stresses God's immanence in the world. In this case, Balthasar opposes a pre-personal monism where the divine

substance that logically precedes the divine persons is immanent in the world and threatens to absorb the divine persons into itself, in effect homogenizing them with itself. Because of what he sees as a Gnostic threat of an egalitarian homogenization in the doctrine of the Trinity that he sees present in both Augustine and what he refers to as the Eastern tradition, Balthasar warns of a pre-personal and a hyper-personal monism, respectively.

## 2.2. Volf's Critique of Other Trinitarian Models

The core of Volf's critique of a person-oriented and a substance (unity)-oriented understanding of the Trinity are present in his book *After Our Likeness*. "We are the people!" are the words of protest that begin the introduction to this book.<sup>108</sup> Volf notes that these words came as a part of the 1989 "Eastern European velvet revolution" against the "patronization by the Communist Party and by its appointed government."<sup>109</sup> However, rather than being a book dealing with political revolution, Volf intends his book to inspire a similar protest in the church using the slogan "We are the church!" Volf in his book places himself chiefly against what he considers as the overly hierarchical Trinitarian ecclesiology of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy.<sup>110</sup> Thus Volf has "tried to develop a nonhierarchical but truly communal ecclesiology based on a nonhierarchical doctrine of the Trinity."<sup>111</sup> Our current study is concerned especially with Volf's understanding of the Trinity. In this regard, we note that part of the reason that Volf chooses Ratzinger and Zizioulas to study is because he believes they are representative of certain key Trinitarian positions:

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<sup>108</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 9.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 4.

According to the familiar schema, the Trinitarian theologies of the Christian West and East differ insofar as for the West, the unity of the divine essence is primary, whereas in the East it is the triplicity of the divine persons. This distinction explains the preference of the West for psychological analogies, and of the East for social analogies for the Trinity. Although both Ratzinger and Zizioulas have reflected in an independent fashion on the Trinity, their respective Trinitarian theologies nonetheless fit this schema quite well.<sup>112</sup>

Thus Volf critiques Ratzinger and Zizioulas as representative figures who capture some key hierarchical Trinitarian themes by some theologians of the “Western-Augustinian” and “Eastern-Cappadocian” traditions, respectively. In what follows I will consider Volf’s basic critique in *After Our Likeness* of the understanding of the Trinity by Ratzinger and Zizioulas separately.

### **2.2.1. Volf’s Critique of the Understanding of the Trinity by Ratzinger**

The section “Trinitarian and Ecclesial Communion” in the first chapter, “Ratzinger: Communion and the Whole,” of *After Our Likeness* deals in part with Ratzinger’s understanding of the Trinity. Volf here divides his presentation of Ratzinger’s Trinitarian understanding into two parts, one critiquing Ratzinger’s understanding of divine personhood and the other critiquing his understanding of divine unity, and these will also structure our presentation.

**2.2.1.1. Divine Personhood.** Volf in “Trinitarian and Ecclesial Communion” characterizes Ratzinger’s position on the issue of Trinitarian personhood as saying that Ratzinger basically follows Aquinas in saying that a divine person is a relation [*persona est relatio*]. For example, for Ratzinger, in the immanent Trinity “the Father is not the one begetting, but rather the ‘act of begetting.’”<sup>113</sup> Similarly, in the economy,

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 67.

The Son “really loses his own identity in the role of ambassador”; he is the activity of being sent. Ratzinger tries to anchor this view of Trinitarian personhood in the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ. According to his interpretation of Phil. 2:5–11, Jesus Christ is a person who has “emptied” himself, and, “surrendering existence-for-himself, entered into the pure movement of the ‘for.’” Divestment is “*pure movement*,” a process of “*consisting completely*” in being sent. This movement does not take place *on* the person of Christ; rather, Christ’s personhood itself consists in divestment. To arrive at this understanding of personhood, however, Ratzinger must withdraw the subject from this activity of self-divestment and then condense the activity itself into a person. As in Nietzsche’s anthropology, so also here: the agent is nothing; the activity is everything. Nor does Ratzinger shy away from expressly drawing this conclusion; there is no “I” remaining behind the deeds and actions of the divine persons; their actions *are* their “I.”<sup>114</sup>

According to Volf, Ratzinger teaches that each divine person fully divests himself in relation to the other divine persons. For Ratzinger, each divine person *is* his relationality rather than *having* relations.<sup>115</sup>

As Volf in “Trinitarian and Ecclesial Communion” begins to evaluate this understanding of divine personhood in Ratzinger, the sort of tension Volf sees present in Ratzinger becomes evident. Volf states,

Robert Krieg has rightly pointed out that the notion of person as relation evades clear understanding. Quite apart from Ratzinger having to reinterpret radically the biblical story of the Son—the *Son* does not divest *himself*, but rather is the activity of divestment—he still has difficulty conceiving Christ’s being as pure relation, something already evident in the inconsistency of his formulations. Next to his references to total relationality, one also finds statements such as “if there is nothing in which he [the Son] is just he, no kind of fenced-off private ground, then he coincides with the Father, is ‘one’ with him.” Ratzinger’s conclusion does not follow. That there is nothing wherein the Son is just himself means that the Son is determined in everything *also* by the Father, and this in its own turn means that the Son is determined *also* by himself. If this is the case, then neither *is* he *pure* relation, but rather is determined in every aspect of his being *by* the relation to his Father. Moreover, Ratzinger’s understanding of the Trinitarian persons as pure relations does

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., italics original.

<sup>115</sup> Volf elsewhere similarly adds that for Ratzinger “‘being from’ and ‘being toward’ constitute the fundamental structure of communality” (ibid., 39).

not reconcile with his assumed biblical basis of Trinitarian personhood in the “phenomenon of God who is *in* dialogue,” unless one were to seek behind this divine dialogue something more profound or more real. Pure relations can neither speak nor hear.<sup>116</sup>

Here Volf characterizes Ratzinger’s position that a person is a relation as being inconsistent or even incoherent. However, we also note that Volf suggests that the reason for this is that Ratzinger seeks “behind” the divine persons “something more profound or more real” that tends to cause the divine persons to be impersonal since “pure relations can neither speak nor hear.”<sup>117</sup> Already Volf is hinting that Ratzinger conceives of the divine substance as impersonal, separable from the divine persons, and in fact “over” the divine persons.

Volf in “Relational Personhood” in the “Trinity and Church” chapter again alludes to the position of Ratzinger on Trinitarian personhood, further filling out the contours of his critique of the notion of divine personhood in Ratzinger. For Volf, defining the divine persons as pure relations has two consequences:

The persons become so transparent that it is difficult to distinguish them from the one, sustaining divine substance. The consequence is not only that the one substance gains the upper hand over the three persons, but also that the three persons actually become redundant. If behind the actions of the divine persons there is no “I” of these persons, then the three persons are superfluous in the economy of salvation, and “the Triune God’s relationship to us is . . . unitary,” as Catherine LaCugna correctly maintains with regard to Augustine’s doctrine of the Trinity. Second, the persons seem to dissolve into relations; the Father becomes fatherhood; the Son, sonship; and the Spirit, procession. Understood in this way, these persons are not only superfluous but also incapable of action.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 69, italics original.

<sup>117</sup> In a footnote, Volf explicitly accuses Ratzinger of subordinating the divine persons to some other unreal thing: “Ratzinger has a tendency to search for something more profound or real behind the historical, and to view concrete reality merely as a sign for spiritual, transcendent content. Hence the earthly Jesus is portrayed less as a concrete human being than as ‘merely an *exemplum* of human beings’ . . . This is a result of Ratzinger’s Platonizing ‘commitment to the primacy of the invisible as that which is genuinely real’” (ibid., 49).

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 205.

For Volf, Ratzinger's defining the divine persons as pure relations means that the divine substance is over the persons. Resulting from this hierarchy of the divine substance over the divine persons is both that the persons become homogenized and that they become impersonal.<sup>119</sup> For Volf, this ultimately means that "although this is admittedly not Ratzinger's intention," "human persons together with the divine persons dissolve into the one substance of God."<sup>120</sup> Volf thus associates seeing the divine persons as relations with a 'pre-personal monism' where all things divest themselves in favor of a hierarchical divine substance and are in danger of being absorbed by it.<sup>121</sup> This charge of pre-personal monism will be central in our next section also.

**2.2.1.2. Divine Unity.** As should already be somewhat apparent from the preceding section, integrally related to Volf's critique of divine personhood is his critique of divine unity. As we saw above that Volf explicitly rejected the notion that a person is a relation for Ratzinger, he also in "Trinitarian and Ecclesial Communion" associates a certain inadequate understanding of unity with Ratzinger:

Because all persons are total relationality [for Ratzinger], their unity cannot come about by way of their specific personal selfhood. For this reason, Trinitarian unity is also not a differentiated unity of persons standing in these relations, but rather a unity in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit "coincide" and in this way are "pure unity." From this perspective, it is consistent when Ratzinger locates the unity of the triune God not at the level of persons, but rather together with the whole tradition of Western Trinitarian thought at the level of substance. The result, however, is that the

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<sup>119</sup> In a footnote, Volf further clarifies the second consequence (making the divine persons impersonal) by asserting that Ratzinger, unlike Kasper, expressly "denies that the Father is 'the one speaking,' the Son 'the one corresponding in obedience,' and the Holy Spirit 'the one purely receiving.'"

For Volf John 7:16 ("My teaching is not mine") emphasizes "mine" and "not mine" equally. But for Ratzinger, a verse like John 7:16 proves that each of the divine persons is pure relationality; here Ratzinger thus says that neither Jesus nor the Father actually has anything that they might call "mine" (ibid., 187, 209).

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>121</sup> In the context of a discussion of Ratzinger Volf speaks of a "spirituality of divestment consisting in perpetual renunciation of what is one's own" (ibid., 60).



one substance gains the upper hand over the three relations. Ratzinger does maintain that the relations represent a form of being equiprimal with that of substance. Reference to this equiprimacy “of the element of the one” and “of that of the triad” suggests a reciprocity in the relation between the two. Yet he expressly asserts that this equiprimacy of substance and persons can obtain only under the presuppositions of an “all-embracing dominance of oneness” of substance.<sup>122</sup>

Thus, related to Volf’s critique of divine personhood is a strong critique of Ratzinger’s understanding of divine unity. For Ratzinger teaches a “*pure* unity” that threatens to overwhelm the divine persons. Volf here chiefly opposes the *hierarchy* of the divine substance over the divine persons, a hierarchy so extreme that Volf calls it an “all-embracing dominance of oneness.”<sup>123</sup>

Because this dominance of the unity of the divine substance over the divine persons is so pervasive in Ratzinger, Volf claims in “Trinitarian and Ecclesial Communion” that the divine substance becomes the actual agent in the Trinity. Volf says,

If persons are *pure* relations, if *no* person possesses anything of its own (and according to Ratzinger, the Father apparently constitutes no exception), then they can hardly be distinguished from one another and from the divine substance sustaining them. Although Ratzinger criticizes Augustine’s doctrine of the Trinity insofar as in it “the persons of God are enclosed completely in God’s interior, and that externally God becomes a pure I,” nonetheless, if all persons are total relationality with regard to one another, then the agent in the deity can only be the one substance, both externally and internally.<sup>124</sup>

Volf thus asserts that Ratzinger makes the divine substance the true agent in both the economic Trinity and in the immanent Trinity. For Volf this leads to pre-personal monism. This may be

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 70, italics original.

<sup>123</sup> For a response to Volf, See Ralph del Colle, “Communion and the Trinity: The Free Church Ecclesiology of Miroslav Volf—A Catholic Response,” 312–22, where del Colle questions Volf’s interpretation of Ratzinger that Ratzinger actually makes the divine substance superordinate to the divine persons.

<sup>124</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 70–71, italics original.

seen in Volf's following discussion about the relation between ecclesiology and the doctrine of the Trinity in Ratzinger:

It is more consistent with Ratzinger's own (sketchy) Trinitarian thinking *to conceive ecclesial structures by way of the one substance of God*. The one, externally acting divine substance corresponds to the one church that, together with Christ, constitutes one subject and in that way becomes capable of action. A *monistic structure* for the church emerges from this.<sup>125</sup>

According to Volf, for Ratzinger Christ and the church constitute one subject. And since what is chief in Christ is the divine substance, Volf asserts that there is the danger of a monistic merging of the church with the divine substance in Ratzinger that is the result of the hierarchy of the divine substance over the divine persons.<sup>126</sup>

A final significant place where Volf critiques Ratzinger on divine unity is at the beginning of the "Trinity, Universal Church, and Local Church" section of the "Trinity and Church" chapter. Here Volf again asserts that Ratzinger takes "the dominance of unity as his point of departure." Volf somewhat nuances his earlier position by saying that in Ratzinger "the substance of God must take precedence over the nonaccidentally conceived persons."<sup>127</sup> "Nonaccidentally conceived persons" recalls Augustine's understanding of divine personhood where he had to conceive of the divine persons as relations in order that they would not be

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<sup>125</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 71, italics original.

<sup>126</sup> Volf has some similar allegations of monism in ecclesiology against Ratzinger at the beginning of the section "The Structure of Trinitarian and Ecclesial Relations" in the "Trinity and Church" chapter. Volf says, "As I have tried to show, although Ratzinger conceives relations within the church in a Trinitarian fashion, he conceives the structure of the church monistically. The paradox is only apparent. Because the persons are 'pure relations,' God can act externally only as the one undifferentiated divine being, that is, as *one* 'person.' This one divine nature acting externally corresponds to the one church that together with Christ constitutes one subject and thus itself becomes capable of action. Hence for both the Trinity and for the church, the 'one' is structurally decisive: the one divine Nature, the one Christ, the one Pope, and the one bishop" (ibid., 214, italics original).

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 201.

considered as accidental properties of the divine substance that could change in qualities.<sup>128</sup> But for Volf this again overly elevates the divine substance, for he goes on to say that the “unity of the one divine nature and essence as it were ‘sustains’ the triplicity of persons.”<sup>129</sup> Based on all of this, Volf concludes,

Understanding the unity of God by way of the one substance of God seems unavoidably to establish the precedence of the one God before the three persons, and thus also to threaten the triunity of God. By contrast, one must insist with Jürgen Moltmann that “the persons themselves constitute both their differences and their unity.” This presupposes that the divinity of the one God does not precede the divine persons, but rather exists concretely as three persons.<sup>130</sup>

For Volf, Ratzinger not only places the divine substance “over” the divine persons but he also makes it sustain the divine persons in such a way that threatens the “triunity of God.” Volf believes that Ratzinger so treats the divine substance in abstraction from the divine persons that in a sort of pre-personal monism the divine substance threatens to be the only real or concrete thing in God. This also helps explain the title of Volf’s chapter on Ratzinger, “Communion and the Whole,” where all particular things are in danger of becoming absorbed into the “whole” that is all things considered in close proximity to the divine substance. For Volf, the hierarchy of the divine substance over the divine persons as evident in Ratzinger threatens to lead to pre-personal monism in the doctrine of the Trinity.

### 2.2.2. Volf’s Critique of the Understanding of the Trinity in Zizioulas

In “Trinitarian Personhood” in the first chapter, “Zizioulas: Communion, One, and Many,” of *After Our Likeness* Volf has his central discussion of Zizioulas’ understanding of the Trinity.

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<sup>128</sup> See section 1.1.1 of the dissertation.

<sup>129</sup> Volf *After Our Likeness*, 201.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

Volf begins by pointing out that for Zizioulas especially the Cappadocian Fathers laid the groundwork for an ontology of a divine person by effecting a “‘revolution’ within monistic Greek philosophical thinking by identifying ‘hypostasis’ (ὕποστασις, *substantia*) with ‘person’ (πρόσωπον, *persona*).” For Zizioulas, this has two consequences:

(a) The person is no longer an adjunct to a being, a category we *add* to a concrete entity once we have first verified its ontological hypostasis. *It is itself the hypostasis of the being.* (b) Entities no longer trace their being to being itself—that is, being is not an absolute category in itself—but to the person, to precisely that which *constitutes* being, that is, enable entities to be entities.<sup>131</sup>

Volf goes on in this section to evaluate these two consequences, the first dealing with Zizioulas’ “negative point of departure” where the Eastern tradition attempted to move beyond “the monistic ontology of Greek philosophy,”<sup>132</sup> and the second dealing with Zizioulas’ understanding of the monarchy of the Father and his relation to the other two divine persons. These two points will also structure our presentation.

**2.2.2.1. Beyond the Monistic Ontology of Greek Philosophy.** With regard to the first point, Volf in “Trinitarian Personhood” quotes a famous dictum of Cyril of Alexandria and summarizes Zizioulas’ warnings about it. Volf says that for Zizioulas,

If one understands the Trinitarian postulate *μία οὐσία, τρία πρόσωπα* (“one substance, three persons”) to mean that God at first (in the ontological sense) *is* the one God, and only then exists as three persons, then “the ontological principle” of the deity is lodged at the level of substance, and one still remains entangled in monistic ontology.<sup>133</sup>

According to Volf, Zizioulas chiefly opposes a substance-oriented understanding of the Trinity for leading to a pre-personal monism where the divine substance threatens to absorb the divine

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 76, Zizioulas’ italics.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 76, italics original.

persons into itself. Volf says that in opposition to this Zizioulas rather postulates that “God the Father perpetually confirms—constitutes!—his own existence in the free personal activity of the divine life.”<sup>134</sup> The person of the Father constitutes the divine essence rather than vice versa. It is significant here that Volf agrees with Zizioulas when Zizioulas sees a Trinitarian understanding that emphasizes the “substance” as superordinate to the divine persons as tending towards a pre-personal monism. Similarly, Volf agrees with Zizioulas’ stressing of the personal nature of the divine persons. In both of these things, Volf finds significant agreement with Zizioulas. However, we will now see that Volf finds the *manner* in which Zizioulas stresses divine personhood highly problematic.

**2.2.2.2. The Priority of the Person of the Father.** According to Volf in “Trinitarian Personhood,” for Zizioulas the second consequence of the Cappadocian “revolution” is the priority given to the person of the Father. Already in his first paragraph of discussion on this topic, Volf hints at his opposition to Zizioulas when he quotes Zizioulas as saying, “the concept of hierarchy inheres in the idea of person.”<sup>135</sup> It is precisely this sort of hierarchy that Volf opposes in Zizioulas’ Trinitarian understanding. Volf goes on to further describe the position of Zizioulas:

On the one hand, the Father never exists alone, but rather only in communion with the Son and Spirit; the other two persons are the presupposition of his identity, indeed, of his very existence. On the other hand, the Son and the Spirit exist only through the Father, who is their cause, and in “a kind of subordination” to him. The communion is always *constituted and internally structured by an asymmetrical-reciprocal relationship between the one and the many*. The reciprocity consists in the many being unable to live as communion without the one, and in the one being unable to exist without the many. The asymmetry, however, consists in the many

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 78.

being constituted by the one, whereas the one is only conditioned on the many; although he cannot exist without them, they are not his cause, but rather he theirs.<sup>136</sup>

Volf summarizes this position of Zizioulas by saying that Zizioulas teaches a “constituting versus conditioned-by” framework in his doctrine of the Trinity. The Father constitutes the Son and Spirit but is not also constituted by them but only conditioned by them, and Volf sees this as a very *hierarchical* position. Furthermore, Volf asserts that this hierarchical “constituting versus conditioned-by” framework affects basically every aspect of Zizioulas’ theology in general. In short, Volf emphasizes especially the *hierarchy* present in Zizioulas’ Trinitarian theology.

Volf goes on to critique this hierarchical Trinitarian understanding of Zizioulas. According to Volf, for Zizioulas it is impossible to say that

*all the persons can exhibit mutually reciprocal causality, for then it would be impossible [according to Zizioulas] to distinguish them from one another (unless one were to identify the immanent and economical Trinity). The monarchy of the Father is the presupposition of the distinction between the persons. What remains obscure [according to Volf], however, is why the monarchy of the Father should be necessary for preserving the unity of God, who is, after all, love, or why the only alternative for securing the unity of God is by way of recourse to “the ultimacy of substance in ontology.” This remains merely a postulate for Zizioulas that does not correspond to the attempt at providing a personal grounding for the unity of God, for it presupposes that the unity of God cannot be conceived without numerical oneness and accordingly without something apersonal.*<sup>137</sup>

Volf here rejects the “either-or” decision that he says that Zizioulas forces: either the person of the Father or the divine substance is the ultimate category in the Trinity. Volf rather advocates a *social* understanding of the Trinity that stresses reciprocity in the divine relationships. We should also note here that Volf asserts that Zizioulas’ stressing the person of the Father should actually be seen as his stressing “numerical oneness”; for Volf this means that Zizioulas arguably is

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., italics original.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 79, italics original.

similar to those whom Zizioulas opposes and is guilty of making “something apersonal,” namely this oneness, ultimate in his Trinitarian understanding. Volf thus here critiques Zizioulas by saying that the *hierarchy* connected with his making the person of the Father the ultimate ontological principle in Trinitarian discourse ironically makes the Father himself impersonal and hence, similar to Zizioulas’ pre-personal monism critique of the substance position above, makes Zizioulas’ position be in danger of a closely-related hyper-personal monism that would make the Son and Spirit be absorbed into the Father.<sup>138</sup>

Volf in the section “Christ: Person and Community” in his chapter on Zizioulas in *After Our Likeness* shows that the flip side of Zizioulas’ alleged depersonalization of the Father is the depersonalization of the Son and Spirit due to their subordination to the Father. Here Volf says that Zizioulas teaches a “deindividuation of Christ” in his filial relationship with the Father.<sup>139</sup> This deindividuation of the Son is reminiscent of the sort of de-centered self that Volf saw present in Ratzinger for each divine person under the divine substance, only Volf says that for Zizioulas the Son is subordinated to the hierarchical Father rather than the divine substance. Volf asserts that Zizioulas’ hyper-personal monism where the Father is oppressively hierarchical over the Son not only depersonalizes the Father but also depersonalizes the Son.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> For another indication of a tendency towards hyper-personal monism in Zizioulas according to Volf, see also Volf’s section “Eucharist and Communion” where Volf can describe Zizioulas as teaching the “identification of Christ and church” so that they are “‘completely’ identical” and “all distance between Christ and the church is overcome insofar as the Holy Spirit personalizes Christ within the Church” (ibid., 99).

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>140</sup> Although Volf does not explicitly say it, Volf seems to view Zizioulas as teaching an oppressive “master-slave” relationship between the Father and the Son.

Returning to the Zizioulas chapter and Volf's discussion in "Trinitarian Personhood," Volf advances another criticism of Zizioulas in connection with the hierarchy of the Father in the constituting versus conditioned-by framework. Volf says,

Another question is whether the notion [in Zizioulas] that the Father confirms his relational being through the begetting of the Son and the emergence of the Spirit does not already contain the logical priority of person over communion. A human being who begets is constituted as such only through the actual process of begetting; in this case, however, being as begetter is added to being as person; a person who has begotten becomes one who begets. God the Father, however, is identical with the one begetting and thus also with himself as God. This is why God cannot become Father only through begetting, but rather must already have been Father and thus person even before this begetting—before, that is, in the ontological, not the temporal sense. The begetting can then only *confirm* his being as Father. The Father is not constituted relationally; rather, his fatherhood is necessarily expressed and confirmed relationally.<sup>141</sup>

Here Volf stresses that Zizioulas' stress on the term 'constituting' in his 'constituting versus conditioned-by' framework causes a tension. For Volf, if the Father is not constituted by the Son and the Spirit, and the person of the Father is the ultimate ontological category in Trinitarian discourse, then Zizioulas most stresses that the Father is alone and hence Zizioulas causes a tension between person and community. Ultimately, according to Volf, for Zizioulas the Father did not logically actually need the Son in order to be the Father. Hence in the tension between person and community, person tends to overwhelm community and make even any conditioning of the Father by the Son and Spirit quite difficult. Again Volf sees Zizioulas' position as in danger of a hyper-personal monism due to the sort of hierarchy the Father exercises over the Son and Spirit.

One final significant place where Volf further clarifies his critique of Zizioulas' Trinitarian understanding is in the "Trinity and Church" chapter in the "Trinity, Universal Church, and



Local Church” section. In the context of a discussion of the correspondences between the doctrine of the Trinity and ecclesiology, Volf says,

The correspondences “divine nature—universal church” and “divine persons—local churches” are similarly to be rejected for Trinitarian reasons. If the universal church is to correspond to the divine nature, and if at the same time every local church is to be identical with the one universal church, the three divine persons must possess the one, numerically identical divine nature, something both the Eastern and the Western traditions do as a rule maintain. In that case, however, one must either assume that the one divine nature exists in addition to the divine persons and is concretized differently in each person, or one is forced into the awkward position of deciding how to distinguish between the persons, each of which is allegedly identical with the one numerically identical divine nature. For this reason, it is advisable to dispense entirely with the one numerically identical divine nature and instead to conceive the unity of God *perichoretically*.<sup>142</sup>

This is a very significant text in Volf. In effect, by holding that both the “Eastern” and “Western” traditions hold to a “numerically identical divine nature,” Volf is actually minimizing the differences between the two traditions. We began to see this above when Volf said that by focusing on the monarchy of the Father, the East actually focused more on the impersonal or substantial *oneness* of the Father than on the Father’s personality. Volf’s critique in the present quote seems to go something like this, then: the West teaches that the divine nature “exists in addition to the divine persons” and hence above them whereas the East teaches that the divine persons are identical to the divine substance since the Father constitutes the divine substance and then gives it to the Son and Spirit. In either case, there remains an impersonal “numerically identical divine nature” that Volf can associate with both the West and the East in connection with a pre-personal and a hyper-personal monism, respectively. Once again, Volf opposes

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 79, italics original.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 203.

*hierarchical* Trinitarian trajectories, in this case reducing them to be quite similar to one another, in favor of his own *egalitarian* Trinitarian trajectory that favors perichoresis.

### **2.2.3. Conclusion**

Volf's critique of the substance (unity)- and person-oriented models of the Trinity comes about through his critique of Ratzinger and Zizioulas, respectively. According to Volf, Ratzinger has an unstable concept of divine personhood where persons are defined in terms of relations in the one divine substance and not as relatively independent ontological realities. The root of this problem is that Ratzinger has an inadequate understanding of divine unity where the divine persons are constituted by their relations in the one divine substance and therefore are logically subordinated to the one divine substance. For Volf, the ontological priority given to an impersonal divine substance vis-à-vis the persons ultimately leads to a pre-personal monism where the divine substance absorbs the persons.

As for Zizioulas, Volf argues that the Orthodox theologian Zizioulas works with a hierarchical 'constituting versus conditioned-by' framework to describe the relationship of the Father with the Son and Spirit. The Father constitutes the Son and Spirit but is not also constituted by them but merely conditioned by them. Here Volf states that Zizioulas so stresses the hierarchy of the Father over the Son and Spirit that he is in danger of making the Father appear more as a substance than as a person. In the process, Zizioulas allegedly depersonalizes the Son and the Spirit, both of whom are already logically subordinated to the Father in the system. Reminiscent of the case with Ratzinger, Zizioulas is in danger of a sort of monism, although in the case of Zizioulas it is a hyper-personal monism where the person of the Father becomes impersonal in lording his authority over the Son and Spirit, which for Volf logically leads to the Father absorbing the Son and the Spirit. This alleged monism in Zizioulas, ironically,

is precisely what Zizioulas is trying to avoid by grounding the reality of *ousia* ('substance'), which Greek thought could conceive pantheistically, in the person of the Father and in the Father's freedom. Because of the hierarchies he sees present in both Ratzinger and in Zizioulas, Volf thus warns of pre-personal and hyper-personal monism, respectively, and counters them with his own egalitarian understanding of the Trinity.

### **2.3. A Brief Comparison of and Evaluation of Balthasar and Volf**

Various similarities and differences are evident in the Trinitarian critiques by Balthasar and Volf. Both Balthasar and Volf critique other Trinitarian models of the Trinity along the lines of a hierarchy-equality polarity, although Balthasar generally opposes what he sees as egalitarian conceptions of the Trinity while Volf generally opposes what he sees as hierarchical conceptions. Balthasar first warns against a substance-oriented Trinitarian model, which he sees as an *egalitarian*, Gnostic conception of the Godhead that would homogenize the persons in a sort of pre-personal monism. But Volf warns that a substance-oriented Trinitarian model *subordinates* the divine persons to an impersonal divine substance and thus leads to pre-personal monism. Balthasar also warns against a person-oriented Trinitarian model as ultimately being in an egalitarian danger of so stressing the One, the Father, that it absorbs the Son and the Spirit into this One and in this way homogenizes the divine persons in a hyper-personal monism. But Volf warns that a person-oriented Trinitarian model subordinates the Son and the Spirit to the Father and in the process depersonalizes the solitary Father as well as the subordinated Son and Spirit, again ultimately leading to a hyper-personal monism.

It is striking that each theologian comes to the same monistic conclusions, though they arrive at it in such completely opposite ways. Balthasar sees both the substance- and person-oriented Trinitarian models as too egalitarian and hence ultimately leading to monism, while

Volf sees both the substance- and person-oriented Trinitarian models as too hierarchical and hence ultimately leading to monism. This is strong proof that both Balthasar and Volf are working with a hierarchy-equality polarity where each forces one to choose between hierarchy and equality in the doctrine of the Trinity without necessarily noting that the potential for monism also lies on their own side of the argument. Finally, both Balthasar and Volf also evidence a certain gradation in their respective critiques of other Trinitarian models, although how each grades various theologians greatly differs. Balthasar assesses that problematic egalitarian Trinitarian conceptions are basically absent in what he sees as mainstream Western theologians like Aquinas and Bonaventure; they are most evident what he sees as basically “heretical” figures such as Joachim, Hegel, and Moltmann; and they are somewhat present in the “Eastern” tradition and even in a mainstream “Western” figure like Augustine. But Volf assesses that problematic hierarchical conceptions of the Trinity are present in almost all of church history, with the West slightly worse than the East.<sup>143</sup> Largely exonerated from Volf’s negative critique of the West is the Free Church tradition of the past five centuries or so, of which Volf is an heir. A hierarchy-equality polarity thus is evident here in that Balthasar and Volf each most oppose the theologians that the other prefers due largely to the question of hierarchy versus equality in the doctrine of the Trinity.

We are now in a position to evaluate how well Balthasar and Volf capture the sociality of the divine persons in their respective Trinitarian critiques. Again we recall that sociality in my proposal requires both the uniqueness and the dignity of each divine person. Balthasar is helpful

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<sup>143</sup> Ironically, Volf tends to critique Augustine due to Augustine’s alleged hierarchy in his Trinitarian understanding, while Balthasar tends to critique Augustine due to Augustine’s alleged egalitarianism in his Trinitarian understanding.

to the extent that he exposes that certain egalitarian Trinitarian conceptions detract from the sociality of the divine persons. Here Balthasar shows that there is a danger in egalitarian conceptions that the divine persons will not be sufficiently *distinguished* from one another and to this extent not be fully social. Here Balthasar's warning about a monistic danger that can arise when the divine persons are homogenized is helpful. But Balthasar is less helpful to the extent that he is one-sided in rejecting the equality of the divine persons. Many of those Balthasar critiques the most were concerned to protect the *dignity* of each divine person, such as when Augustine was battling against an Arian threat. Balthasar's critique thus endangers the sociality of the divine persons in that it does not account adequately for each divine person having the *dignity* necessary for the divine persons to be fully social.<sup>144</sup> Balthasar's opposition to what he sees as egalitarian Trinitarian conceptions makes his theology not fully account for the dignity of the divine persons that is necessary for the full sociality of the persons.

As for Volf, his critique of the tradition is helpful to the extent that he exposes that certain hierarchical Trinitarian conceptions detract from the sociality of the divine persons; Volf points out that there is a danger that such unilateral hierarchy will exist between the divine persons that the dignity of the "oppressed" persons will not be sufficiently maintained in order for the Trinity to truly be social. Here Volf's warning about a monistic danger that can arise when the dignity of each divine person is not maintained is helpful. But Volf is less helpful to the extent that he is one-sided in rejecting hierarchy among the divine persons. For example, Zizioulas, whom Volf

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<sup>144</sup> Some have even seen Balthasar resembling some of the allegedly "Gnostic" positions he opposes. Mongrain, 214, in a section that looks at "opening the possibility of internal critique" of Balthasar's theology admits the "possibility that there might nonetheless be acute instances of speculation in his [Balthasar's] theology of the Trinity." Mongrain, *Systematic Theology*, 227–28, also contains a footnote supporting this claim of Mongrain where Mongrain summarizes the critique of Balthasar by Gerard Loughlin, who says that Balthasar "may be in danger of falling into 'Gnostic mythology.'" Mongrain also summarizes other critiques of Balthasar that accuse him of something like Gnosticism, although Mongrain generally disputes the validity of these critiques (*ibid.*, 211).

critiques, was concerned to protect the distinctness and personhood of the Father and in this way protect the distinctness and personhood of the Son and Spirit as well. By so rejecting Trinitarian hierarchy in Zizioulas, Volf's critique thus does not account adequately for the sociality of the divine persons in that it does not adequately allow the *uniqueness* of each divine person. Volf's opposition to what he sees as hierarchical Trinitarian conceptions makes his theology not fully account for the uniqueness of the divine persons that is necessary for the full sociality of the divine persons.

In evaluating Balthasar and Volf, I have acknowledged a certain validity of their critiques of other Trinitarian models. However, in both cases I believe that the charges of monism against other Trinitarian models are extreme and would require much more deterioration of the opposed positions in order for monism truly to result. Moreover, although I have acknowledged a certain validity in Balthasar and Volf's critiques, I have also pointed out the inadequacy of their critiques. Since these critiques are lacking, this suggests that a different framework is needed. To this we now turn.

#### **2.4. Towards a Revised Social Trinitarian Critique of Other Trinitarian Models**

In this section, I will first offer a general description of how a mutual hierarchy framework can function in the context of a critique of other Trinitarian models. Next, utilizing a mutual hierarchy framework, I will describe and critique the substance-oriented model of Augustine, whom Balthasar often explicitly critiqued and Volf sometimes mentions in connection with his critique of Ratzinger. Finally, I will describe and critique the person-oriented model of Zizioulas, whom Volf critiqued. By thus choosing theologians also chosen by Balthasar or Volf, I will be in a better position in my final section to show how a mutual hierarchy framework can provide a more adequate critique of other Trinitarian models than the corresponding critiques by Balthasar

and Volf. Utilizing a mutual hierarchy framework will allow me to critique other Trinitarian models in such a way that my account will foster both the uniqueness and the dignity of each divine person, both of which I have argued are necessary in order to foster the sociality of the persons.

#### **2.4.1. An Initial Description of the Mutual Hierarchy of the Divine Persons in the in the Context of a Critique of Other Trinitarian Models**

In the introduction to the dissertation I stated that a mutual hierarchy framework aims to uphold both the uniqueness and the dignity of the divine persons. That each divine person has a positive uniqueness in his relations with the other divine persons entails each person having a *hierarchy* over the others; however this hierarchy is of such a kind that it does not detract from but rather fosters the dignity of the other divine persons and hence the *mutuality* among the divine persons.<sup>145</sup> In terms of the current section, we will see how a mutual hierarchy framework can critique other Trinitarian models for how well they preserve both the uniqueness and dignity of each divine person, which uniqueness and dignity are necessary for the full sociality of the divine persons.

#### **2.4.2. A Mutual Hierarchy Critique of Augustine**

In order to establish the general contours of Augustine's understanding of the Trinity, we will enlist the aid of Cornelius Plantinga's article "The Fourth Gospel as Trinitarian Source Then and Now," which has a concise discussion of Augustine's understanding of the Trinity.<sup>146</sup>

Plantinga critiques Augustine's understanding of the Trinity mainly in connection with

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<sup>145</sup> Associating hierarchy with the vocations and personal properties of each divine person will be further discussed in chapters three and four, respectively.

<sup>146</sup> Cornelius Plantinga, "The Fourth Gospel as Trinitarian Source Then and Now," in *Biblical Hermeneutics in*

Augustine's derivation of the Trinity from the biblical narrative in *On the Trinity*: "In *On the Trinity* one finds a powerful and subtle statement of the doctrine of the Trinity that self-consciously derives Trinitarian principles largely, though not wholly, from Scripture."<sup>147</sup>

Plantinga's presentation of Augustine's Trinitarian understanding revolves around Augustine's understanding of what Plantinga refers to as three sorts of passages in the Gospel of John: mutual relations passages, sending passages, and unity passages.<sup>148</sup> We will now look at each of these sorts of passages.

According to the presentation of Plantinga, the Johannine sending passages are in many respects the least important for Augustine among the three sorts of passages. According to

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*Historical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 303–21.

<sup>147</sup> Plantinga, "The Fourth Gospel," 308. Although Plantinga also suggests a philosophical framework that lies behind many of the alleged ambiguities in Augustine's understanding of the Trinity, for Plantinga this framework is integrally connected to Augustine's understanding of what Plantinga calls the unity passages in the Gospel of John.

See also Scott Dunham, *The Trinity and Creation in Augustine: An Ecological Analysis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 25–29, where Dunham looks at "the scriptural basis of Augustine's Trinitarian doctrine" and similarly argues that Augustine's method was chiefly to depend on Scripture even though he was also heavily influenced by Neoplatonism.

For a critique of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity that sees it as heavily influenced by Neoplatonism see Joseph Farrell's introduction of the translation of Saint Photius in *The Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1987), 17–56. While this heavy influence of Neoplatonism on Augustine is likely, Augustine nevertheless builds his case primarily by appealing to Scripture.

<sup>148</sup> See also Plantinga, *The Hodgson-Welch Debate*, 291–93, where he describes the structure of *On the Trinity* in terms of these three sorts of passages. According to Plantinga, books 1–4 treat especially sending, books 5–7 treat especially unity, and book 15 treats especially social themes. Books 8–14 involve all three and witness a progression from more social analogies of the Trinity to more psychological analogies. Concerning books 8–14, Balthasar notes a shift even within the psychological analogies as Augustine seeks to prevent subordination between the divine persons: "Does the mind (*mens*) as such not have a preponderance over its functions, *notitia* and *amor*, so that (to use the terminology of later Scholasticism) it plays the role of substance, they of accidents? Augustine (probably on account of these difficulties) then changed somewhat the composition of his triad: it now became *memoria* (the ground of the mind), *intellectus* (self-knowledge), *voluntas* (loving self-affirmation). Here the three component members appear of more equal worth, for they are all states or functions of the one spiritual substance. They also seem to require one another reciprocally and to be relative to one another. However, Augustine had to recognize that the three faculties of the soul are not the soul itself, whereas in God the Persons are identical with the divine substance" (*Theo-Logic*, 2:39).

See also section 1.1.1 of the dissertation where I discussed chapter five of Augustine's *On the Trinity* where he utilizes three chief systematic terms for the Trinity: substance, relation, and person.



Plantinga, most prominent in Augustine's exegesis of the Johannine sending passages is his tendency to interpret the vast majority of them in such a way that prevents any subordination of the persons.<sup>149</sup> However, Augustine does allow that a few sending passages allow hierarchy between the divine persons in the economy; it is these few sending passages that Augustine uses as textual basis for the divine processions (i.e. generation and spiration) in the immanent Trinity.<sup>150</sup> However, although Augustine allows that these passages involve hierarchy in the economy, he does not allow that they point to any hierarchy in the immanent Trinity. Based on all of this, Plantinga notes that the majority of sending passages, since they are fully egalitarian for Augustine, allow an accurate revelation of what Augustine sees as the fully egalitarian immanent Trinity, but the few sending passages that Augustine says allow for a temporary hierarchy among the divine persons in the economy do not accurately reveal the egalitarian immanent Trinity.<sup>151</sup> Based on this different hermeneutic for understanding different sending texts, Plantinga concludes that there is "methodological strain" in Augustine's derivation of the doctrine of the Trinity from the Scriptures.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Plantinga, "The Gospel of John," 318.

<sup>150</sup> Here Plantinga cites *On the Trinity* 1.4.7 as an example, where Augustine references John 14:26 and John 15:26 to connect the *filioque* to the sending of the Spirit by both the Father and the Son.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 317. Closely associated with this methodological strain is that Augustine employs a 'double rule' where a passage is classified as either treating of Jesus according to his equality with God according to his divine status (his *forma dei*) or according to his inequality with God according to his human status (his *forma servi*) (*ibid.*, 306). Thus those sending passages that Augustine sees hierarchy in Augustine classifies as speaking of Jesus according to his humanity (*forma servi*). But those sending passages Augustine does not see hierarchy in he classifies as speaking of Jesus according to his deity (*forma servi*). Augustine in *On the Trinity* thus interprets the various Johannine sending passages either in a fully egalitarian manner with respect to Jesus' divine status (*forma dei*) or in a way that only allows Jesus to be temporarily subordinate to the Father according to his humanity (*forma servi*).

See also Plantinga, *The Hodgson-Welch Debate*, 291: "In the first four books of *De Trinitate*, Augustine follows Hilary in linking incarnation and 'sending' to Trinity doctrine. By examining particularly the meaning of John 1:1-18, 10:30, 14:28, and Philippians 2:5-11, Augustine determines that the 'form of God' or 'form of a slave'

According to the presentation of Plantinga, more important for Augustine than the few sending passages that involve hierarchy in the economy are the many more passages that refer to the egalitarian mutual relations of the divine persons. For example, in the context of a discussion of Augustine's use of certain social analogies of the Trinity, Plantinga says,

Augustine draws heavily on those places in the Fourth Gospel in which Father, Son, and Spirit/Paraclete appear as distinct divine centers of love, will, knowledge, and purposeful action—indeed, as *mutually* knowing, loving, glorifying entities. The divine persons share a unity (not an identity) of will akin to that of humans, and a “society of love.”<sup>153</sup>

Augustine thus connects the mutuality of the divine persons seen in various sorts of passages in John's Gospel with the equal deity of the divine persons.<sup>154</sup> These passages speaking of equality and mutuality between the divine persons are thus superordinate to the few sending passages that speak of the temporary subordination of the Son in the economy.

According to the presentation of Plantinga, the most important passages for Augustine are the passages that speak of mutual indwelling or unity. Plantinga says,

In Augustine's overall thought, the oneness statements of John 10 and 17 (which, however mysterious, include oneness of work) plus Augustine's remorseless philosophical tendency to unify and simplify the divine life—these things lead him to a general indivisibility-of-work principle that, in ranging speculatively far beyond any ordinary sense of Scripture, sometimes reaches heroic proportions. Accordingly, he has the whole Trinity (including the Son) working the conception in and birth from Mary. In fact, not content with the anti-subordination claim that “the Son and Spirit

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status of Jesus Christ is always the rule for understanding what otherwise appear to be inconsistencies in the gospels.”

<sup>153</sup> Plantinga, “The Gospel of John,” 311.

<sup>154</sup> Earlier in Plantinga's article he discusses the derivation of the doctrine of the Trinity from the biblical narrative in the fourth century in general. In this context Plantinga suggests the following six central Trinitarian phenomena in John's Gospel: “common will, work, word, and knowledge, plus reciprocal love (excluding the Spirit) and glorifying.” In the footnote Plantinga offers the following verses as examples: “Will: 4:34; work: 5:19–22; 15:26; word: 3:34; 16:14; knowledge: 10:14–15; love: 3:35; glory: 16:14; 17:22” (ibid., 305).

are not less because sent,” Augustine uses a fancy paralogism, loosely based on the Fourth Gospel, to argue that the Son actually sends himself....<sup>155</sup>

Here Plantinga makes it clear that Augustine emphasizes the few unity passages of John 10 and 17 over the sending passages of John for a specifically “anti-subordination,” or egalitarian, purpose, which purpose Plantinga earlier said was to preserve the equal deity of the divine persons. The context of Plantinga’s statement here also indicates that Augustine emphasized these few unity passages over the mutuality passages as well.<sup>156</sup> According to Plantinga, Augustine thus displays a hierarchy in his use of three sorts of passages in John—unity passages, then mutuality passages, then sending passages—in order to preserve the equal deity and dignity of the divine persons.

Although my proposal that utilizes a mutual hierarchy framework agrees with some of the chief Trinitarian critiques of Augustine by Plantinga, Plantinga emphasizes different things in his critique than what my proposal emphasizes. The critique by Plantinga that is of most interest to the present chapter is that Plantinga asserts that there is methodological strain in Augustine over how Augustine can see a certain economic hierarchy among the divine persons utilizing a few sending passages but then deny any hierarchy in the processions in the immanent Trinity based on those same sending passages as well as the other sending passages. My proposal agrees with Plantinga on this point. However, my proposal, in contrast to Plantinga, is more interested in the fact that Augustine tends to force one to choose between hierarchy and equality. This arguably is a large part of what drives Augustine to interpret the biblical narrative in the way that he does. Hence when Augustine interprets most of the Johannine sending passages in an egalitarian

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 316–17.

<sup>156</sup> See also Plantinga, *The Hodgson-Welch Debate*, 294–95, 306–8, where Plantinga further discusses this

manner in books one through four of *On the Trinity* he does this in order to combat an Arian interpretation of these verses.<sup>157</sup> Augustine thus combats the Arian hierarchical reading with a fully egalitarian reading. Augustine thus brings together the majority of the sending passages with the mutuality passages and makes them all fully egalitarian. The few sending passages where Augustine allows for a temporary, economic subordinationism among the divine persons thus are exceptions to the rule and are allowed in order to try to safeguard the uniqueness of each divine person. Finally, we saw from Plantinga's presentation that Augustine associates the divine unity passages with egalitarianism among the divine persons. My proposal asserts that Augustine's grading of biblical passages has the effect of making the divine persons as equal to one another as possible, only allowing a temporary economic hierarchy among the persons for the purpose of distinguishing the divine persons. In so doing, Augustine distorts much of the Johannine narrative. For example, Augustine interprets many Johannine passages as egalitarian that clearly involve hierarchy among the divine persons, especially the various Johannine sending passages. Similarly, Augustine gives disproportionate space to the few Johannine unity passages and denies that such passages can involve any hierarchy among the divine persons. The net effect of all of this is an overwhelming stress on the equality of the divine persons, where equality is understood in such a way that leaves little to no room for hierarchy among the divine persons. In so doing Augustine detracts from the uniqueness of the divine persons and hence from their sociality which seems to require this uniqueness.

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preeminence of unity and its association with equality in Augustine's Trinitarian understanding.

<sup>157</sup> For example, Augustine, *On the Trinity* 2.5, mentions various Johannine verses in connection with the theme that "The Son and Holy Spirit are not therefore less because sent," such as John 1:10–11, 1:14, 14:26, 16:7, and 16:28; Augustine here begins his discussion by opposing what he associates with an Arian interpretation of these verses: "But being proved wrong so far, men betake themselves to saying, that he who sends is greater than the Son, because the Son continually speaks of Himself as being sent by the Father...."

Although my proposal that utilizes a mutual hierarchy framework provides a quite sharp critique of Augustine's biblical understanding of the Trinity, it also does much to try to account for arguably Augustine's major concern in formulating his Trinity doctrine, opposing Arianism, yet without endangering the sociality of the divine persons in doing so. Coming as he does in the wake of the Arian controversy, one certainly sympathizes with Augustine for wanting to protect the equal deity of the Son and the Spirit in their relations with the Father. A mutual hierarchy framework has the potential to be very strong on securing the divinity and dignity of the Son and Spirit, for which Augustine was very much concerned. For a mutual hierarchy framework says that hierarchy is not exercised in an oppressive manner but rather maintains the dignity of those one is hierarchical over. Here each divine person has hierarchy over the others in connection with the vocation and personal properties of each, yet each person exercises this hierarchy in a way that promotes the dignity and divinity of the others. Especially by allowing these hierarchies among the divine persons, the divine persons may be thought of as complementary to one another and fully social.

#### **2.4.3. A Mutual Hierarchy Critique of Zizioulas**

Next we will critique the Trinitarian understanding of Zizioulas. First, we will briefly recount Volf's basic characterization of Zizioulas' understanding of the Trinity. Next, supplementing the presentation of Volf, we will briefly examine some of the key biblical evidence Zizioulas uses to support his notion of the Father as the ultimate ontological category in his doctrine of the Trinity. Finally, we will critique Zizioulas' views utilizing a mutual hierarchy framework.

Above we saw that Volf characterizes Zizioulas as emphasizing the priority of the person of the Father in the Trinity as the personal cause of the divine communion. Moreover, Zizioulas

works with a hierarchical or asymmetrical “constituting versus conditioned-by” framework in his doctrine of the Trinity where the Father constitutes the Son and the Spirit but is only conditioned by them in return. According to Volf, a key reason that Zizioulas formulates his doctrine in this way is because he sees a monistic danger in a substance-oriented Trinitarian model.

Although I agree with Volf’s basic presentation of Zizioulas’s understanding of the Trinity, I believe that it would be useful to supplement Volf by looking more at Zizioulas’ stated biblical basis for his constructive Trinitarian views.<sup>158</sup> To support his position, Zizioulas tends to use four major types of biblical arguments that he sees as interrelated. A first, and probably chief, argument is that the designation “God” in the New Testament almost always refers to the Father. For example, in the opening chapter of *Being as Communion*, after Zizioulas emphasizes the person of the Father as the ultimate ontological category in theology, he cites 1 John 4:7–17 for support of this and says that ‘God’ in these verses refers to the Father: “the word ‘God’ is identified with Him who ‘sent His only-begotten Son.’”<sup>159</sup> This quotation already brings us to Zizioulas’ second and third biblical arguments, from the Johannine *μονογενής* (which Zizioulas translates as “only-begotten”) texts and from various sending texts, respectively.<sup>160</sup> Concerning the Johannine *μονογενής* texts, Zizioulas further says,

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<sup>158</sup> See also section 1.1.1 of the dissertation where I give an example of Basil’s statement of a person-oriented Trinitarian model.

<sup>159</sup> Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 46. Zizioulas here also looks at the phrase ‘God is love’ from 1 John 4:16 and concludes that ‘God’ here refers to the Father. For more background on Zizioulas emphasizing that the term God refers to the Father in the New Testament, see especially Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 113–18, 137, 152–54.

<sup>160</sup> The Johannine *μονογενής* texts are the following: John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; and 1 John 4:9. For a listing by Zizioulas of some of the sending texts that support the priority of the person of the Father, see especially Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 139. Here Zizioulas also argues for the priority of the Father based on John 14:28 where it says, “the Father is greater than I”; for more on John 14:28 see also *ibid.*, 129–30, 143.

The word “only-begotten” [μονογενής] in the Johannine writings means not only the unique mode of generation of the Son by the Father, but also “Him who is beloved in a unique manner”.... It is precisely this identification of ontology with love in God that signifies that eternity and immortality do not belong to His [the Son’s] “nature” but to the personal relationship which is initiated by the Father.<sup>161</sup>

Keeping in mind our previous quotation, the present one suggests that for Zizioulas the Johannine writings in general point to the priority of the Father in connection with the begetting passages and the closely-related sending passages.<sup>162</sup> A final biblical argument Zizioulas utilizes is from the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19. For example, Zizioulas asserts that the old predecessor creeds of the Apostles’ Creed connect the term God with the Father in the phrase ‘God the Father almighty’ and that the origin of this is Matthew 28:19 and the ecclesial experience of Baptism.<sup>163</sup> Especially these four arguments are the biblical basis for Zizioulas’ understanding of the priority of the Father in the Trinity.

Having briefly looked at Zizioulas’ biblical basis for his Trinitarian views, we are now in a position to evaluate Zizioulas’ Trinitarian understanding utilizing a mutual hierarchy framework. A mutual hierarchy framework suggests that it is not so much that Zizioulas has hierarchy in his understanding of the Trinity that is problematic; rather it is the sort of hierarchy he sees as he pits

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<sup>161</sup> Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 49.

<sup>162</sup> Concerning the relation between generation and procession, on the one hand, and sending, on the other hand, Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:305, asserts that the “East” in the early church distinguished yet closely associated these two: “In the East the doctrine followed Johannine terminology closely and distinguished between the ‘generation’ of the Son (John 1:14; 3:16; cf. Luke 3:22) and the ‘procession’ of the Spirit (John 15:26)... The processions according to the classical doctrine of the Trinity must be carefully distinguished from the sending of the Son (Rom. 8:3; Gal. 4:4; John 3:17; 8:16; etc.) and the Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7), in which the issue is the relation of the eternal God to the world in the economy of salvation. The processions take place from all eternity in the divine essence, but the sending of the Son and the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:38; 10:45) relate to those to whom the Son is sent or the Spirit given.”

<sup>163</sup> Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 113. See also Zizioulas, *ibid.*, 150. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 48–49, also connects Jesus’ Baptism itself to the priority of the Father seen in the generation of the Son: “If the Son is immortal, He owes this primarily not to His substance but to His being the ‘only-begotten’ (note here the concept of uniqueness) and His being the one in whom the Father is ‘well-pleased.’”

hierarchy against equality and chooses hierarchy over equality. Zizioulas fears that if the divine persons would together constitute the divine substance, there would be a monistic danger that the impersonal divine substance would take precedence over the persons. Accordingly, Zizioulas is more interested in protecting the *person* of the Father than he is in preserving the mutuality between the divine persons; here he tends to stress the *hierarchy* of the Father against the *equality* of the divine persons. Similarly, to support his view, Zizioulas stresses what he sees as hierarchical passages from Scripture over passages that speak more of the mutual relations of the divine persons or their perichoresis.<sup>164</sup> Zizioulas' choice of biblical passages has the effect of greatly emphasizing the hierarchy of the Father over the Son and Spirit, which causes a tension with other biblical passages that speak more of mutuality. In doing this, Zizioulas distorts much of the biblical narrative, and perhaps especially the Johannine narrative that Augustine arguably distorted in the opposite manner. By doing these things Zizioulas does not account adequately for the dignity of the Son and Spirit, since for Zizioulas the Father and the divine nature to a certain extent may be thought of without the Son and Spirit, and ultimately does not account

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<sup>164</sup> For Zizioulas, after the priority of the Father, next in importance are the relations of the divine persons to one another, while least important is the substantial unity of the divine persons. See also Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 83–87, where Zizioulas critiques the Trinitarian understanding of Athanasius. See also Zizioulas, "The Teaching of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ecumenical Council on the Holy Spirit in Historical and Ecumenical Perspective," in *Credo in Spiritum*, vol. 1 (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983).

We note that for Zizioulas, hierarchical passages are the pivotal passages, whereas Augustine subordinated their importance to the mutuality and especially oneness passages. That John's Gospel may understood in such different ways may also be seen today through a comparison of Andreas Köstenberger's *Father, Son, and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel*, which evidences a clearly hierarchical doctrine of the Trinity, and Royce Gruenler's *The Trinity in the Gospel of John*, which evidences a clearly egalitarian doctrine of the Trinity. It is noteworthy that Köstenberger relies largely on the sending passages in John for his position while Gruenler focuses on passages he sees as pointing to the mutuality between the divine persons. See also Andreas Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel: With Implications for the Fourth Gospel's Purpose and the Mission of the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Berdmans, 1998).



adequately for the dignity of the Father himself who can be thought of in an asocial way.<sup>165</sup>

Zizioulas thus does not account adequately for the full sociality of the divine persons.

Although a mutual hierarchy framework has a considerable critique of Zizioulas' understanding of the Trinity, it also seeks to account for arguably Zizioulas' major concern in formulating his Trinity doctrine. Zizioulas argues against a certain understanding of the divine substance that would see it as the ultimate ontological category in theology. Considering the pagan Greek philosophy that the Cappadocians opposed as monistic as well as the alleged monistic danger of a substance-oriented Trinitarian model tradition according to the presentation of Zizioulas, one certainly sympathizes with Zizioulas for wanting to protect the personal distinctness of the divine hypostases through stressing a certain hierarchy in the Trinity. However, a mutual hierarchy framework combats this pre-personal monism in such a way that the dignity of each divine person is maintained. Especially by allowing for the dignity of each divine person, a mutual hierarchy framework has the potential to preserve the full sociality of the divine communion better than Zizioulas' proposal.

#### 2.4.4. Conclusion

In this section we have seen that a mutual hierarchy framework in the context of the critique of other Trinitarian models allows one to critique these models *both* with respect to the *uniqueness* and *dignity* of each divine person. Utilizing a mutual hierarchy framework, I

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<sup>165</sup> There seems to be ambiguity in the title of Volf's book *Being as Communion*. Seemingly the more natural reading would be that the divine persons may only be thought of together and because of this all being must have a communal structure. However, I do not believe this is the main thrust of Zizioulas' understanding of the Trinity. Rather he likely means by the title that for any entity other than the Father, that person or thing may only have true being by being in communion *with the Father*. This includes the Son and Spirit, who only have being by being in communion with the Father. Although at first glance this distinction may seem subtle, it actually entails two completely different ultimate ontological categories in theology: the person of the Father versus the divine persons in communion.

critiqued Augustine for not accounting adequately for the uniqueness of each divine person and distorting the Johannine narrative through the manner in which he interpreted and prioritized especially passages dealing with divine unity in John 10 and John 17. Nevertheless, my critique of Augustine sought to preserve the dignity of the divine persons that Augustine was concerned to protect. Similarly, I critiqued Zizioulas for not accounting adequately for the dignity of each divine person, even while I sought to preserve the uniqueness of the divine persons that Zizioulas was concerned to protect. By fostering both the uniqueness and the dignity of each divine person, my proposal utilizing a mutual hierarchy framework thus consistently accounts for the sociality of the divine persons that requires this uniqueness and dignity of each divine person.

## **2.5. Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter we have seen that Balthasar opposes what he sees as egalitarian understandings of the Trinity that he associates to varying degrees with what he sees as Gnosticism. This Gnosticism for Balthasar is a systematic construct that, on the one hand, in the context of a Neoplatonic worldview that stresses God's transcendence, has certain similarities with second-century Gnosticism. On the other hand, more in the context of an apocalyptic worldview that stresses God's immanence in creation, Gnosticism also has mutated into a more recent, dangerous form. Both forms of Gnosticism, and especially the more apocalyptic form, ultimately threaten to lead to either a pre-personal or hyper-personal monism depending upon whether a substance- or a person-oriented view is under consideration. Both forms of monism for Balthasar ultimately result from the egalitarian, homogenizing effects of Gnosticism. For example, one key figure holding to a substance-oriented Trinitarian model that Balthasar critiques in a moderate way is Augustine. Here Balthasar emphasized that Augustine had a

certain Neoplatonic tendency to deny the distinctions between the divine persons in connection with an emphasis on equality in his Trinitarian thought.

My proposal utilizing a mutual hierarchy framework voices both agreement and disagreement with Balthasar's critique of other Trinitarian models. I agree with Balthasar to the extent that he demonstrates that certain egalitarian Trinitarian conceptions detract from the uniqueness of each divine person. But I disagree with the manner in which Balthasar opposes egalitarian Trinitarian conceptions *simply for being egalitarian*. My proposal rather opposes Trinitarian conceptions to the extent that they see hierarchy and equality as opposites. Similarly, my proposal disagrees with Balthasar's critique of other Trinitarian models to the extent that Balthasar does not well allow for the dignity of each divine person.

Moreover, my proposal utilizing a mutual hierarchy framework seeks to preserve both the uniqueness and the dignity of the divine persons in its critique of other Trinitarian models. It is more concerned with the manner in which a Trinitarian construct understands such terms as equality and hierarchy and with the harmony of these two concepts. For example, one of the chief reasons for Augustine's tendency to stress unity in the doctrine of the Trinity over both the mutual relations of the divine persons and especially over the hierarchy among the persons in the economy arguably is that Augustine generally chooses Trinitarian equality over hierarchy in light of an Arian threat. This arguably is a large part of what drives Augustine to interpret the Johannine narrative in such a way that did not account adequately for the distinctness of the divine persons. Balthasar opposes Augustine in a one-sided way for having an egalitarian Trinitarian conception; in the process Balthasar insufficiently allows for the dignity of the divine persons. In contrast, my proposal critiques the manner in which Augustine sees equality and hierarchy as opposites; it opposes Augustine's tendency to inadequately account for the

uniqueness of each divine person even while it maintains the dignity of the divine persons that Augustine strives for in the face of an Arian threat. In this way, a mutual hierarchy framework accounts for the sociality of the divine persons more adequately than Balthasar's proposal.

In this chapter we have also seen that Volf opposes what he sees as hierarchical understandings of the Trinity that he associates to varying degrees with monism. Volf sees both a person- and a substance-oriented Trinitarian model as being in danger of a hyper-personal and a pre-personal monism, respectively. For example, Volf sees the sort of hierarchy between the divine persons as present in the Trinitarian thought of Zizioulas as tending towards a hyper-personal monism that depersonalizes both the Son and Spirit who are under the Father as well as the hierarchical Father himself. Volf thus says that Zizioulas does not account adequately for the dignity of the divine persons in connection with Zizioulas' emphasis on hierarchy in his Trinitarian thought.

My proposal utilizing a mutual hierarchy framework voices both agreement and disagreement with Volf's critique of other Trinitarian models. I agree with Volf to the extent that he demonstrates that certain hierarchical Trinitarian conceptions detract from the dignity of the divine persons. But I disagree with the manner in which Volf opposes hierarchical Trinitarian conceptions *simply for being hierarchical*. My proposal rather opposes Trinitarian conceptions to the extent that they see hierarchy and equality as opposites. Similarly, my proposal disagrees with Volf's critique of other Trinitarian models to the extent that Volf does not well allow for the uniqueness of each divine person.

Moreover, my proposal utilizing a mutual hierarchy framework preserves both the uniqueness and the dignity of the divine persons in its critique of other Trinitarian models. It is more concerned with the manner in which a Trinitarian construct understands such terms as

equality and hierarchy and with the harmony of these two concepts. For example, one of the chief reasons for Zizioulas' tendency to stress the priority of the person of the Father in the Trinity is that Zizioulas tends to choose hierarchy over equality in light of what he sees as a monistic threat. This is arguably a large part of what drives Zizioulas to interpret the biblical narrative in such a way that the dignity of the divine persons is not accounted for adequately. Volf opposes Zizioulas in a one-sided way for having a hierarchical Trinitarian conception; in the process Volf insufficiently accounts for the uniqueness of the divine persons. In contrast, my proposal critiques the manner in which Zizioulas sees equality and hierarchy as opposites; it opposes Zizioulas' tendency to not account adequately for the dignity of each divine person even while it maintains the uniqueness of the divine persons that Zizioulas strives for in the face of what he sees as a monistic threat. In this way, a mutual hierarchy framework preserves the sociality of the divine persons better than Volf's proposal.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### TOWARDS A REVISED SOCIAL TRINITARIAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE ECONOMIC TRINITY USING A MUTUAL HIERARCHY FRAMEWORK

The question this chapter will be trying to answer is “What is the place of the economic Trinity in a social model?” I will show that Balthasar and Volf evidence a hierarchy-equality polarity in their understandings of the economic Trinitarian trajectory of the life of Jesus through their strong preference for hierarchy and equality, respectively. I will argue that a mutual hierarchy framework for reading the Trinitarian trajectory of the life of Jesus in the Gospel of John accounts more adequately for the *differentiated kenotic vocations* of the divine persons. Differentiated kenotic vocations refer to each divine person having a unique vocation involving authority over the other divine persons, where each person in his vocation limits his power relative both to the other persons and to creation. Arguing that each divine person has authority over the others in their vocations differs from how many understand hierarchy in the Trinity, since many only emphasize the Father’s hierarchy over the Son as well as perhaps the Father and the Son’s hierarchy over the Holy Spirit. I will supplement this conception by asserting, for example, that the Father in his vocation is dependent upon the vocation of the Son and the Spirit so that in a sense the Son and the Spirit exercise an authority over him. I will argue that this vocational authority helps maintain the uniqueness of each divine person. Similarly, I also will bring out the Trinitarian aspects of kenosis, which term is typically only used in Christology. By arguing that each divine person is kenotic relative both to the other persons and to creation, I will stress that the divine persons are dignified in their vocations. By arguing for the differentiated

kenotic vocations of the divine persons, my proposal thus will attempt to consistently account for both their uniqueness and their dignity, both of which are necessary for their full sociality.

The chapter will first present the basic contours of Balthasar's hierarchical understanding of the economic Trinity during the life of Jesus. Next the chapter will present the basic contours of Volf's egalitarian understanding of the economic Trinity during the life of Jesus. After this, the positions of Balthasar and Volf will be compared and evaluated for how well they consistently capture the sociality of the divine persons. Next, I will show how a mutual hierarchy framework offers a way of reading the story of Jesus in the Gospel of John that displays more adequately the sociality of the divine persons by consistently maintaining their uniqueness and dignity. The chapter will conclude by comparing my understanding of the economic Trinity with that of Balthasar and Volf.

### **3.1. Balthasar's Hierarchical Understanding of the Economic Trinity and Its Culmination in the Son's Descent into Hell on Holy Saturday**

Balthasar's hierarchical understanding of the economic Trinity is oriented towards Holy Saturday and the descent of Jesus into hell that he sees occurring there. For Balthasar, it is this descent that is the chief redemptive period of the economic Trinity. Assuming this hermeneutical priority, my method of analysis in this section will be to look at Alyssa Pitstick's book *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell* as the first of two steps in evaluating Balthasar's understanding of the economic Trinity during the life of Jesus. Here I will especially focus on the Trinitarian tension Pitstick sees present in Balthasar's proposal as evident in a few sections of her book, namely the tension on Holy Saturday between, on the one hand, the kenotic Son *fully* depositing his divine and human attributes with the Father and, on the other hand, the Son maintaining his identity as the divine

Son of the Father.<sup>166</sup> The second and final step in evaluating Balthasar will be to look at Balthasar's understanding of the economic Trinity in his "Hell and Trinity" discussion in the chapter "The Word Was Made Flesh" of the second volume of *Theo-Logic* in order to supplement the work of Pitstick, especially by showing certain misconceptions and omissions in Pitstick's understanding of Balthasar, namely that Pitstick does not clearly demarcate that Balthasar employs 'mediating concepts' to connect his two sets of Trinitarian statements that are in tension with one another.<sup>167</sup> We will see that these mediating statements have the effect of emphasizing hierarchy in Balthasar's overall understanding of the economic Trinity. In this way, we will see that Balthasar's understanding of the economic Trinity is marked by a hierarchy-equality polarity or tension, which is very closely related to the tension between Balthasar's two different sorts of Trinitarian statements. In the case of the hierarchy-equality polarity, we will see that Balthasar emphasizes the hierarchy of the Father over the Son with little mention of their equality.

### **3.1.1. Balthasar's Hierarchy-Equality Tension in His Understanding of the Son's Descent into Hell on Holy Saturday as Presented by Alyssa Pitstick**

Alyssa Pitstick sees a Trinitarian tension in Balthasar's hierarchical understanding of the economic Trinity. According to Pitstick, the tension in Balthasar's position basically concerns how the Son can *fully* give himself away to the world out of obedience to the Father and yet still retain his own stable personal being. In order to lay out Pitstick's position, I will first look at

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<sup>166</sup> Since I am mainly concerned with determining the position of Balthasar I will not deal with some of Pitstick's presuppositions and critiques of Balthasar. Some of the more notable among these are the following: Pitstick opposes Balthasar for teaching any divine sort of suffering in any divine person; she opposes a more social Trinitarian trajectory in general; and she is opposed to a "vicarious satisfaction" understanding of redemption.

<sup>167</sup> See also section 1.3.1 of the dissertation where I quoted Balthasar's description of his chapter-by-chapter methodology in the second volume of *Theo-Logic*.



various sections in her chapter on the Son, “Christ’s Descent in Light of Trinity: The Son, Mission as Expression of Procession.” Then I will look at an important section in her chapter on the Spirit, “Christ’s Descent in Light of the Trinity: The Spirit, Bond of Love, Bridge of Separation.”

In her chapter “Christ’s Descent in Light of Trinity: The Son, Mission as Expression of Procession,” Pitstick highlights the kenosis of the Son in the Descent. There is a certain chronological order in Pitstick’s sections in this chapter, which order basically follows the chronology of Christ’s life as evident in the Gospels. Pitstick identifies five steps of progression in Christ’s life, which are the basis for her five sections in the chapter.<sup>168</sup> Here I will briefly highlight certain key points from three of these sections that are especially relevant for our topic.

Pitstick’s first section, “From Procession to Mission, and Back Again,” asserts that there is a Trinitarian tension in Balthasar’s thought. Here Pitstick identifies *mission* as an overarching category in Balthasar’s understanding of the vocation of the Son in his life, death, and resurrection. For Balthasar Jesus *is* his mission and thus *fully* gives himself away for the world in his mission since he is *fully obedient* to the commission of the Father.<sup>169</sup> For Pitstick the tension here is over how Jesus can have his own stable personal being if he completely gives his divine attributes away to the Father through his mission in the world.

Pitstick sees the same Trinitarian tension in Balthasar, albeit with greater intensity, in her second section, “Procession into the ‘Form of a Slave’ through ‘Depositing.’” This section looks

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<sup>168</sup> Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 142.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 145. For much more background on Balthasar’s view that the Son is his mission, see especially the section “Jesus’ Consciousness of Mission” in *Theo-Drama*, 3:149–259. Balthasar bases his mission Christology chiefly on the Gospel of John.

more closely at the kenosis of the Son especially at the cross. Key for Pitstick is that for Balthasar the Son during his life “must not bring with Him attributes of the divine essence...or give His human soul exceptionally extensive knowledge..., if the *Word* is really to *become* flesh....”<sup>170</sup> Balthasar thus says that the Son *fully* surrenders the *forma Dei* and is human. Due to such self-giving in the economy, Jesus at the cross really *cannot* help himself. Rather, at the cross the Father gathers the sins of the world into Jesus, which sins will then be suffered in their eternal consequence on Holy Saturday.<sup>171</sup> In order to illustrate Balthasar’s kenotic Christology (and also his Trinitarian theology) Pitstick uses the analogy of a container filled with a substance. The Son in his life of humiliation takes his divine attributes, which are the contents of the container, out of the container that is the Son’s person and deposits these divine attributes in the container that is the person of the Father. The container that is the person of the Son is then filled with new contents—his human nature with human attributes.<sup>172</sup> Pitstick further notes that Balthasar appeals to the fact that God is mysterious and greater than man in order to explain this teaching. But Pitstick finds this appeal to mystery unsatisfactory and again questions whether a divine person can have a stable personal existence if he fully gives his divine attributes away. She concludes, “Thus contradictions (Balthasar prefers the word *paradoxes*) will arise frequently in the course of God’s involvement with man.”<sup>173</sup> In this section Pitstick says that the tension over how Jesus can have his own stable being if he completely gives his divine attributes away to

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<sup>170</sup> Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 149, italics original.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 154–55.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 150, italics.

the Father is so dangerous that Balthasar could be in danger of causing “the undoing of the Trinity.”<sup>174</sup>

Pitstick again sees this Trinitarian tension in Balthasar, although greatly intensified, in her section, “The ‘Depositing’ of the Word’s Humanity.” Here Pitstick says that Christ’s “depositing” activity reaches a new level with the descent into hell on Holy Saturday, for here, besides his already-deposited divine attributes, Christ even further deposits his human attributes with the Father.<sup>175</sup> Holy Saturday is thus, in Balthasar’s words, “a kind of suspension, as it were, of the Incarnation.”<sup>176</sup> Jesus’ divinity is shown in that no mere man could so entirely deposit himself with the Father.<sup>177</sup> It was necessary for the Son in redeeming man to bear sin in himself, or be made sin, in order to fully experience the hell of what man deserved and in fact even more so. The Son is made sin (2 Cor 5:21) and “becomes the hypostasis of sin-in-itself” as the Son only sees the eternal *visio mortis* in hell.<sup>178</sup> Jesus’ self-giving in the economy “shatters” his human nature, which involves, in Balthasar’s words, its “‘stretching apart’ ... which remains physiologically indescribable.”<sup>179</sup> The flip side of Jesus’ (completely passive) self-giving is that he is a “free space” in which the Father may work.<sup>180</sup> Here the Father “pushes” the Son so that the Son “falls” into the abyss of hell; the Father “crushes” the Son with the world’s sin since the weight of the world’s sins would be too heavy for the Son to load on himself in his infinitely

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 191.

weakened condition.<sup>181</sup> Furthermore, for Balthasar sin is a sort of “substance” so that the Father in his active wrath is able to separate sin from all sinners and load it onto the Son.<sup>182</sup> Pitstick in the previous chapter explained that this active loading of sin onto the Son has unique kenotic consequences for the Father as well: “[The Father’s] reciprocal relation to the Son means that the Father Himself experiences loss when He abandons the Son in Sheol.”<sup>183</sup> Finally, by the Son’s bearing sin in himself, sin is taken into the “distance” between the Father and Son so that finally this Trinitarian distance consumes the lesser distance of sin.<sup>184</sup> Pitstick thus sees the Trinitarian tension in Balthasar reach its peak intensity on Holy Saturday since the Son remains the Son of the Father and yet is somehow utterly passive in hell in comparison with the entirely active Father who on Holy Saturday keeps within himself both Jesus’ divine and human attributes.

We next move on to consider briefly Pitstick’s next chapter, “Christ’s Descent in Light of the Trinity: The Spirit, Bond of Love, Bridge of Separation,” where she continues to see a Trinitarian tension in Balthasar’s understanding of the descent into hell on Holy Saturday, namely a tension between the divine Son retaining his stable personal being (and hence retaining his ability to spirate the Spirit) and the Son fully depositing his divine and human attributes with the Father (and hence, seemingly, his ability to spirate the Spirit). Here we will consider one section from this chapter that looks at Balthasar’s views on the role of the Spirit during Jesus’ life.

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 198–99, *italics original*.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 199. Pitstick elsewhere argues that Balthasar’s views on the stonement are integrally related to his alleged tendency to teach universal salvation (*ibid.*, 263–70).

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 199.

In the section “Bridge between God and Man, i.e., between the Father and Christ,” Pitstick continues to see a tension in Balthasar’s Trinitarian understanding. In this section, Pitstick especially looks at the tension present in Balthasar’s understanding of the “Trinitarian inversion” during the life of Jesus where the Son appears “below” the Spirit.<sup>185</sup> Pitstick has already pointed out that for Balthasar the Son is quite passive in his life since he has deposited his divine attributes with the Father. Now Pitstick looks at the “active priority of the Spirit over the incarnate Son” in his life, as the Spirit above Jesus continually mediates the Father’s will to Jesus.<sup>186</sup> Here Pitstick wonders, if the Son fully deposits his divine attributes with the Father in his humiliation, how can the Son continue to spirate the Spirit? For Pitstick, since in Balthasar’s thought the Son so fully gives away his divine attributes in his life he must also deposit his power of spirating the Spirit. Pitstick thus again sees a Trinitarian tension in Balthasar’s understanding of the economy that is related to the great hierarchy between the Father and the Son in the economy; in the present instance, the Son is so kenotic under the Father that it is difficult for Balthasar to explain how the Spirit could ever be beneath him in the economy.

We have thus far seen that Pitstick asserts that Balthasar posits great hierarchy between the Father and the Son in the life of Jesus and especially in the descent into hell on Holy Saturday. According to Pitstick, for Balthasar the Son fully deposits his divine attributes with the Father during his life and further deposits his human attributes with the Father on Holy Saturday in order to pay for the sins of mankind. Here the kenosis of the Father is radically different than the

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<sup>185</sup> See *Theo-Logic*: 3:203–4, for more background on Balthasar’s understanding of the basis (or lack thereof) for the Trinitarian inversion in the immanent Trinity. In the end, Balthasar says that the Trinitarian inversion (the Son being “beneath” the Spirit” in the economy) is temporary, limited to the Son’s humiliation, and in basically no way reflects the immanent Trinity. Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 231, says that Balthasar resorts to apophaticism to explain the basis for the Trinitarian inversion in the immanent Trinity as he says that it is possible due simply to “the infinite vitality of the relations between the divine Persons.”

kenosis of the Son since the Son loses all of his attributes while the Father merely suffers loss over the Son doing so. For Pitstick, this means there is a tension especially in how the Son can continue to be the Son during his extreme kenosis. Similarly, for Pitstick, the extreme kenosis of the Son especially on Holy Saturday also means that Balthasar does not account adequately for how the Son can continue to spirate the Holy Spirit. According to Pitstick, the tension in Balthasar's understanding of the Trinity is integrally related to the hierarchy of the Father over the Son (and Spirit). In Pitstick's presentation we therefore see how Balthasar "resolves" his hierarchy-equality tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the hierarchical pole of the system while giving little attention to the equality pole.

### **3.1.2. Balthasar's Hierarchy-Equality Tension in His Understanding of the Son's Descent into Hell on Holy Saturday as Evident in the Second Volume of *Theo-Logic***

In the present section I will supplement the presentation by Pitstick on the Son's descent into hell on Holy Saturday by examining Balthasar's discussion in "Hell and Trinity" in the chapter "The Word Was Made Flesh" of the second volume of *Theo-Logic*.<sup>187</sup> Doing so will confirm that Pitstick's presentation of the relationship between the divine persons in Balthasar's understanding of Holy Saturday is generally accurate. However, it will also seek to correct certain misconceptions and omissions in Pitstick's presentation.

It is significant that Balthasar's discussion in "Hell and Trinity" is located within the section "Theo-Logic in a Dialectical Key," where Balthasar considers how his *Theo-Logic* can deal with certain paradoxes in theology. At the beginning of the section, Balthasar compares the

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<sup>186</sup> Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 221.

<sup>187</sup> Balthasar's entire discussion in "Hell and Trinity" is influenced very liberally by the thought of his friend Adrienne von Speyr. See Balthasar's "Hell and Trinity" discussion for all of these references to von Speyr.

paradoxical way of the Triune God's working in the world to his previous "law" that "we can approach the mystery [of the Trinity] only by means of two opposing formulations, which is not to say, of course, that we should characterize the mystery itself as internally contradictory."<sup>188</sup> This then sets the stage for the "Hell and Trinity" discussion where Balthasar's purpose will be to answer the question:

How can the whole theological contradiction of sin, which reaches down into hell, be simultaneously affirmed and overtaken in something deeper without either losing its force or destroying theological logic (since the contradiction of the lie is integrated into the interiority of truth)?<sup>189</sup>

My present section will consider how well Balthasar succeeds in "overtaking" this contradiction or tension in his "Hell and Trinity" discussion. Already, however, we note from Balthasar's discussion thus far that he establishes a connection between the contradiction of sin and the law of only approaching the divine mystery from two opposing perspectives.

In "Hell and Trinity," Balthasar sees the cross as a prelude to the hell of Holy Saturday, as Balthasar already sees Jesus as quite passive and kenotic at the cross. For example, Balthasar says that at the cross "the Son is forsaken by the Father and no longer understands either this forsakenness or the Father."<sup>190</sup> Although in his life Jesus had some consciousness of the meaning of his mission, the cross was the beginning of a process of meaninglessness:

The Cross, where the Son is forsaken by the Father and no longer understands either this forsakenness or the Father—a state that endures until Easter—takes us even deeper. Before this forsakenness, the Son was the great, the only interpreter of God, "for he was the only one who understood both languages," that of the Father and that of men, and therefore could make the Father's language understandable to human beings. But what remains to be translated when the Son no longer hears or

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<sup>188</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, 2:327, italics original.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 345.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 347.

understands the Father's language? If we look back on Jesus' earthly activity, we see that it was "increasingly like an obstacle course" ending in sheer "failure." In Godforsakenness "he must ask himself whether his action did not actually foster this No of men, whose burning glass he becomes." Having consciously gathered in himself the sins of men, of all men, in the Passion, he must now, just because he is the sin-bearer, experience his whole action and suffering as absolute meaninglessness. Everything was sheer futility. Everything is incomprehensible for the dying man.<sup>191</sup>

Although Pitstick is not far off the truth when she says that according to Balthasar Jesus fully deposits the divine attributes with the Father during his life, the present quotation shows that she is not wholly right. It is true that the quotation says that at the cross the Son no longer understands the Father. However, paradoxically, Balthasar here also says that in the Passion the Son is able to "consciously gather into himself the sin of all men"; surely this feat must require Jesus, paradoxically, to exercise the divine attributes to some extent. We thus see a bit more clearly what the true nature of the Trinitarian tension in Balthasar is. In connection with the Son's obedience to the hierarchical Father at the cross, Balthasar says that Jesus at the cross is conscious of his gathering sins into himself. But, paradoxically, this consciousness seems cut off since Jesus is so fully "forsaken by the Father" that he no longer understands the Father, the language of the Father, or his forsakenness by the Father.

But if there is a Trinitarian tension in Balthasar's understanding of the cross, it reaches its apex in his understanding of Holy Saturday. Holy Saturday "signals the beginning of an indescribable paradox."<sup>192</sup> Balthasar writes,

He [Jesus] is the dead "sin-bearer" of all sins. As such, he passes through what, looked at objectively, is his victory, the sin separated from man on the Cross, which God eternally damns as the second—man-created—chaos. However, because he is

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 347–48.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 348.



dead, he cannot know it subjectively as what he has made it to be. He can only “take cognizance” of it as the fearsome agglomeration of all sins that no longer has the slightest connection with the Father who is the good Creator. This involves an absolute overtaxing of knowledge.<sup>193</sup>

On the one hand, Balthasar points to an awareness on the part of Jesus on Holy Saturday of the sins of mankind. But, on the other hand, Balthasar speaks of an “absolute overtaxing of knowledge” where Jesus is not aware of any possible victory over this sin. The tension here may be seen in that Balthasar can speak both, on the one hand, of the divine Son having consciousness of sin and the Father’s mission and, on the other hand, of the Son being so fully kenotic that he no longer has consciousness of the Father and the potential of victory over sin.

The tension between the Son having consciousness of the Father and the Son not having consciousness of the Father may be seen further as Balthasar continues. Balthasar himself notes the tensions, or contradictions as he calls them, involved in his views on Holy Saturday as he says, “here the contradictions emerge with full force.”<sup>194</sup> Balthasar writes,

[For Jesus on Holy Saturday] there is only the purely objective stock-taking of the abomination that is the sin of the world. This is a downright “mechanical” inspection, inasmuch as the onlooker (who, after all, is dead) does not know who he is and whether he is in the first place. In a sort of “automatism” without “interiority,” which is therefore “without pain,” he is a pure “remains,” and it is as such that he takes note of what is there. The I becomes purely neuter, an “it that does” and a “that that is done,” but neither of the two can be cleanly identified.... To endure this is sheer horror, which generates an unnameable dread (of which Adrienne speaks again and again). This dread makes it plain that the one who is reconnoitering is not the horror itself: “The horror is in sin and in the sinner and is borne by the Lord without his being it himself.... In the horror he recognizes what separates him from the horror and yet connects him with the it and the that, namely, the form of the darkness of his mission in the darkness of the Father.”<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 351.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 350–51.

On the one hand, Balthasar indicates that on Holy Saturday Jesus was dead and “objectively” was without consciousness of sin, himself, and the Father. On the other hand, Balthasar indicates that Jesus on Holy Saturday subjectively “recognizes” and “endures” the horror of sin and is aware of the Father who has given him his mission.<sup>196</sup> Here my presentation has a notable difference from the presentation of Pitstick. Pitstick said that for Balthasar Jesus fully deposits both his divinity and his humanity with the Father on Holy Saturday. Pitstick gave the impression that Jesus is fully passive on Holy Saturday. But we have just seen that Balthasar’s position is actually paradoxical since he can speak, for example, both of Jesus being conscious of the Father and Jesus not being conscious of the Father. Since this is so, we must question Pitstick’s assertion that for Balthasar Jesus fully deposits his humanity with the Father on Holy Saturday. It rather seems the case that Balthasar can speak *both* of Jesus maintaining his human attributes (and consciousness) relative to the Father *and* losing his human attributes (and consciousness) through depositing it with the Father. Our reading of the “Hell and Trinity” section to this extent gives a more adequate depiction of the Trinitarian tension present in Balthasar’s depiction of Holy Saturday than that presented by Pitstick.<sup>197</sup> Whether Balthasar depicts the Son as unconscious as the Father loads the world’s sins upon him, or whether he depicts the Son exercising a strict obedience to the Father, Balthasar’s understanding of the Father-Son relationship on Holy Saturday is very hierarchical as we have seen from his

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 350.

<sup>197</sup> Part of the significance of my correction of Pitstick’s presentation on Balthasar is that my view better harmonizes with Balthasar’s understanding of the immanent Trinity. For Balthasar, the Son in the immanent Trinity can at a ‘level of relation’ consciously obey the Father, but at a ‘level of constitution’ the Father can be thought of as alone. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

reflections on the tension between Jesus' consciousness of the Father and his lack of consciousness of the Father.

This Trinitarian tension between the Father and the Son in Balthasar's understanding of Holy Saturday can also be seen in Balthasar's discussion when he brings up the question of time on Holy Saturday. Balthasar writes,

To have to seek God, the lost Father, here [in hell on Holy Saturday] is sheer futility, absolute contradiction, especially since all time, every past or future, has completely disappeared. "Hell is timeless": von Speyr hammers home this principle over and over again in many variations. The Cross itself was atemporal, because all the sins of past and future were gathered in the Son who had been "made sin." Hell is atemporal in another way, because it is definitive and affords no prospect of escape on any side. Thus, "hell is the extreme opposite to heaven, where all time is fulfilled in God's eternity." The absolute solitude of hell also makes this apparent. Since its "substance" is the sin of the world, become (or becoming) anonymous, there is no community in hell; one simply goes "missing" there without a trace. Everything that looks like love is now deposited; nor is there any hope. Consequently, one can at most guess at the footsteps of the Lord who has passed through hell, but because there is no path in hell, there is no following him, either, and his footsteps cannot really be located.<sup>198</sup>

Again we note the Trinitarian tension in Balthasar's thought here. On the one hand, Balthasar indicates that the Son is in a sort of atemporal limbo and is without consciousness since he is "missing" and cannot find the Father. But, on the other hand, Balthasar says that the Son is still aware of and searching for the Father. Here we should also note that Balthasar often employs certain mediating concepts between his two types of statements that are in tension with one another. These mediating concepts typically assert that, even though it is impossible, the Son nevertheless does the impossible. For example, Balthasar has said that even though the Son was not conscious of himself or the Father on Holy Saturday, he still, paradoxically, had conscious experiences of himself and the Father. Similarly, even though Balthasar says that it was

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 349–50.

impossible for the atemporal Son to find the Father, somehow the Son does find the Father since the Son has successfully “passed through hell.” Thus we further see the nature of the Trinitarian tension between the Father and the Son in Balthasar’s understanding of Holy Saturday.

As Balthasar continues, it becomes more evident how the Father himself is related to the Trinitarian tension of Holy Saturday. Balthasar writes,

And now the Father, so to say, “draws back” in order to admit the incarnate Son into this ultimate darkness, which the Father discloses to him, as the Redeemer of sinners, only here, at the end of the way of redemption.<sup>199</sup>

Here we see the same tension as above, only now from the perspective of the Father. The Father “draws back” from the Son, implying absence from the Son, yet the Father “discloses” things to the Son, implying presence with the Son. Here it is important to note, as was already somewhat evident in Pitstick’s presentation, that for Balthasar it is chiefly the Son who suffers in hell. It is true that Balthasar in a footnote can also quote von Speyr that “hell is a ‘Cross’ for the Father.”<sup>200</sup> Balthasar thus teaches that there is a certain kenosis of the Father. Nevertheless, our aforementioned quotation shows that the Father for Balthasar is more transcendent and neutral relative to the Son. Whereas for Balthasar the Son simultaneously is completely unconscious of sin and yet experiences the most extreme suffering due to sin on Holy Saturday, the Father merely simultaneously draws back and discloses. Here the language of disclosing in Balthasar means not so much that the Father comforts the Son in hell, but rather that the Father communicates with the Son in order to punish him. Again one sees the great hierarchy of the Father over the Son on Holy Saturday and the Trinitarian tension connected with it.

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 352–53.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 352.

Finally, that Balthasar focuses upon especially the hierarchy of the Father over the Son on Holy Saturday may be seen when Balthasar discusses the Trinitarian victory that occurs on Holy Saturday. Here Balthasar attempts to integrate the “contradiction” introduced by sin and hell into a larger Trinitarian framework where this contradiction is overcome within the Trinity.<sup>201</sup> Balthasar says that his “central point” is that “the dead Son’s passage through hell...is the expression of his ‘*super-obedience*’ to the Father.”<sup>202</sup> Similarly, Balthasar says,

The Son’s obedience even in death, even in hell, is his perfect *identity* in all contradiction. By the same token, it is also the vanquishing of the ultimate contradiction through this identity, which infiltrates it, and all else, from below. Christologically speaking, this obedience is nothing other than the expression of the Son’s Trinitarian love, which precisely here, in this absolute overtaxing, this “impossible obedience,” reveals itself as the hypostatic obedience of the eternal Son.<sup>203</sup>

Here Balthasar again concentrates especially on the person of the Son and the contradiction involved in his existence in suffering on Holy Saturday. Balthasar emphasizes that it is especially the obedience of the Son to the hierarchical Father that overcomes hell. Balthasar says that it is precisely the great kenosis of the Son and the contradiction in his existence that reveals his eternal existence relative to the Father and overcomes sin. We also note that Balthasar’s talk about the Son’s “impossible obedience” and “perfect *identity* in all contradiction” again serve as mediating concepts that Balthasar employs to somehow bridge his sets of two contradictory statements. Here Balthasar places great redemptive emphasis precisely upon the Trinitarian tension between Christ and his hierarchical Father on Holy Saturday. We see, therefore, how

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 353, italics original.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 354, italics original.

Balthasar “resolves” his hierarchy-equality polarity or tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the hierarchical pole of the system.

### **3.1.3. Conclusion**

Balthasar has a Trinitarian tension in his understanding of the economic Trinity that is most evident in his discussion of Holy Saturday, which for Balthasar is the key redemptive period for the divine persons. Alyssa Pitstick rightly notes that there is a Trinitarian tension in Balthasar’s understanding of Holy Saturday that is integrally related to the hierarchy of the Father over the Son, although she also has certain misconceptions and omissions in her presentation. She asserts that the tension centers in how on Holy Saturday the Son may fully give away both his divine attributes and his human attributes to the Father and yet still somehow remain a divine person. She further asserts that the Father’s existence on Holy Saturday also implies a tension between him and the Son since the Father both radically abandons the Son and yet still is highly active in hell on Holy Saturday. However, Pitstick in this presentation somewhat misconstrues Balthasar as teaching that the Son never really has any consciousness of the Father in the descent. Similarly, she misses certain concepts in Balthasar’s Trinitarian understanding that mediate between his statements, on the one hand, that the Son does not have consciousness of the Father, and, on the other hand, that the Son does have consciousness of the Father.

My reading of Balthasar’s discussion in “Hell and Trinity” confirms Pitstick’s basic thesis about the paradoxical nature of Christ’s work on Holy Saturday in the context of the Father’s hierarchy over his dead Son. But it also tries to demonstrate the inadequacy of Pitstick’s position that the Son has no consciousness of the Father on Holy Saturday. My reading rather shows that Balthasar says paradoxically that the Son on Holy Saturday is both fully conscious of the Father and yet also not capable of being conscious of the Father. Balthasar also employs various

mediating concepts that attempt to bridge the two contradictory sorts of statements that Balthasar admits are ultimately unbridgeable. This provides a more plausible Trinitarian picture in Balthasar than the one provided by Pitstick. In Pitstick, the Son is simply dead and incapable of relating with the Father, obeying the Father's mission, and suffering for men. But by recognizing the mediating statements in Balthasar, my presentation portrays Balthasar as allowing a certain unfathomable suffering to take place in the Son on Holy Saturday, one where he has a consciousness of the hierarchical Father who punishes him for sins and yet, paradoxically, in this very punishment the Son loses track of the hierarchical Father. It is in this way that Balthasar emphasizes the hierarchy of the Father over the Son on Holy Saturday, with little mention of their equality. And thus we see how Balthasar "resolves" his hierarchy-equality polarity or tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the hierarchical pole of the system.

### **3.2. Volf's Egalitarian Understanding of the Economic Trinity as Culminating in the Self-Giving of the Divine Persons at the Cross**

Volf's understanding of the economic Trinity is generally egalitarian, although he also allows for a certain limited hierarchy among the divine persons. Volf's understanding of the economic Trinity is oriented towards the egalitarian relations and mutual indwelling of the divine persons at the cross, which for Volf the cross is the chief redemptive period of the economic Trinity. Assuming these assumptions by Volf, my method in this section will be to look first at the general contours of Volf's egalitarian understanding of the economic Trinity as evident in the "Trinity and Church" chapter of *After Our Likeness*. My second and final step will be to look more specifically at what Volf says about the economic Trinity in the context of the cross using primarily his work *Exclusion and Embrace*.

### **3.2.1. Egalitarian Relations versus Hierarchical Sending in Volf's Understanding of the Economic Trinity**

Volf's biblical basis for his understanding of the economic Trinity in the "Trinity and Church" chapter of *After Our Likeness* is predominantly an egalitarian reading of the Trinitarian aspects or trajectory of the Johannine narrative. For example, consider the following quotation from the "Relational Personhood" section:

The divine persons are constituted through *generatio* [generation] and *spiratio* [spiration] as subjects who, though different, are mutually related from the outset and are inconceivable without these relations; furthermore, they manifest their own personhood and affirm that of others through their mutual relations of giving and receiving.<sup>204</sup>

Volf will later demonstrate that the "giving and receiving" he here speaks of is based primarily on the Gospel of John. We also note the economic thrust of Volf's statement that the divine persons "manifest" their personhood through "their mutual relations of giving and receiving." Such manifesting is much more clearly related to the economic Trinity than the processions in the immanent Trinity that Volf also here mentions by making reference to the language of generation and spiration. As will become clearer in what follows, for Volf the egalitarian relations of the divine persons in the economy, their mutual relations of giving and receiving, are primary in comparison with the any hierarchical relationship between them, and for Volf especially the Gospel of John evidences this primacy.

In the section "The Structure of Trinitarian and Ecclesial Relations" in the "Trinity and Church" chapter, Volf shows even more clearly that he bases his understanding of the economic Trinity chiefly on the Gospel of John and that he reads it as a primarily egalitarian text, albeit not entirely excluding hierarchy from it. Volf writes,



Within salvation history they [the divine persons] do appear as persons standing in reciprocal relationships to one another. With regard to the immanent Trinity, salvation history thus allows us to infer the fundamental equality of the divine persons in their mutual determination and their mutual interpenetration; even if the Father is the source of the deity and accordingly sends the Son and the Spirit, he also gives everything to the Son and glorifies him, just as the Son also glorifies the Father and gives the reign over to the Father (see Matt. 28:18; John 13:31–32; 16:14; 17:1; 1 Cor. 15:24). Moreover, within a community of perfect love between persons who share all the divine attributes, a notion of hierarchy and subordination is inconceivable. Within *relations* between the divine persons, the Father is for that reason not the one over against the others, nor “the First,” but rather the *one among the others*.<sup>205</sup>

One immediately notes here that the overwhelming thrust of this quotation is that for Volf the divine persons relate to one another in an egalitarian fashion in the economy.<sup>206</sup> Accordingly, it is a mere exception that Volf also acknowledges that the Father hierarchically sends the Son and the Spirit in the economy. This lack of emphasis on the hierarchy between the persons in the economy may also be seen in the fact that sending is really the only biblical theme Volf associates with hierarchy between the divine persons. It is striking that the aforementioned quotation is the only occurrence in *After Our Likeness* of this sending in Volf’s constructive argumentation. In Volf’s presentation of the economic Trinity, therefore, there seems to be a tension between the hierarchical sending of the Son by the Father and the otherwise fully egalitarian relations of the divine persons, with the latter receiving the overwhelming emphasis.

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<sup>204</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 205.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 217, italics original.

<sup>206</sup> Volf also cites John 17:20 to assert that relations between members in a congregation should to some extent image the relations of the divine persons (*ibid.*, 218). Since Volf sees the relations between members in a congregation as egalitarian, this further supports seeing the relations between the divine persons as egalitarian.

Besides the one instance in *After Our Likeness* where Volf connects the Father's sending of the Son and the Spirit with hierarchy, Volf also mentions hierarchy in his article "The Spirit and the Church."<sup>207</sup> Volf writes,

The divine persons are distinct yet equal. Since each divine person shares all the attributes of divinity, there can be no place for non-reciprocal subordination in their mutual relations (except for the subordination of the *incarnate* Word to the One who sent him and, significantly, to the One in whose power he was sent).<sup>208</sup>

Here Volf admits that the Father has a certain hierarchy over the Son in the economic Trinity.

However, Volf's statement about hierarchy is merely parenthetical to and is in conflict with his primary point that the divine persons are equal.<sup>209</sup>

In connection with the tension between the egalitarian relations and the hierarchical sending among the divine persons, Volf utilizes perichoresis as a mediating concept. For example, Volf in the "Perichoretic Personhood" section of *After Our Likeness* writes,

Perichoresis refers to the reciprocal *interiority* of the Trinitarian persons. In every divine person as a subject, the other persons also indwell; all mutually permeate one another, though in so doing they do not cease to be distinct persons. In fact, the distinctions between them are precisely the presupposition of that interiority, since persons who have dissolved into one another cannot exist in one another. Perichoresis is "co-inherence in one another without any coalescence or commixture." This is why both statements can be made: "Father and Son are in one another," and "Christians are in *them*" ("in us"—plural!; John 17:21). Being in one another does not abolish trinitarian plurality; yet despite the abiding distinction between the persons, their subjectivities do overlap.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Volf's "The Spirit and the Church" is an important, but brief, work in his corpus. In a footnote on page 407 of this article he says that "in this and the following main sections [of "The Spirit and the Church"] we are building and expanding on the arguments presented in 'The Church as a Prophetic Community and a Sign of Hope,' *Exclusion and Embrace*, *After Our Likeness*, and 'The Trinity Is Our Social Program.'"

<sup>208</sup> Volf, "The Spirit and the Church," 397, italics original.

<sup>209</sup> See also Volf, "The Spirit and the Church," 385, for more background on Volf's understanding of the hierarchy of the Father over the Son in the economic Trinity.

<sup>210</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 209, italics original.

This statement at least partially has the economy in view since it cites John 17:21 where Christians are in the Father and Son. It shows that in the economy Volf mostly associates perichoresis with the egalitarian relations of the divine persons.<sup>211</sup> For here the egalitarian relations of the persons are so intense that they even involve the “overlap” of the subjectivities of the divine persons. Here Volf does not account adequately for the distinctness of each divine person. That Volf also associates perichoresis with hierarchical sending is merely an exception to his normal tendency to associate it with the egalitarian relations of the persons. In the present instance, Volf merely seems to allude vaguely to hierarchical sending in his statement that the distinctions between the divine persons are presuppositions for existence in mutual interiority, which distinctions Volf presumably associates with divine sending. Perichoresis is thus ambiguous for Volf and reflects Volf’s Trinitarian tension, for Volf associates it primarily with the egalitarian relations and actions of the divine persons in the economy, but also vaguely allows hierarchical sending as an exception to these egalitarian relations.

Volf’s continued discussion in the “Perichoretic Personhood” section further shows the nature of perichoresis as a mediating concept. Volf writes,

From the interiority of the divine persons, there emerges what I would like to call their *catholicity*. “The Father is in me and I am in him” (John 10:38) implies that “whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9–10). The one divine person is not only itself, but rather carries within itself also the other divine persons, and only in this indwelling of the other persons within it is it the person it really is. The Son is Son only insofar as the Father and the Spirit indwell him; without this interiority of the Father and the Spirit, there would be no Son. The same applies to the Father and to the Spirit. In a certain sense each divine person *is* the other persons, though is such

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<sup>211</sup> See also “The Spirit and the Church,” 396–98, where Volf stresses the perichoresis, equality, and love of the divine persons as those aspects of the Trinity that are especially relevant for the church in its imaging the Trinity.

in its own way, which is why rather than ceasing to be a unique person, in its very uniqueness it is a completely *catholic* person.<sup>212</sup>

This statement at least partially has the economy in view since it appeals to Johannine passages that refer to people seeing the Father through seeing the Son. Perichoresis here again is a highly egalitarian phenomenon, as can be seen especially in the fact that the divine persons are so similar that Volf says that in a certain sense one divine person *is* the other. Nevertheless, Volf still vaguely allows for perichoresis to be connected with something like hierarchical sending since each divine person is unique and is catholic “in its own way.”<sup>213</sup> Perichoresis thus again reflects the tension between the egalitarian relations and hierarchical sending among the divine persons. Based on this heavy emphasis in the economic Trinity upon the equality of the divine persons both in the mutual relations of the persons and in their perichoresis, we see how Volf “resolves” his hierarchy-equality polarity or tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the egalitarian pole of the system.

### **3.2.2. Egalitarian Relations versus Hierarchical Sending in Volf’s Understanding of the Cross**

Volf’s understanding of the economic Trinity finds its focal point in his treatment of the cross, which for Volf is the chief redemptive period for the divine persons. Similar to what we have seen thus far, Volf’s presentation stresses the egalitarian relations of the divine persons at the cross, but also at a few point allows for a certain vague hierarchy of the Father over the Son and Spirit. Likewise, Volf in connection with his understanding of the cross uses concepts like

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 209–10, italics original.

<sup>213</sup> Another ambiguous statement about perichoresis in Volf appears in “The Spirit and the Church,” 384–85, where after Volf’s basic agreement with recent trends in Spirit Christology where Jesus is the receiver, bearer, and sender of the Spirit, Volf says, “Integral to Jesus of Nazareth’s Messianic identity and mission was his consciousness of the ‘power’ of God’s Spirit at ‘work’ *in him*” (italics mine). Is the relation between the Son and

perichoresis to mediate between the egalitarian relations and hierarchical sending among the divine persons, although Volf overwhelmingly associates this perichoresis with the egalitarian relations of the persons. In what follows I will analyze chiefly Volf's views on the economic Trinity in the context of the cross primarily utilizing his discussion in *Exclusion and Embrace*.

At a few points *Exclusion and Embrace* contains statements that point to a certain hierarchy of the Father over the Son at the cross. Probably most notable among these is the following from Volf's introductory chapter:

At its core, however, the scandal of the cross in a world of violence is not the *danger* associated with self-donation. Jesus' greatest agony was not that he suffered. Suffering can be endured, even embraced, if it brings desired fruit, as the experience of giving birth illustrates. What turned the pain of suffering into agony was the *abandonment*; Jesus was abandoned by the people who trusted in him and by the God in whom he trusted. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). My God, my God, why did my radical obedience to your way lead to the pain and disgrace of the cross? The ultimate scandal of the cross is the all too frequent failure of self-donation to bear positive fruit: you give yourself for the other—and violence does not stop but destroys you; you sacrifice your life—and stabilize the power of the perpetrator. Though self-donation often issues in the joy of reciprocity, it must reckon with the pain of failure and violence. When violence strikes, the very act of self-donation becomes a cry before the dark face of God. This dark face confronting the act of self-donation *is* a scandal.<sup>214</sup>

Here Jesus at the cross had to trust the Father with a "radical obedience," which again points to a certain humiliation of Jesus and a hierarchy of the Father over him. However, even here the equality of the Father and the Son is dominant since Volf with his mentioning "self-donation" suggests that the Father, similar to the Son, experiences abandonment by human beings at the cross, a point that will become clear as we continue.

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Spirit hierarchical or egalitarian here? See also "The Trinity Is Our Social Program," 418–19.

<sup>214</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 26, italics original.

Even if *Exclusion and Embrace* in its teachings on the cross contains a few statements that point to a certain hierarchy of the Father or the Spirit over Jesus, its emphasis is clearly upon the egalitarian relations of the divine persons. This may be seen Volf's purpose statements in the introductory chapter. For example, Volf says,

Here are the contours of my attempt to spell out the promise of the cross in this volume. I present them here following the *inner logic* of my argument rather than tracing the path of its presentation. Chapter III develops the basic argument, best summarized in the Apostle Paul's injunction to the Romans: "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you" (15:7). To describe the process of "welcoming," I employed the metaphor of "embrace." The metaphor seems well suited to bring together the three interrelated themes that are central to my proposal: (1) the mutuality of self-giving love in the Trinity (the doctrine of God), (2) the outstretched arms of Christ on the cross for the "godless" (the doctrine of Christ), (3) the open arms of the "father" receiving the "prodigal" (the doctrine of salvation).<sup>215</sup>

Note that it is difficult to distinguish the Son in point (2) from the Father in point (3), a fact only exacerbated by the mutuality and equality of the divine persons implied in point (1). Point (2) may presuppose some hierarchy of the Father over the Son at the cross, but Volf does not mention it. Rather, Volf discusses at length some views of Moltmann on the cross in the pages preceding our present quotation. For example, Volf cites approvingly Moltmann's discussion of the "passion of God" in *The Trinity and the Kingdom* where Moltmann associates all of human history with the suffering of "God" in general.<sup>216</sup> As we will see, Volf similarly places the

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>216</sup> See Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 22–25. Volf in a discussion called "Space for the Other: Cross, Trinity, Eucharist" also cites Moltmann to support placing the hierarchy of the Father over the Son within a larger, egalitarian framework: "If the fate of the Crucified and his demand to walk in his footsteps disturb us, then we will also be disturbed by the *God* of the Crucified. For the very nature of the triune God is reflected on the cross of Christ. Inversely, the cross of Christ is etched in the heart of the Triune God; Christ's passion is God's passion (Moltmann 1981, 21ff.). As Rowan Williams puts it, 'the inconceivable self-emptying of God in the events of Good Friday and Holy Saturday is no arbitrary expression of the nature of God: this is what the life of the Trinity is, translated into the world' (Williams 1979, 177) (ibid., 127)."

However, in contrast to Moltmann, Volf does not utilize concepts like retroactive causality and does not use the extreme language that Moltmann does that seems in danger of making God dependent upon the cross (and the

suffering of the Son under the hierarchical Father within a larger framework of the egalitarian relations and suffering of the divine persons together throughout human history and culminating at the cross.

Besides this more material statement of Volf's purpose in *Exclusion and Embrace*, his second, more formal, purpose statement is also telling with regard to the relationship between hierarchy and equality in Volf's understanding of the economic Trinity in the context of the cross. Volf writes,

The second comment concerns an aspect of my *method*, in particular the use of the biblical texts in relation to the theological theme of "the self-donation and reception of the other." Most chapters contain extended interpretation of some key biblical texts.... As I have argued following Luke Johnson, at the center of the New Testament lies the narrative of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ understood as an act of obedience toward God and an expression of self-giving love for his followers as well as the model for the followers to imitate. This narrative, in turn, is intelligible only as a part of the larger narrative of God's dealing with humanity recorded in the whole of Christian Scripture.<sup>217</sup>

Volf here speaks of Christ's "obedience toward God," which involves a certain hierarchy between the Father and Son. But this hierarchical relationship is clearly subordinated to the "larger narrative of God's dealing with humanity recorded in the whole of Christian Scripture," which for Volf refers to the egalitarian relations of the divine persons as they work together throughout history. In other words, the hierarchy of the Father and the Son is placed into the larger framework of the complete equality of the Father and the Son. Again the egalitarian relations and the hierarchical sending among the divine persons in the economy are in unresolved tension with each other, as Volf chooses the former over the latter.

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world) for his eternal existence. See 1.2 above.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 30, italics original.

The tension in Volf between the egalitarian relations of the divine persons and the hierarchical sending of the Son and the Spirit by the Father is also prominent in the chapter “Deception and Truth” in *Exclusion and Embrace*. Here Volf extensively uses the Johannine passion narrative for his Trinitarian discussion.<sup>218</sup> Volf says that Jesus witnesses to the truth by subjecting himself nonviolently to the power of Pilate. Jesus thus witnesses to a different sort of power than Pilate has as he witnesses to the truth of his Father:

A witness, unseduced by the lure of power, strives not to bring anything of her own to her speech; not seeking her “own glory” (7:18), she strives to point precisely to what is *not* her own. There is no better summary of Jesus’ mission as a witness than his statement, “My teaching is not mine but his who sent me” (7:16; cf. 12:49; 14:24).<sup>219</sup>

Volf clearly sees a certain hierarchy of the Father over Jesus here as Jesus witnesses to the Father who sent him. But at the same time, Volf in this section also says that Jesus himself is the truth along with the Father.<sup>220</sup> Even more importantly, Volf associates the Father with the same sort of non-violent power as Jesus.<sup>221</sup> As a result Jesus’ work on the cross glorifies and reveals the Father:

A man dressed in a purple robe with a crown of thorns on his head, a man stripped naked hanging on the cross, represents the victory of truth and life, not their defeat.

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<sup>218</sup> Considering that Volf uses about one extended biblical illustration per chapter in *Exclusion and Embrace*, proportionally Volf uses Johannine writings more than any other. Besides the current illustration Volf also utilizes one from the book of Revelation. To my knowledge, Volf does not state whether he sees the apostle John as the author of Revelation; however, he does say that the message of Revelation harmonizes with the Gospels (ibid., 288). Volf, “The Trinity is Our Social Program,” 418, emphasizes the significance of the Johannine Jesus being the one who reveals who God is as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”; Volf in his discussion of the book of Revelation in chapter seven of *Exclusion and Embrace* similarly emphasizes Jesus as the Lamb that has been slain as revealing God as love. Volf thus emphasizes the same basic themes using the same basic terminology for the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation.

<sup>219</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 267–68, italics original.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>221</sup> For more background on this, see especially Joe Coker, “Peace and the Apocalypse: Stanley Hauerwas and Miroslav Volf on the Eschatological Basis for Christian Nonviolence,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 71 (1999): 261–68.



Should we be surprised that John considers crucifixion an act of *glorification* (13:31–32)?<sup>222</sup>

Although Volf allows for a hierarchy of the sending Father over the sent Son at the cross, his larger framework is that the divine persons together give themselves in a non-violent manner to the world at the cross. In this larger framework, the divine persons relate to each other in an egalitarian way.

Further supporting this interpretation of Volf's theology of the cross is his further discussion of divine self-donation and glory in "The Trinity is Our Social Program," which was published at about the same time as *Exclusion and Embrace* and shares many of its basic themes.<sup>223</sup> Volf begins by grounding the concept of self-donation in the perichoresis and "circular movement" the divine persons as they relate to one another in the immanent Trinity.<sup>224</sup> The language of circular movement for Volf is clearly egalitarian. Volf goes on to argue that the love of the economic Trinity for the world differs from the love of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity. For in a world of sin the divine love must also be translated since the divine Word who became "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)" does so in such a way that "the delight of love is transmuted into the agony of love."<sup>225</sup> Similarly, Volf says,

To propose a social knowledge based on the doctrine of the Trinity is above all to re-narrate the history of the cross, the cross understood not as a simple repetition of heavenly love in the world, but as the Triune God's engagement with the world in order to transform the unjust, deceitful, and violent kingdoms of this world into the

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid., italics original.

<sup>223</sup> On the topic of glorification, Volf has likely been influenced by Moltmann, who extensively discusses egalitarian mutual glorification in his writings. See Thompson, *Imitatio Trinitatis*, 84–85.

<sup>224</sup> Volf, "The Trinity is Our Social Program," 412.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 414.

just, truthful, and peaceful “kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah” (Revelation 11:6).<sup>226</sup>

Here it is crucial that Volf does not simply say that Jesus donates himself at the cross but rather the “Triune God” does. This again points to Volf’s larger framework of the egalitarian relations of the divine persons with one another as they together give themselves to the world at the cross. For Volf, the hierarchy of the Father over the obedient Son at the cross is in tension with and receives much less emphasis than the egalitarian self-giving of all three divine persons at the cross.

After discussing “self-donation” in “The Trinity is Our Social Program,” Volf goes on to discuss God’s glory. Here Volf again says that the eternal, reciprocal love of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity undergoes a sort of translation in the economy:

I have argued that the social vision based on the doctrine of the Trinity should rest primarily on the downward movement in which God, in a sense, comes out of the circularity of divine love in order to take godless humanity into the divine embrace. A soteriology based on the indwelling of the Crucified by the Spirit (Galatians 2:19–20) grounds a social practice modeled on God’s passion for the salvation of the world.<sup>227</sup>

Here Volf asserts that the hierarchical “God” had to condescend to take godless humanity into the divine embrace. Here the divine persons actually remain egalitarian relative to one another as they give themselves for the world. Furthermore, although “the indwelling of the Crucified by the Spirit” may have certain hierarchical connotations, Volf’s main emphasis seems egalitarian since he closely associates this perichoresis of the divine persons with the “circularity of divine love” in the immanent Trinity. As Volf continues we similarly see that he emphasizes the larger, egalitarian narrative of embrace:

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<sup>226</sup> Volf, “The Trinity is Our Social Program,” 415.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

Following a similar train of thought, John the Evangelist surprisingly narrates the story of the crucifixion as a story of the glorification of the Crucified—in the hour of the Son’s passion, the Father will glorify the Son with the same glory that the Son had before the foundation of the world (John 17:5; cf. 1:14), so that through the passion the Son may glorify the Father (John 17:1). The historical reflection of God’s character in the labor of self-donation gives glory to God and receives back God’s glory because it *is* that very glory. The downward linear movement already participates in the circular movement in which that which is most properly divine—the glory of God which is nothing else but the purity of God’s self-giving love—is eternally exchanged.<sup>228</sup>

For Volf, Jesus glorifies the Father at the cross by revealing that the Father is marked by pure self-giving love. Even more, the Father at the cross also glorifies the Son. This means that for Volf the “downward linear movement” of the divine persons in the economy in the end is egalitarian since it already participates in the eternal circular movement of the divine persons and their egalitarian mutual glorification.<sup>229</sup> Again Volf emphasizes the egalitarian relations of the divine persons at the cross in such a way that these relations are in conflict with Volf’s understanding of the hierarchy between the Father and the Son that he also sees at the cross.

Returning to *Exclusion and Embrace*, Volf discusses the mediating concept of perichoresis in the context of the cross. For example, after citing some statements by Moltmann to the effect that the divine persons are eternally in one another through love, Volf says the following:

When the Trinity turns toward the world, the Son and the Spirit become, in Irenaeus’ beautiful image, the two arms of God by which humanity was made and taken into God’s embrace.... That same love that sustains nonself-enclosed identities in the Trinity seeks to make space “in God” for humanity. Humanity is, however, not just the other of God, but the beloved other who has become an enemy. When God sets out to embrace the enemy, the result is the cross. On the cross the dancing circle of self-giving and mutually indwelling divine persons opens up for the enemy; in the agony of the passion the movement stops for a brief moment and a fissure appears so

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 418.

<sup>229</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 217, similarly says that the mutual glorification of the divine persons in the economy is egalitarian. See also my discussion of this reference in 3.2.1 and 4.2.1.

that sinful humanity can join in (see John 17:21). We, the others—we, the enemies—are embraced by the divine persons who love us with the same love with which they love each other and therefore make space for us within their own eternal embrace.<sup>230</sup>

Here Volf ties the sinfulness and alienation of fallen man to the need for the cross. But although Volf alludes to a certain hierarchy among the divine persons by mentioning Irenaeus' comment about the two arms of God, his main emphasis again is overwhelmingly on the egalitarian, "dancing circle of self-giving and mutually indwelling divine persons." And so while perichoresis appears in the vicinity of hierarchy among the divine persons, it again is much more closely related to the egalitarian, mutual relations of the persons. Furthermore, here Volf argues that because the divine persons mutually indwell one another through perichoresis, which again is primarily egalitarian, sinful humanity can be brought into the mutual indwelling of the divine persons, "sinful humanity can join in." Thus Volf generally understands human redemption in an egalitarian manner. Here mutual indwelling is a sort of bridge that allows for the hierarchy between the Father and the Son to ultimately bring man to its final destination in the fully egalitarian relations of the divine persons. Perichoresis allows for hierarchy but in the end is more connected with the egalitarian relations of the divine persons. Finally, this passage also helps sum up Volf's views on salvation. In one sense, Volf ties the hierarchy of the Father over the Son with the Son being closely associated with our sin.<sup>231</sup> Thus Volf says that Jesus is abandoned by the Father on our account. But the greater realities for Volf are the egalitarian

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<sup>230</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 129.

<sup>231</sup> Volf's comment in *ibid.*, 125, is typical of Volf's works in general in that he is rather vague on how human redemption occurs: "This is no place to develop a full-blown theology of the cross; I only draw on some features of the New Testament witness to the death of Christ. In particular, I will eschew all attempts to explain the 'logic' of redemption.... I am interested here in elaborating the social significance of some aspects of what happened on the cross, not in explaining why and precisely how it happened."

See also Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 172–75, where Volf describes the "ecclesiality of salvation" as Volf closely associates communion with God and egalitarian communion with others who have entrusted themselves to God.

relations of the divine persons and the fact that through the egalitarian self-giving of the divine persons, most fully evident at the cross, human beings are drawn into these egalitarian relations.

One final illustration, from the final chapter “Violence and Peace” of *Exclusion and Embrace* that looks at the narrative of the book of Revelation, will help further illustrate how Volf understands the way that the divine persons work together for human redemption. Here Volf says that Jesus is an innocent victim who refuses to return violence for the violence he undergoes due to evil forces in the world:

The cross is, third, part of Jesus’ *struggle* for God’s truth and justice. Jesus’ mission certainly did not consist merely in passively receiving violence. The cry of anguish to an absent God was not Jesus’ only utterance; falling under the weight of the cross on the road to execution was not his only accomplishment. If Jesus had done nothing but suffer violence, we would have forgotten him as we have forgotten so many other innocent victims. The mechanism of scapegoating would not have been demasked by his suffering, and violence not diminished by his nonresistance. The pure negativity of nonviolence is barren because it shies away from “transgressing” into the territory of the system of terror. At best, oppressors can safely disregard it; at worst, they can see themselves indirectly justified by it. To be significant, nonviolence must be part of a larger strategy of combating the system of terror.

...Active opposition to the kingdom of Satan, the kingdom of deception and oppression, is therefore inseparable from the proclamation of the kingdom of God. It is this opposition that brought Jesus Christ to the cross; and it is this opposition that gave meaning to his nonviolence. It takes the struggle against deception and oppression to transform nonviolence from barren negativity into a creative possibility, from a quicksand into a foundation of a new world.<sup>232</sup>

This quotation is very significant in that it neutralizes the hierarchy between the Father and the Son by transferring it to the “kingdom of Satan.” Thus we note that Volf mentions that the Son is subordinate to the “absent God” but then seems to say that it was not really a hierarchical “God” that was oppressing him but rather oppressors who use scapegoating mechanisms. Having thus

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<sup>232</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 293, italics original.

transferred hierarchy from the Father to those associated with the kingdom of Satan, the path is cleared for the divine persons' "larger strategy" to embrace the world in their egalitarian relations to one another through non-violence.<sup>233</sup> In yet another way we see that Volf pits equality and hierarchy against one another and chooses equality over hierarchy as the divine persons work together for human redemption. Based on this heavy emphasis in his understanding of the cross upon the equality of the divine persons both in the mutual relations of the persons and in their perichoresis, we see how Volf "resolves" his hierarchy-equality polarity or tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the egalitarian pole of the system.

### 3.2.3. Conclusion

In this section I have shown that Volf exhibits a tension between hierarchy and equality in his understanding of the economic Trinity. Utilizing *After Our Likeness* I laid out the basic shape of this tension as Volf pits the hierarchical sending of the Son and the Spirit by the Father against the egalitarian relations among the divine persons and chooses the latter over the former. *After Our Likeness* also showed that Volf assigns the same priority of the egalitarian relations of the divine persons in his use of perichoresis as a mediating concept between the hierarchical sending and the egalitarian mutual relations of the divine persons in the economy. With this basic structure in place, I further evaluated the nature of the Trinitarian tension as it pertains to the cross as evident especially in Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace*. Here Volf in the context of the hierarchy of the Father over the Son at the cross speaks of such things as Christ's obedience to

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<sup>233</sup> See Joe Coker, "Peace and the Apocalypse: Stanley Hauerwas and Miroslav Volf on the Eschatological Basis for Christian Nonviolence," 261–68, where Coker shows that Volf interprets the book of Revelation as teaching that God defers violence until the eschaton, and even here it is only a violence against those who done violence in the world. Coker contrasts Volf's position with the corresponding position of Stanley Hauerwas, who according to Coker argues that there is no divine violence even at the eschaton.

the Father and the Father's abandoning of the Son. However, Volf consistently places this hierarchical sending into a larger, egalitarian framework of the Triune God's self-donation to the world. Volf at one point even seems to transfer the hierarchy of the Father over the Son to the hierarchy felt by Jesus due to evil oppressors from the kingdom of Satan, which hierarchy and evil the divine persons eventually overcame. In addition, in considering the cross, Volf employs perichoresis as a mediating concept that he closely associates with the egalitarian relations of the divine persons as they give themselves for the redemption of man. Here we saw that Volf speaks of human salvation in terms of people being brought into the egalitarian relations of the divine persons on the cross. Based on this heavy emphasis in his understanding of the economic Trinity upon the equality of the divine persons both in the mutual relations of the persons and in their perichoresis, we saw how Volf "resolves" his hierarchy-equality polarity or tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the egalitarian pole of the system.

### **3.3. A Brief Comparison of and Evaluation of Balthasar and Volf**

Various similarities and differences are evident in the understanding of the economic Trinity by Balthasar and Volf. Both have a hierarchy-equality tension in their social conceptions of the economic Trinity, but Balthasar "resolves" it in a hierarchical manner while Volf does so in an egalitarian manner. Otherwise stated, both Balthasar and Volf exhibit a hierarchy-equality tension or polarity in their respective understandings of the economic Trinity, although the tension in each case is dealt with by moving towards one side of the polarity. Both Balthasar and Volf distinguish between two sorts of seemingly contradictory statements about the divine persons as they work during the life of Jesus. The tension in Balthasar is most easily seen in his views on Holy Saturday. This tension is related to the fact that, on the one hand, the Son is not capable of relating to the Father (and, by extension, the Father's Spirit) and, on the other hand,

the Son consistently relates with the Father over him. On both counts, Balthasar stresses the hierarchy of the Father over the Son and places comparatively little emphasis on their equality. For Balthasar, the hierarchy-equality tension is thus between, on the one hand, the hierarchy of the Father over the Son and, on the other hand, the equality of the divine persons that receives little attention in his thought. For Volf, the tension is rather between the egalitarian relations of the divine persons and the hierarchical sending of the Son and the Spirit by the Father. The tension between hierarchy and equality is thus more explicit in Volf than in Balthasar since Volf explicitly contrasts hierarchy and equality (and chooses the equality pole of the polarity) whereas Balthasar simply usually talks about hierarchy and does not often mention equality (and in this way chooses the hierarchy pole of the polarity).

It is also noteworthy that both Balthasar and Volf employ concepts that seek to mediate between the two sets of Trinitarian statements in tension with one another. However, these mediating statements seem to function differently in the two theologians. In Balthasar, the mediating statements are hierarchical and connect one set of statements where the Father works alone in the economy with the second set of statements where the Son is obedient to the hierarchical Father. The mediating statements thus tend to reinforce the hierarchy present in both sets of statements. But Volf's mediating statement of perichoresis seeks to mediate between statements on either side of the hierarchy-equality polarity. Here Volf overwhelmingly associates perichoresis with the egalitarian relations of the divine persons and makes much less of a connection with the hierarchical sending among the divine persons. Thus in Volf the mediating concepts merely allow a minimal hierarchy among the divine persons, likely in order to try to better distinguish between the persons, so that the impression is given that Volf's understanding of the Trinity is almost entirely egalitarian.



As far as the biblical resources that each uses, it is striking that Balthasar and Volf both use the Gospel of John extensively as a source for their understanding of the economic Trinity during the life of Jesus, even though they understand John in ways very different from one another. Balthasar focuses on the hierarchy involved in the Father's sending of the Son and the Son's obedient response to his sending Father that he finds present in John, but Volf focuses on the egalitarian relations and the (almost entirely egalitarian) mutual indwelling of the divine persons as he finds them in John.

Finally, these differences between Balthasar's and Volf's proposals could also relate to their distinct emphases in their readings of Holy Saturday and the cross, respectively, as the chief redemptive periods during Jesus' life. Balthasar's emphasis on Holy Saturday allows him to maximize the kenosis of the Son relative to his hierarchical Father and thus allows the Son to endure the most suffering possible in order to atone for the sins of mankind. Volf's emphasis on the cross allows him to focus on the divine persons working together in an egalitarian manner to give themselves on behalf of human beings and invite them into the divine community.

Having briefly compared Balthasar and Volf's proposals for the economic Trinity, I will now briefly evaluate them for how well they account for the sociality of the divine persons in the economic Trinity, where sociality in my proposal requires both the uniqueness and the dignity of the divine persons. Balthasar understands the Johannine notion of sending in a basically "master-slave" fashion where the Son in his vocation is like an unwilling servant obeying his commanding Father.<sup>234</sup> Thus, on Holy Saturday, which for Balthasar is the key redemptive period

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<sup>234</sup> It is true that Balthasar sometimes speaks of the willingness and spontaneity of the Son in his mission. For example, *Theo-Drama*, 3:515f. says that the Son was not persuaded by the Father but rather spontaneously decided to become incarnate. Nevertheless, although Balthasar sometimes makes statements such as this, the dominant trajectory in Balthasar is an extreme hierarchy of the Father over the Son. For example, Steffen Lösel, "A Plain

during the Son's life, the Son is characterized by self-sacrificial obedience while the Father is depicted as commanding such a sacrifice and sometimes even working alone in inflicting such a sacrifice upon the dead Son for the redemption of mankind. Finally, the effect of the hierarchical mediating concepts in Balthasar is to intensify this hierarchy of the Father over the Son in his two sets of statements both by more easily allowing the two sets of statements to reinforce one another and by providing yet another way that the Father is hierarchical over the Son.

Balthasar thus does not account adequately for the dignity of the Son since the Son does not so much willingly sacrifice himself for human beings but rather is compelled by the Father to perform his mission. On the surface, Balthasar seems helpful for emphasizing the kenosis of the Son during his life as well as the effects this has on the Father. However, on closer inspection, this kenosis is related to the basically master-slave relations of the divine persons. And so Balthasar does not so much portray the Father as kenotic but rather as one who commands the Son to perform an unpleasant mission while having little sympathy for him in that mission. In other words, all of the power and authority lie with the Father while the Son has little to no power. The effect of this is to emphasize the role of the Father in the Johannine narrative *against* the role of the Son, which detracts from the dignity of both the Father and the Son. In this way Balthasar does not account adequately for the sociality of the divine persons, which requires both their uniqueness and dignity.

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Account of Christian Salvation? Balthasar on Sacrifice, Solidarity, and Substitution," *Pro Ecclesia* 13 (2004): 168, says the following: "Balthasar's concept of Trinitarian, Christological, and hence also Christian love begs a number of questions from biblical and/or theological perspectives. Certainly the model of self-surrender and filial obedience might be one possible biblical interpretation of Christological and Christian existence—even if, as I would argue, it can hardly disguise its hermeneutical roots in Balthasar's Ignatian tradition. It can therefore function also as an interpretative key for understanding the immanent Trinity. Yet I question whether this model should be seen as the only one or even as the normative interpretative key to understanding divine and human love." Mongrain, *Systematic Theology*, 126, says something similar: "all roads in von Balthasar's theology lead back to the monotheistic axiom that ethical activity is the quintessential incarnational activity."

As for Volf, he too does not account adequately for the sociality of the divine persons. Volf so emphasizes the egalitarian relations and mutual indwelling (including even the overlap of consciousnesses) of the divine persons in the economic Trinity that it becomes difficult to distinguish between them. Moreover, Volf merely utilizes the hierarchical sending among the divine persons as an exception to their otherwise fully egalitarian relations in an attempt to better distinguish them. In this regard, Volf's mediating concept perichoresis, in contrast to the function of Balthasar's mediating concepts, merely allows for a certain hierarchy to enter the otherwise egalitarian relations of the divine persons. Thus, at the cross, which for Volf is the key redemptive period during the Son's life, Volf characterizes the divine persons as being in fully egalitarian relationships with one another as they give themselves on behalf of mankind. Furthermore, Volf associates the perichoresis of the divine persons at the cross chiefly with their egalitarian relations with one another. Therefore, he places little emphasis upon and inadequately explains the significance of the hierarchy of the Father over the Son at the cross. As a result, the impression given in Volf is ultimately that all three divine persons give themselves from within the consciousness of Jesus, for Volf stresses that the divine persons mutually indwell one another in such a way that the consciousness of one person overlaps with the others so that it appears that each divine person *is* the others. Volf thus does not account adequately for the uniqueness of the Son since it is difficult to determine who is the divine agent truly operative in Jesus Christ at the cross. In this way, Volf does not account adequately for the emphasis that the Johannine narrative places upon the unique person of the Son. Especially by detracting from the uniqueness of the divine persons, Volf does not account adequately for their sociality, which requires both their dignity and uniqueness.

### **3.4. Towards a Revised Social Trinitarian Understanding of the Economic Trinity**

In this section, I will argue for a mutual hierarchy framework in the context of a revised social Trinitarian understanding of the economic Trinity. In doing so, I will argue for the differentiated kenotic vocations of the divine persons. First, I will analyze how some key social Trinitarians use the term ‘kenosis,’ which term is usually used as a Christological category to describe the Son’s limiting the use of his divine powers in his humiliation, in a Trinitarian context to describe the vocation of each divine person. Next, I will offer a general description of how a mutual hierarchy framework functions in the context of the economic Trinity. I will then speak in more detail in the context of the Gospel of John about how this framework allows for the *differentiated* vocations of the divine persons where each person exercises hierarchy over the others in the context of their particular vocations. Finally, I will speak in more detail in the context of the Gospel of John about how in their vocations the divine persons are *kenotic* both relative to one another and relative to creation.

#### **3.4.1. A Brief Analysis of Trinitarian Kenosis in Some Key Figures in Social Trinitarianism**

Because kenosis is typically associated with Christology, in this section I will briefly analyze the understanding of Trinitarian kenosis in some key figures in social Trinitarianism. My proposal is not so much interested in how we understand the kenosis of the Son relative to the world (although I also argue that the Son’s kenosis relative to the world may never be separated from his relations with the Father and the Spirit), but rather it emphasizes how the Son is kenotic relative to the Father and the Spirit, and it brings out the implications of this kenosis of the Son

for the Father and the Spirit.<sup>235</sup> In what follows, I will look at Trinitarian kenosis or a similar phenomenon in Balthasar, Moltmann, and Pannenberg.

As we have seen, Balthasar explicitly asserts that in the economy both the Father and the Son are kenotic. Besides the kenosis associated with the Son's limiting his power in the world, Balthasar also asserts that the Father is kenotic relative to the Son. Here Balthasar is more concerned with the Father's kenosis relative to the Son than he is the Father's kenosis relative to the world.<sup>236</sup> Balthasar understands the hierarchy of the Father over the Son in the economy in such a way that he does not account adequately for their dignity since he tends to understand their relationship in a master-slave fashion. In so doing, he also does not account adequately for the kenosis of each. For the present purposes, Balthasar does not account adequately for the kenosis of the Father since it is difficult to see how for Balthasar the Father truly limits his power

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<sup>235</sup> Sometimes, critics of this sort of view that attributes kenosis to the Father seek to label it as the early church heresy of patripassionism. However, this is a serious misunderstanding of patripassionism since this heresy was rather of the modalist variety and said that it was the Father who was crucified on the cross. Dennis Ngien, *The Suffering of God according to Martin Luther's Theologia Crucis* (New York: P. Lang, 1995), 9–10, has a helpful discussion of this and says that in the second century the modalist monarchians Noetus and Praxeas were the key representatives of patripassionism and were opposed by Tertullian. Ngien in a later section of the book entitled "Theopaschitism vis-à-vis Patripassionism" convincingly argues that Luther rejected the modalist form of patripassionism but accepted a form of theopaschitism and patripassionism that more clearly distinguished between the divine persons (145–53). According to Ngien, Luther's Christology meant that the suffering of the Son on the cross could not be separated from his person and hence also from his divine nature. According to Ngien, this is the first, Christological half of Luther's argument. The second, Trinitarian half of the argument is that since the Father and Son are united, the suffering of the Son cannot be separated from the suffering of the Father: "For Luther Christ suffered in his person; and this person (*hypostasis*), God's Son, is of one being (*homoousios*) with the Father" (152). Thus, "The suffering of Christ as the eternal Son is therefore also that of the Father because of their divine unity. In God's own life the Father and the Son are distinguished but not separated" (153).

For more helpful discussion from a Lutheran perspective see David Scaer, "Homo Factus Est as the Revelation of God," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 65 (2001): 111–26.

For more background on discussion in the twentieth century about divine kenosis, see Richard Bauckham, "Only the suffering God can help": Divine Passibility in Modern Theology," *Themelios* 9 (1984): 6–12. See also Catherine LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991).

<sup>236</sup> See also Jürgen Moltmann, "God's Kenosis in the Creation and Consummation of the World," in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 140–41, where Moltmann summarizes Trinitarian kenosis in Balthasar's work and makes this point.

as he commands the Son in a master-slave fashion. Finally, Balthasar does not allow for any sort of kenosis for the Holy Spirit in his vocation.<sup>237</sup>

Besides Balthasar, Moltmann is also helpful with regard to the kenosis of each divine person in his vocation. But if Balthasar focused too much on the kenosis of the divine persons (i.e. the Father and the Son) relative to one another, Moltmann focuses too much on the kenosis of each divine person relative to the world. For example, in his article “God’s Kenosis in the Creation and Consummation of the World” we see that Moltmann writes of a self-humiliation of the Father in his creating the world that Moltmann asserts closely parallels Christ’s self-surrender to death on the cross. Thus Moltmann:

Is creation an act of divine *self-humiliation*? Many Christian theologians from Nicholas of Cusa down to Emil Brunner have seen in the fact that God commits himself to this finite and fragile creation a first act of self-humiliation on God’s part, an act continued in his descent to his people Israel and reaching its nadir in Christ’s self-surrender to death on the cross. “The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 18:8) is a symbol to show that there was already a cross in the heart of God before the world was created and before Christ was crucified on Golgotha.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> For more on Trinitarian kenosis in Balthasar see especially his discussion in “The Pain of God” in Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, 5:212–46. In addition to seeing the Father and the Son as being kenotic in unique ways in the economic Trinity, Balthasar also teaches a supra-kenosis in the immanent Trinity where the Father and Son each exercise a divine sort of “self-sacrifice” as they love one another. See John Sachs, “The Holy Spirit and Christian Form,” 391, where Sachs says, “Balthasar’s understanding of God as ‘ever-greater’ is at the same time grounded in a fundamentally kenotic conception of God’s own being and reflects something of the inner-Trinitarian surrender or ‘obedience’ of the Son to the Father that Balthasar understands as the foundation of Jesus’ obedience in the economy.” It is also worthy of note that Balthasar does not ascribe either kenosis or supra-kenosis to the Spirit in either the economic Trinity or the immanent Trinity. For more discussion of kenosis in Balthasar see especially Graham Ward, “Death, Discourse, and Resurrection,” in *Balthasar at the End of Modernity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999). See also chapter four of the dissertation where I briefly discuss supra-kenosis in the immanent Trinity for Balthasar.

<sup>238</sup> Moltmann, “God’s Kenosis in the Creation and Consummation of the World,” 146–47, italics original. Much of Moltmann’s discussion in this article is reminiscent of his discussion in the chapter “The Passion of God” in *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 21–60. See also my discussion in section 1.2 of the dissertation where I argue that Moltmann has elements in his theology that do not account adequately for the ontological independence of the immanent Trinity relative to creation. For more discussion on Moltmann’s views on Trinitarian kenosis, see also Ronald Goetz, “Karl Barth, Juergen Moltmann and the Theopaschite Revolution,” in *Festschrift: A Tribute to Dr. William Hordern* (Saskatoon, Canada: University of Saskatchewan, 1985), 17–28.

Moltmann holds that each divine person is kenotic. But, likely due to the fact that he views them in such an egalitarian manner relative to one another, he emphasizes their extreme kenosis relative to creation with Christ's cross at the center of this reflection even "before the world was created," and even to the point of not accounting adequately for the ontological independence of the divine persons relative to creation.<sup>239</sup>

Finally, Pannenberg is also helpful for understanding Trinitarian kenosis, even if he himself only allows for a kenosis of the Son.<sup>240</sup> The way that Pannenberg is helpful for our topic is his insistence that the divine persons are consistently mutually dependent upon one another in the economy. John O'Donnell summarizes,

Pannenberg wants to think the immanent Trinity on the basis of the economy. But in the economy we see, for example, not only that the Son is sent by the Father but also that the Father makes his divinity dependent on the Son, in the sense that the Father makes the coming of his reign dependent on the mission of the Son. Thus we see that the Father is not only active but also receives from the Son. The Son hands over the Kingdom to the Father. Pannenberg makes a similar reflection as regards the Holy Spirit. If, from one point of view, the Spirit proceeds from the Father, and if the Son sends the Spirit, it is equally true, according to the order of the economy, that the Son receives the gift of the Spirit. Thus Pannenberg argues for a true mutuality of relationships in the Trinity. It is not sufficient to say that the Son and the Spirit proceed from the Father. Rather the Father is also dependent on the Son and the

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<sup>239</sup> For a discussion of the kenosis of the Spirit according to Moltmann see especially Jane Linahan, "Experiencing God in Brokenness: The Self-Emptying of the Holy Spirit in Moltmann's Pneumatology," in *Encountering Transcendence: Contributions to a Theology of Christian Religious Experience*, ed. Lieven Boeve et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 165–84. This article shows that Moltmann very closely associates the kenosis of the Spirit with the suffering of Christ as well as with the suffering of the world. Among Moltmann's more recent works, this article draws largely upon *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990), and *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). It is also significant for this dissertation that in Linahan, 173–74, Linahan shows how for Moltmann the Spirit possesses a "kenotic power."

<sup>240</sup> Pannenberg in his *Systematic Theology* often speaks of the Father "suffering" the suffering of the Son. However, he is reticent to speak of the Father as kenotic. Pannenberg, "God's Love and the Kenosis of the Son: A Response to Masao Abe" in *Divine Emptiness and Historical Fullness* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 244–50, asserts that only the Son, and not the Father, can be kenotic since this harmonizes with the Son's place in the immanent Trinity. We might suggest here that it is because of Pannenberg's *hierarchical* Trinitarian trajectory that he allows the Son to be truly kenotic but is reticent to allow the kenosis of the Father in the economy.

Spirit, for example, for the coming of his Kingdom and for his glorification. Thus, as Pannenberg expresses it, each person of the Trinity is the focus of several relationships (S.T. 1, p. 348). The core, then, of Pannenberg's doctrine of the divine persons is that personhood in the Trinity implies mutuality of relationship and mutuality of dependence.<sup>241</sup>

Although Pannenberg will not allow that the Father and Spirit are kenotic, he does allow that at least the Father can suffer and that the Father is aware of and even dependent upon the Son and the Spirit in the world for his own vocation (e.g. "for the coming of his Kingdom and for his glorification").<sup>242</sup>

We thus see in an initial way that the kenosis of the Son in his life has implications for the vocations of the Father and the Spirit. Prominent social Trinitarians like Balthasar, Moltmann, and Pannenberg have done much to reflect upon this topic. Balthasar is especially helpful for beginning to analyze the effect of the kenosis of the Son on the Father. Moltmann is especially helpful for his reflections on how the Father and the Spirit, like the Son, may be kenotic relative to the world. And Pannenberg is especially helpful for showing how the divine persons are mutually dependent in their vocations, even if he asserts that this does not entail kenosis on the part of the Father and the Spirit. We will deal in greater detail with this theme of Trinitarian kenosis in section 3.4.4 below.

### **3.4.2. An Initial Description of the Mutual Hierarchy of the Divine Persons in the Economic Trinity**

In my mutual hierarchy proposal, the word *hierarchy* in the context of the economic Trinity points to the fact that each divine person has a unique vocation in relation to the other divine

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<sup>241</sup> O'Donnell, "Pannenberg's Doctrine of God," 87–88.

<sup>242</sup> However, see section 1.1.3 of the dissertation where I argue that Pannenberg has elements in his theology that do not account adequately for the ontological independence of the immanent Trinity relative to creation.



persons that involves power. This means that the vocations of the divine persons are differentiated and that each divine person in his vocation exercises a sort of authority over the other two divine persons in the context of that person's particular vocation.

This quickly brings us to the word *mutual* in the context of the economic Trinity. According to a mutual hierarchy framework, the hierarchy of one divine person over another during Jesus' life must also be thought of as allowing for mutuality in that hierarchical relationship. Here each divine person fosters the dignity of the other divine persons he is hierarchical over. Here a divine person limits the use of his power in his vocation in order to foster the dignity of the other divine persons in their respective vocations. Thus each divine person is kenotic in his vocation relative to the other divine persons. Finally, this kenosis of each divine person relative to the others during Jesus' life is closely related to the kenosis of the divine persons relative to creation itself, and mankind in particular.

### **3.4.3. Mutual Hierarchy as a Framework for Understanding the Differentiated, Hierarchical Vocations of the Divine Persons**

Having thus suggested in a general way how my proposal for a mutual hierarchy framework functions in the context of the economic Trinity, I will now offer a reading of John's Gospel utilizing this mutual hierarchy framework. In the process, I hope to show that such a social reading of the Trinitarian trajectory of the life of Jesus fosters both the uniqueness and dignity of the divine persons. Otherwise stated, a mutual hierarchy approach to Trinitarianism fosters sociality by bringing together hierarchical and egalitarian aspects of divine relations other social Trinitarians have tended to polarize. As a first step, I will look at how the divine persons with their vocations are differentiated from one another during Jesus' life according to John's Gospel. To this end, I will briefly look at the chief vocations of the Son, the Father, and the Holy

Spirit in John's Gospel, and I will briefly explain how each vocation involves a certain hierarchy of one person over the other two.

**3.4.3.1. The Differentiated Vocations of the Divine Persons.** Among the divine persons the Son and his vocation in various respects are central in the Gospel of John. In John the Son is a distinct actor whose words and deeds are chronicled in great detail. One significant thing that makes John distinctive among the Gospels is that he speaks of Jesus' passion and resurrection in terms of Jesus' glorification.<sup>243</sup> For example, John 12:23–24 says, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."<sup>244</sup> According to this verse Jesus' vocation is to suffer and die in order to bear much fruit for mankind and in this way honor and reveal the Father, that is glorify the Father.<sup>245</sup> Similarly, John 7:39 and 12:16 speak of Jesus'

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<sup>243</sup> On Jesus' glorification being connected to the cross in John, see Charles Gieschen, "The Death of Jesus in the Gospel of John: Atonement for Sin?" *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 72 (2008): 246–54, in Gieschen's section entitled "Jesus' Death as Exaltation and Glorification." Gieschen gives a lengthy definition of 'glorify' as it pertains to John: "Although the basic semantic field of δοξάζω centers on the action of "honoring" someone or something, it is necessary to read this verb as used in *John*, especially in relationship to the noun δόξα. It is widely recognized that John frequently uses the noun δόξα with its profound Old Testament theophanic connotations from the Septuagint where it is used as a designation for YHWH's visible form. The use of the noun in John is a prominent theme in the Prologue ('we beheld his glory, glory as of the Father's Only-Begotten' in John 1:14) and the Farewell Prayer ('glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world began' in John 17:5). John sees Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah's promise: 'The Glory of YHWH will be revealed and all flesh shall see him' (Isa 40:5). The use of the verb δοξάζω in John seems to take on these theophanic or revelatory connotations of the noun usage. A translation like 'honor by tangibly showing forth true identity' is very clumsy, but it gets to the heart of what is being communicated by the verb in these texts. The irony is that Jesus is 'glorified,' namely honored by his true identity being shown forth, not primarily in his Baptism, miracles, resurrection, or ascension, but in his death. As stated earlier, many first-century Jews longed to see the Son of Man, the mystery of God's tangible form, revealed; John indicates that this apocalyptic event happened in the crucifixion. Remember, this glorification language is from an interpretation of Isaiah 53 that sees glorification happening in the humiliating suffering and death of the servant that atones for sin. Jesus stressed that even if people reject his words, they should believe his works (John 14:11); this work of atonement, above all, reveals his true identity" (253, italics original).

<sup>244</sup> Christine Poston, *The Motif of Glory in the Gospel of John* (PhD diss., Trinity International University, 2004), 93–95, makes a connection between Jesus' glory and his 'hour.'

<sup>245</sup> Poston summarizes the nature of glory in John by noting three aspects of glory in John. First, it is an eternal attribute of both the Son and the Father. Second, Jesus' mission, and especially his cross and resurrection are glorious and reveal the glory of the Father. And third, Jesus is able to share his glory with his followers, which in

glorification and say that the disciples will understand Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit after this glorification.<sup>246</sup> These verses show that Jesus' glorification in his passion and resurrection are beneficial for the disciples. Finally, in John 17 we see Jesus praying to the Father just before he is betrayed by Judas. Here John 17:1 function as a summary of the entire prayer: "When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may also glorify you.'" It is significant that in John 17 Jesus in the context of his glorification uses numerous expressions that point forward to his impending death and resurrection, such as when he speaks of his no longer being in the world (17:11), his going to the Father (17:13), and his sanctifying himself (17:19).<sup>247</sup> John 17, like the aforementioned verses, points to Jesus' vocation as the one who glorifies the Father in his passion and resurrection, which glorification is for the sake of the disciples and even the world (17:20).

Even as John's Gospel places particular emphasis on the place of the Son and his vocation as Glorifier of the Father on the cross, it also points to the vocations of the Father and the Spirit. Here Christology opens out into Trinitarian theology. We will first consider the vocation of the Father as Creator. In John, the Father is primarily transcendent and invisible relative to creation and thus does not work in a direct manner in it. For instance, the prologue of John points to the Father as the one who created the world through the Son.<sup>248</sup> Furthermore, as Creator, the Father

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turn enables them to glorify both him and the Father (ibid., 131).

<sup>246</sup> See also John 20:9.

<sup>247</sup> See, for example, Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John (XIII–XXI)* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 765–67, for his discussion of sanctification, or consecration, in John 17:19 and its connection to the atonement achieved at the cross.

<sup>248</sup> Viçens Maria Capdevila i Montaner, "El Padre en el Cuarto Evangelio," in *Dios de Padre* (Salamanca: Secretariado Trinitario, 1991), 103–5, uses verses like John 1:18 and John 6:46 in order to argue for the transcendence and invisibility of the Father in John's Gospel. He argues that John 10:38 and John 14:8–11 show that Jesus' words and deeds reveal the presence, words, and deeds of the Father (ibid., 107).

is also the transcendent goal of all of the things he has created. For example, the Farewell Discourse and the post-Easter narrative point to the Father as the final destination of Jesus and the disciples.

Furthermore, in John's Gospel Jesus points to the Father as the one who sends himself and the Spirit into the world, as is evident, for example, in John 3:16–17 and John 14:26, respectively.<sup>249</sup> Because the Father deals indirectly with his creation, it is not surprising that in a text such as John 5:21–23 the Father does not judge the world but rather has entrusted judgment to the Son whom he has sent to give life to the world. In connection with this transcendence of the Father in his sending activity, he is able to provide stability to the missions of the Son and the Spirit in the sense that in his transcendence he is not in direct danger in the way, for example, that especially the Son is in his mission to glorify the Father through his suffering at the cross.

As for the Holy Spirit, the Gospel of John teaches that he too has a unique vocation. John focuses on the Spirit's vocation in the post-Easter church. John 20:21–22 is central here as it says that the resurrected Christ "will send [the Holy Spirit] from the Father" to the disciples. Certain earlier verses in John that mention the Spirit point forward to John 20 as their goal. For example, John 7:39 is important since it says that in Jesus' ministry the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.<sup>250</sup> Given that the Spirit is associated especially with the

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<sup>249</sup> John 3:16–17: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

John 14:26: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."

Here we recall Irenaeus' image of the Son and the Spirit as the two hands of the Father working in the world. See also Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:328: "The Father acts in the world only through the Son and Spirit. He himself remains transcendent. This fact comes to expression in the 'sendings' of the Son and Spirit into the world."

<sup>250</sup> Félix Porsch, *El Espíritu Santo Defensor de los Creyentes: La Actividad del Espíritu según el Evangelio de San Juan* (Salamanca: Secretariado Trinitario, 1983), 27, argues that Jesus' reference in John 7:39 that the Spirit had

post-Easter church, it is not surprising that he is spoken of most extensively in the Farewell Discourse. Here he is called the “Spirit of truth,” who will be with the disciples (14:17); will bear witness about the truth (15:26); and will lead the disciples into all truth (16:13). As the Spirit of truth, the Spirit witnesses to the truth of both the Son and the Father.<sup>251</sup> In the Farewell Discourse, the Spirit is also called a “Paraclete,” or Helper, whom Jesus says will be sent to the disciples both from the Father (14:16, 14:26) and from himself (15:26, 16:7). In John the Spirit’s vocation as Paraclete is closely related to his vocation as Spirit of truth, as can be seen in their close connection in 14:16–14:17. Perhaps we might suggest that the Spirit’s vocation as Paraclete points especially to his comforting presence with the disciples, and his vocation as Spirit of truth points to his witnessing to the Father and the Son among the disciples.<sup>252</sup> Whether

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not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified is a turning point in John’s Gospel. Porsch argues that this verse shows that all of John’s Gospel has an internal orientation towards the glorification of Jesus on the cross and the giving of the Spirit there. In fact, Porsch says that this is no less than the fundamental law of Johannine pneumatology and is the structural principle of the John’s Gospel. Thus Porsch:

“Tras la solemne revelación de que Jesús es ‘el bautizante con Espíritu Santo,’ se espera realmente que Jesús comience pronto a ejercer tal función. Pero como ya se ha dicho, en todo el evangelio no se vuelve a hablar de tal cosa. Es solo el resucitado quien da el Espíritu a los discípulos (20, 22), sin que en tal ocasión se haga la más mínima referencia a la idea de bautismo con Espíritu.”

“Y en lo referente a la vida y actividad pública de Jesús el evangelista constata más bien expresamente que ‘no había Espíritu todavía porque Jesús aún no había sido glorificado’ (7, 39).”

“Mediante esta constatación todo el evangelio adquiere una dinámica interna orientada a la hora de la glorificación de Jesús y con ello simultáneamente una orientación hacia el don o envío del Espíritu. En este sentido hay que decir que el evangelio se halla a la espera del Espíritu.”

“Es cierto que también conforme al resto de la tradición neotestamentaria al Espíritu se le considera como el don del resucitado, de Jesús, ensalzado al volver al Padre (cf. en especial Lc 24, 49; Hech 1, 4–8; 2, 32 s. y cuanto dice Pablo), pero en ninguna parte se habla y se piensa sobre la íntima relación entre don del Espíritu y glorificación de Jesús de modo tan expreso como se hace en el evangelio de Juan. En él esta relación aparece nada menos que como ley fundamental de la pneumatología joánica y como principio estructural del evangelio.”

<sup>251</sup> In John, this witnessing to the Father and the Son in the post-Easter church by the Spirit happens largely through his working through the disciples. For example, in John 17, the main triad is the Father, the Son, and the disciples, with the Spirit nowhere explicitly present. This allusive, or quiet, nature of the Spirit will be considered in the next section in connection with the kenosis of the Spirit.

<sup>252</sup> That ‘Paraclete’ has certain connotations of presence is also suggested by the fact that Jesus in John 14:16 speaks of the Spirit in the post-Easter church as another Paraclete. This suggests that Jesus is a Paraclete for the disciples while he is with them in his life and that the Spirit will be their Paraclete when he is sent to them after

as Spirit of truth or as Paraclete, the Spirit in John is portrayed as having a unique vocation and as third in the ordering of the divine persons in the economy.

In order to summarize my discussion in this section, I will now offer two diagrams. The first diagram is borrowed from Balthasar:

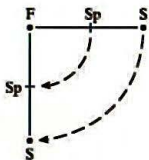


Diagram 1. The Father's Sending of the Son in the Holy Spirit<sup>23</sup>

The second diagram is related to the first but is my own construction:

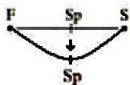


Diagram 2. The Father and the Son's Sending of the Holy Spirit.

In this section we have seen that the Gospel of John places particular emphasis on the place of the Son and his mission of glorifying the Father, especially through his death and resurrection for mankind. Diagram 1 helps illustrate how Jesus in his vocation points "up" to the Father as the

Jesus returns to the Father.

<sup>23</sup> The diagram comes from Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, 3:191. The immanent Trinity in both this diagram and Diagram 2 is represented by the horizontal line and will be discussed further in the next chapter. The position of the Spirit over the Son in John as evident in Diagram 1 will be discussed further in the next section. A nearly identical diagram to Diagram 1 appears in Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* 3:183, except that the latter diagram reverses the direction of the arrows and points to the raising of the economic Trinity to be the eschatological Trinity.

transcendent Creator who has sent him into the world to perform this task. We have also seen that in John's Gospel Jesus points "down" to the Paraclete or Spirit of truth. Diagram 2 helps illustrate how the Holy Spirit in John is associated especially with his working in the post-Easter church as he witnesses to those who have sent him: the transcendent Father and the Son, the Glorifier of the Father. Thus the Gospel of John witnesses to the unique vocations of each divine person in the economy. And it points to an overall Father-Son-Spirit ordering among the divine persons with their vocations.

**3.4.3.2. The Hierarchy of Each Divine Person over the Others in the Context of Their Differentiated Vocations.** Already in this discussion of the uniqueness of the divine persons in their respective vocations we see that the vocations of the persons are relational, that is the vocation of each divine person is always related to the vocations of the other persons. In the present section, I will now argue that the vocation of each divine person actually entails a hierarchy of each person over the others in the context of each person's vocation. I will argue that this hierarchy may be either more explicit, especially in the case of the Father, or more implicit in connection with the mutual dependence of the divine persons in the economy.

As mentioned above, John's Gospel in one sense concentrates on the words and deeds of the Son. Here the vocation of the Son as Glorifier as the Father involves a certain hierarchy over the Spirit and even over the Father. On the one hand, the Son is hierarchical over the Holy Spirit insofar as he sends the Holy Spirit into the church. Here Jesus sends the Spirit in order to continue and complete his work of glorifying the Father. On the other hand, the Son is hierarchical over the Father in the context of his vocation as Glorifier of the Father. For the

Father in John is dependent upon the Son for his own glorification in the world.<sup>254</sup> For example, in John 17:1, Jesus prays, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may also glorify you.” Here there is a dependence of the Son on the Father, but there is also a dependence of the Father on the Son for the Father’s own glorification in the world.<sup>255</sup> In other words, the Father is dependent upon the Son so that he himself may be revealed and honored in the world.

The association of a divine person’s vocation with a power over the other divine persons is probably most easily seen in the case of the Father. During Jesus’ life there is a certain overall hierarchy of the Father over the other divine persons that is evident in the Father’s vocation as the transcendent Creator who sends the Son and Spirit into the world. Hence the Father always sends the Son and Spirit but is never sent by them. This primacy of the Father as sender may be seen, for example, in the fact that the Son in John often speaks of following the command of his Father.<sup>256</sup> Similarly, in John Jesus speaks of a servant not being greater than his master who sends him,<sup>257</sup> and in this context even speaks of the Father being greater than himself.<sup>258</sup>

The vocation of the Spirit as Paraclete and Spirit of truth in John also involves a certain hierarchy over the other divine persons. Although the Spirit is never said to send the Father in John, there are indications in John that the Spirit plays some role in the sending of the Son by the Father. Before looking at this, we first note that the hierarchy of the Spirit over the Son is

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<sup>254</sup> Capdevila, “El Padre en el Cuarto Evangelio,” 112, suggests that John 17:5 shows that the Father is dependent upon the success of Jesus, his mission, and his return to the Father in order for the Father to be glorified in the world.

<sup>255</sup> See also John 13:31–32; 14:13; 15:8; 17:4.

And see also section 3.4.1 where I mentioned that for Pannenberg the Father is dependent on the Son “for the coming of his Kingdom and for his glorification.”

<sup>256</sup> See John 10:18; 12:49–12:50; 14:31; and 15:10.

<sup>257</sup> John 13:16; 15:20.

<sup>258</sup> John 14:28; See also John 10:29.



arguably more obvious in the synoptic Gospels than in John. For example, in Mark 1:12, the Spirit *drives* the Son into the wilderness in order to be tempted by the devil. And in Matthew 12:28 it is only by the Spirit of God that Jesus casts out demons. Here the Spirit more clearly has a certain authority over the Son. Nevertheless, even if the Spirit's hierarchy over the Son is less obvious in John than in the synoptics, it is still evident, such as in the Spirit's involvement in the Father's sending of the Son. Thus in John 10:36 Jesus alludes to the Father consecrating the Son, presumably with the Holy Spirit, and sending him into the world at the Incarnation.<sup>259</sup> Similarly, John 1:32–33 connects the Spirit to the Father at Jesus' Baptism as the Spirit descends from the Father to the Son.<sup>260</sup> Because John associates the Spirit with the Father as he sends Jesus, the Spirit in his vocation as Paraclete and Spirit of truth is portrayed as exercising a certain hierarchy over the Son in his life.

Although John's Gospel does not explicitly speak of the Spirit exercising hierarchy over the Father, there are clear indications that the Father is dependent upon the Spirit and his

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<sup>259</sup> See also Sánchez, *Receiver, Bearer, and Giver of God's Spirit*, 11–20, 47–53, for further discussion of the Son being anointed with the Spirit in preparation for the Incarnation.

<sup>260</sup> This interpretation of the Baptism of Jesus that associates the Spirit with the Father is in harmony with the synoptic Gospels, which say that the Spirit descended from the Father to Jesus at Jesus' Baptism. Considering that in John sending language is closely related to the motif of descending and ascending, this suggests that John connects Jesus' Baptism with the Father *sending* the Spirit to Jesus. Further supporting a link between the descending of the Spirit upon Jesus at his Baptism and the sending of the Spirit to Jesus at his Baptism is that in John 1:33, John the Baptist speaks rather mysteriously about the 'one' who sent him to baptize Jesus. John 1:6 clears up the mystery when it identifies John as the man "sent by God." Although 'God' could also here refer to the Son, it seems to rather refer to the Father since John the Baptist was sent by God to be a witness to the light, Jesus. Thus the Father sent John the Baptist (along with the Spirit) to Jesus at his Baptism.

That sending in John is also integrally related to other themes is evident, for example, in Charles Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 293, where Gieschen connects sending and ascending/descending with the Angel of the Lord tradition: "we see the prominence of the angelomorphic traditions related to the Glory, the Name, and the Word form a substantial foundation for the Christology of this document [the Gospel of John]. The roots of several ideas in Angel of the Lord traditions have been shown: Christ as the visible form of the Father, his descending and ascending, as well as his being sent from the Father." For more background on sending in John, see also Francis Agnew, "The Origin of the NT Apostle-Concept: A Review of Research," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105 (1986): 75–96.

vocation, and in my proposal this dependency points to a hierarchy of the Spirit over the Father. In John one detects a certain deferral to the Holy Spirit and dependence upon him by the Father and Son. For example, John 16:12–13 in the context of Jesus' departure to the Father says that the Spirit of truth will guide the disciples into all truth, a task that Jesus, sent by the Father, could not fully perform in his life since the disciples at Jesus' time could not bear all of his teaching. We can assert, therefore, that the Spirit in his being the Paraclete and Spirit of truth sent by the Father and the Son exercises a hierarchy over the Father and the Son in the context of his vocation, especially in the post-Easter church.<sup>261</sup> Although in John there is a Father-Son-Spirit ordering of the economic Trinity, the greater reality in John is that each divine person exercises a hierarchy over the others in conjunction with each person's vocation.

#### **3.4.4. Mutual Hierarchy as a Framework for Understanding the Kenotic Vocations of the Divine Persons**

Having briefly illustrated the differentiated vocations of the divine persons where each person has a hierarchy over the others in his vocation, we will now see how a mutual hierarchy framework also posits a *kenosis* of each divine person in the exercise of this hierarchy. In other words, each divine person in a unique way limits the use of his divine power in his vocation. In the preceding section we could argue that there is a certain dependence of each divine person on the others in their vocations. However, this is not yet to say that each divine person necessarily exercises his authority in his vocation in a kenotic way. To take a crude human analogy, three human beings could in various ways depend upon one another in their vocations and yet still not much care for one another or even know one another, let alone use their power in order to

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<sup>261</sup> There may also be connotations of this hierarchy of the Spirit over the Father and the Son in John 14:12, the "difficult" passage that speaks of the disciples doing greater works than Jesus.

deliberately serve one another. Even worse, each of the three could exercise their power in order to oppress the others in the context of the particular things the others are dependent upon them. Because of such things, it is necessary to argue that each divine person deliberately exercises his authority in his vocation in a kenotic way in order to serve both the other divine persons as well as creation. Here positing a kenosis in each of the divine persons helps safeguard their dignity during Jesus' life. In what follows, I will describe individually the kenosis of the Son, the Father, and the Spirit, in their vocations as evident in John's Gospel.

In section 3.4.3.2 we saw that Jesus in John's Gospel exercises a certain hierarchy over the Father and the Spirit in connection with his vocation as Glorifier of the Father. We saw, for example, that the Father was dependent upon the Son for his own glorification in the world, and I posited a hierarchy of the Son over the Father in this context. Now we must focus on how Jesus in his vocation uses his authority as Glorifier of the Father in a kenotic way. This kenosis of the Son should be looked at in two ways, in relation to creation and in relation to the other divine persons. In relation to creation, the Son limits the use of his divine power in order to voluntarily undertake ministry, go to the cross, and in both of these tasks suffer in order to redeem mankind.<sup>262</sup> Here the Son glorifies the Father especially through suffering for the benefit of the world. An example of this sort of kenotic exercise of authority may be seen in John 13:12–17 where Jesus acknowledges that he is the lord, master, and teacher of the disciples, but shows the disciples that his authority is best illustrated in the humble act of serving the disciples and washing their feet. Thus the Son is dignified in that he utilizes his authority in order to serve others. This serving of the disciples culminates in the cross. Jesus in John 10:17–18 says that he

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<sup>262</sup> Here we can also make the point that the divine Son in being capable of and willing for such kenosis is actually *more* powerful and dignified than if the Son were not capable of thus helping mankind.

has the power to lay down his own life and the power to take it up again. These verses show that the Son is capable of limiting his divine power at the cross. We see an example of how this plays out in John 19:26–27 where Jesus at the cross serves Mary and John even in the midst of his agony. In fact it may be argued that cruciform themes are present throughout John’s Gospel. In John Jesus is the one who takes initiative to redeem his people through suffering: he is the Lamb of God that sacrifices himself, the shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep, and the King who rules on the cross.<sup>263</sup> Thus Jesus as the Glorifier of the Father limits his divine power and subjects himself to the power of evil on earth in order to redeem mankind.

Besides being kenotic relative to mankind, in an integrally related way the Son is kenotic relative to the Father and the Spirit by limiting the use of his divine power. Through limiting his power in his humiliation he allows and invites the Father and the Spirit to lead and help him. For example, in John 10:17–18, Jesus not only says that he has the power to lay down his life and take it up again, but Jesus also says that he has been commanded by the Father to do so.<sup>264</sup> Thus the Son is dignified in that he does not try to perform his mission in isolation from the Father and the Spirit, but rather works with, trusts, and follows the Father and the Spirit in his redemptive mission.<sup>265</sup> Furthermore, by so permitting the Father and the Spirit to help him, he also fosters their dignity as they too are allowed a role in man’s salvation. By accounting for this dignity of

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<sup>263</sup> See also John Stibbe, *John as Storyteller: Narrative Criticism and the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, U. K.: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 96–120, where Stibbe sees John 18–19 consist of three main sections: “the arrest of the shepherd,” “the trial of the king,” and “the slaughter of the lamb.”

<sup>264</sup> John 10:17–18: “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

<sup>265</sup> Thomas Thompson and Cornelius Plantinga, “Trinity and Kenosis,” in *Exploring Kenotic Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 165–189, argue in a helpful way that a kenotic Christology in order to be successful requires a social understanding of the Trinity.

each divine person, my proposal for a mutual hierarchy framework preserves the sociality of the divine persons, which requires both their uniqueness and their dignity.

In section 3.4.3.2 we also saw that in John, the Father in connection with his sending the Son and the Spirit into the world exercises a certain overall hierarchy in the economic Trinity. Now we will see that although the Father is authoritative in his vocation as the Creator who sends the Son and Spirit into the world, the Father uses his authority in a kenotic way. This occurs through the Father allowing himself to be dependent upon the Son (and the Spirit) in creation and hence allowing himself to be affected by the kenosis of the Son (and the Spirit) in creation.<sup>266</sup> The Father in sending the Son into the world makes himself dependent upon the Son even though the Son's powers will be limited in the world. In this sense, the Father in sending the Son also limits his own power.<sup>267</sup> Similarly, during the life of Jesus, the Father in a more dynamic manner sends the Spirit to the Son and relates with the Son through the Spirit.<sup>268</sup> Here the Father is affected by the kenosis of the Son through the Spirit's mediation between the Father and the Son. A human analogy can help illustrate this kenosis of the Father. Consider a father, a son, and a worker working on a farm. If the son is then sent off to war in a foreign country and the worker is sent back and forth to the son as a messenger, the father loses significant working power on the farm even though the working capacity of the father himself is not necessarily impaired. Similarly, in the economic Trinity the Father sends the Son and Spirit into the sinful world, is dependent upon them, and is affected by their afflictions there. Thus we can see based

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<sup>266</sup> The kenosis of the Spirit will be considered below.

<sup>267</sup> See Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John*, 37–40, which says with respect to John 5:21–23 that it is because the Father so trusts the Son's judgment that he sends him on such an important mission.

<sup>268</sup> Verses like John 5:17, 5:20, and 14:10 make it clear that the Father works during the life of Jesus, which suggests that the Father as sender of the Son and Spirit is aware of what is occurring in their missions. The Spirit's

on John's Gospel that the Father in a divine sort of suffering (obviously the Father did not assume human flesh) "suffers" the suffering of the Son in the economy. Thus in John 17 we see Jesus praying to the Father just before he is betrayed by Judas. Here as Jesus prepares for his redemptive suffering at the cross, he prays to the Father for help because he knows that the Father sympathizes with him, hears his prayer, and will help him with his Spirit.<sup>269</sup> Thus John 17:1 shows that the Father will glorify the Son. Here the Father uses his authority as the transcendent Creator who sends the Son and Spirit in order to serve the Son and glorify him in the world. Through such kenosis the Father is portrayed as dignified and as fostering the dignity of the other divine persons.<sup>270</sup>

Furthermore, through his interaction with the Son and the Spirit, the Father is also kenotic relative to creation itself during the life of Jesus. But, in contrast to the Son, the Father is kenotic relative to creation in an indirect way. The Father knows that the Son whom he has sent does his work on behalf of the same mankind that the Father himself created. Furthermore, the Father in a more dynamic manner relates with the Holy Spirit in his mission to the Son and to the world. Through the Son and the Spirit, the Father is affected by the struggles and misery of those whom he has created.<sup>271</sup> What is more, even though the Father is transcendent in heaven as the Creator,

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mediation between the Father and the Son will be considered in more detail below.

<sup>269</sup> See also John 11:41–42, which says that the Father always hears Jesus. See also the numerous verses in John that demonstrate the Father's loving involvement in the Son's life. See, for example, John 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 14:15–14:23; 14:31; 15:9–10; 16:32; 17:26.

<sup>270</sup> Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John*, x–xi, says that in John's Gospel not only the Son and the Spirit but the Father too is portrayed as being disposable to the Son and Spirit as a servant: "While the Father is given pride of place by the Son, he is seen to defer to the Son by honoring and glorifying him as the appointed spokesman on behalf of the divine Family, and by faithfully listening and responding to the Son's requests on behalf of himself and the community of believers."

<sup>271</sup> It is true that in John 16:23–33 Jesus tells the disciples that they will pray directly to the Father and that the Father loves them. But I would argue that even here the disciples' prayer to the Father is mediated by the Holy Spirit, such as is evident in John 4:23: "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will

he is intimately involved with creation and serves it through sending and interacting with his Son and Spirit. Thus the Father is dignified in that he utilizes his authority in order to serve others rather than seclude himself from creation. By account for this dignity of the Father, my proposal for a mutual hierarchy framework preserves the sociality of the divine persons that requires both their uniqueness and their dignity.

In section 3.4.3.1 we also saw that even though John's Gospel places particular emphasis upon the Son in its narrative, the Son also points down, or ahead, to the Spirit and his work as the Paraclete and Spirit of truth in the church. Thus we saw in section 3.4.3.2 that the Spirit too has a unique, authoritative vocation relative to the Father and the Son. Now we will see that the Spirit in his vocation uses his authority in a kenotic way.<sup>272</sup> In what follows, I will argue that the Spirit is kenotic in his relationship to the Father, the Son, and the disciples, respectively, appearing not in the dazzling glory of heaven but rather as a quiet, kenotic servant. To do so, I will use John 20:21–22 as my guide:

Jesus said to them [the disciples] again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

As we will see, this text connects the Holy Spirit in unique ways with the Father, the Son, and the disciples.

We will begin with the Spirit's relationship to the Father. John 20 implicitly connects the Holy Spirit to the sending of the Son by the Father. Just as Jesus sends the disciples by giving

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worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him." Here the disciples worship the Father, but do it through the Holy Spirit.

<sup>272</sup> Supporting the claim that the Spirit is kenotic in John's Gospel is that he is portrayed as so personal in John. In John, he guides, comforts, convicts, speaks, hears, etc. These sorts of activities would be implausible for the Spirit if he were merely an impersonal force or overwhelming power.

them the Holy Spirit, the Father had sent Jesus by giving him the Holy Spirit. We already saw in section 3.4.3.2 above how in John the Spirit is associated with the Father's sending of the Son. We add here that the Spirit also mediates the Father's will to the Son in a dynamic way during the ministry of Jesus.<sup>273</sup> Here Jesus sees what the Father is doing in his life *largely through seeing the external works of the Spirit of the Father*. In other words, Jesus witnesses the works of the Holy Spirit and traces them to their source in the Father. For example, in John 4:31–35 Jesus is able to see the will of the Father by looking at the state of affairs around him whereas the disciples were not able to see this.<sup>274</sup> Here the term 'truth' in the 'Spirit of truth' points especially to the Father since the Spirit witnesses to Jesus about the truth of the Father. However, the Spirit in his association with the Father is quiet. In other words, the Father is typically the one mentioned by Jesus, and only at a few places does John make it clear that the Spirit mediates the Father's will to the Son. The reason for this partly is, as we have seen, that John emphasizes the Spirit as the one who works in the post-Easter church. Nevertheless, throughout John's Gospel the Spirit has an intimate relationship with the Father as he mediates between the Father and the Son. In this mediating vocation, the Spirit is kenotic and quiet as he does not draw attention to himself as the mediator of the Father's will but rather points to the kenotic Father himself.<sup>275</sup> To use our human analogy from above, the worker sent by the human father to the son at war in a

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<sup>273</sup> For Jesus as the *receiver* of the Holy Spirit in the biblical narrative see Sánchez, *Receiver, Bearer, and Giver of God's Spirit*, 46–60.

<sup>274</sup> On Jesus seeing and hearing, or having seen and having heard the Father, see also John 3:32, 5:30, 6:46; 8:26, 8:38, 8:40, 8:47, 12:29, 15:15. It is possible that when Jesus speaks in the past tense of having seen or heard the Father he could be speaking from his memory of his interaction with the Father prior to the Incarnation. While not denying this, at least the present tense hearing and seeing of the Father are mediated by the Holy Spirit, and perhaps even the past tense hearing and seeing of the Father reflect the Spirit's earlier working in Jesus' life.

<sup>275</sup> Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 216, says that the Son and Spirit exalted the way of kenosis in the life of Jesus: "What we see is not the dazzle of glory, but simplicity and humility. This means that the mode of being of the immanent Trinity and that of the economic Trinity are not conatural."



foreign country does not draw attention to himself but instead focuses on communicating the father's message to the son. Similarly, although the Spirit interacts with the Father in heaven, the Spirit represents the Father as humble, loving, and kind to the Son. Here the kenotic Spirit is dignified, reflecting the dignity of the kenotic Father.

Next, again beginning with John 20:21–22, I will now argue that the Spirit is quiet and kenotic in relation to the Son in his life. If in the previous paragraph, we looked more at what the Spirit of the Father was doing outside of and around Jesus on behalf of the Father, here we will look more at what the Spirit is doing *in* Jesus in his life. Here John 20 suggests that just as Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to the disciples in such a way that the Spirit remained with them, so Jesus performed his mission *in the Spirit* since the Holy Spirit *remained* on Jesus at his Baptism.<sup>276</sup> This is further supported by John 6:63, which says both that it is the Spirit that gives life and that Jesus' words are Spirit and life. This saying implies that Jesus possesses the Spirit in such a way that *all* of Jesus' words in John are filled with the Spirit, even if Jesus in John does not always explicitly say so. Here we should also think of the Spirit internally helping Jesus in his struggles, comforting him by bringing to his remembrance all the things that the Father has done in Jesus' life through the outward mediation of the Spirit.<sup>277</sup> Another helpful example of the quietness of

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<sup>276</sup> See also John 1:32: "I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'"

<sup>277</sup> See John 11:33 and 13:21, which speak of Jesus being moved in his [S]pirit. My proposal prioritizes the outward working of the Spirit in the Son's life even while also allowing for the internal working. In this context I suggest that the mutual indwelling of the divine persons is actually primarily an economic phenomenon. Understanding the mutual indwelling of the divine persons in this way points one forward to the eschaton where the divine community will appear more clearly as it is, a community. That the mutual indwelling of the divine persons is primarily an economic phenomena may be seen in chapters four and five of the book of Revelation where the Lamb standing as if slain in chapter five approaches the one sitting on the throne with a human-like appearance introduced in chapter four. The one sitting on the throne is no doubt the Father and the Lamb is the Son, and they externally relate to one another rather than mutually indwell one another. Revelation 5:6 has the Spirit connected to Jesus and Revelation 4:5 has the Spirit connected to the Father. Here the Spirit is portrayed as indwelling the Father and the Son. But if Revelation 4–5 is picturing the exaltation of Jesus at his ascension, this allows that the Spirit will be

the Spirit is when Jesus at the cross bows his head and gives the Spirit to the world. Here the quietness of the Spirit relative to the Son is evident in that a casual reading of John 19:30 might lead one to simply think that the verse in saying that Jesus “gave up his [S]pirit” was simply saying that Jesus died by giving up his soul when it rather also indicates a reference to the Holy Spirit.<sup>278</sup> Here we should think of the Holy Spirit helping and comforting Jesus in his agony on the cross. Here the kenosis of the Spirit reflects the kenosis of the Son, and the dignity of the Spirit reflects the dignity of the Son.

Finally, again beginning with John 20:21–22, I will now argue that the Spirit in John is kenotic and quiet in his vocation relative to the disciples in John. John 20:22 has Jesus send out the disciples and give them the Holy Spirit. As mentioned in section 3.4.3.1, the work of the Holy Spirit in the post-Easter church as the Paraclete and Spirit of truth is the Spirit’s chief vocation according to John’s Gospel. However, even here in the post-Easter church the Spirit points away from himself to the Father and the Son. For example, John 14:26 says that the Spirit will bring to the disciples’ remembrance everything that Jesus has said to them. Furthermore, the Spirit not only limits his power by pointing away from himself to the Father and the Son, the Spirit as Paraclete, or Helper, also limits his power by dealing gently with Christians and tailoring his message to their circumstances. Here again the Spirit is portrayed not as lording his authority in his vocation to the disciples but rather limiting his power so that he may be with the

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visible as a distinct person at the eschaton once his work in the New Testament church is complete. Until then, the Spirit appears as personal mainly through his indwelling of Jesus, as evident especially in the Gospels, as well as through his indwelling of individual Christians in the church.

<sup>278</sup> John 19:30: “When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

disciples, comfort, and serve them.<sup>279</sup> In this way, the Spirit exercises his authority in a dignified manner, which also points to the dignity of the Son and the Father who send him into the post-Easter church.<sup>280</sup>

In this section we have thus seen that each divine person in his vocation during the life of Jesus is kenotic both relative to the other divine persons as well as relative to creation. The Son is kenotic relative to creation by limiting his power, suffering under the power of evil, and voluntarily laying down his life for the sake of the sinful world. And he is kenotic relative to the Father and the Spirit by allowing and inviting them to work together with him. The Father as the transcendent Creator is kenotic relative to creation in an indirect manner, through his kenotic relations with his Son and Spirit whom he supports and upon whom he is dependent for his own glorification in the world. The Holy Spirit is kenotic relative to the Father and the Son as he quietly mediates between them and serves them. And the Holy Spirit is kenotic relative to human beings in the post-Easter church by dealing gently with them and pointing them to the Father and the Son.

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<sup>279</sup> Here it is also significant that in John there is no mention of glorious angels attending to either Jesus or the disciples. The Spirit in John is rather present in Jesus and in the disciples.

<sup>280</sup> David Crump, "Re-examining the Johannine Trinity: Perichoresis or Deification?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 59 (2006): 395, says the following: "Theological discussions of perichoretic Trinitarianism typically turn to John's Gospel for supporting evidence despite the fact that John nowhere describes the Spirit's so-called 'interpenetration' (A is in B and B is in A) of either the Father or the Son. In this article, all gospel references pertinent to questions of perichoretic union among Father, Son and Spirit are examined, demonstrating that the Johannine Spirit does not share in such mutual indwelling. Rather, the Spirit is inextricably linked to Johannine ecclesiology, performing the work of regeneration and illumination as Christ's earthly alter ego. John's pneumatology is thoroughly functional and salvation-historical, offering no insight into the Spirit's eternal or essential place within the Godhead. However, John's Gospel does describe a third member of a perichoretic trinity: the disciples." I disagree with Crump, and have argued accordingly, to the extent that the Spirit in John in fact is closely associated with both the Father and the Son and is hence clearly portrayed as divine. My proposal also emphasizes the circumincessio (face-to-face encounter) of the divine persons over their static mutual indwelling, and hence differs from the "perichoretic Trinitarianism" Crump mentions. Nevertheless, Crump's article is helpful for showing how closely the Spirit is associated with the disciples in John's Gospel, which also shows his quiet and kenotic character. Crump's article is also helpful for showing the potential Pneumatomachian danger that can result if the Spirit's close, yet stealthy, association with the Father and the Son in John is not recognized.

### **3.4.5. Conclusion**

In section 3.4 I have argued for a mutual hierarchy framework where each divine person has a unique vocation during Jesus' life as evident in John's Gospel. Each divine person has authority over the others in the context of his vocation, even in the midst of an overall Father-Son-Spirit hierarchical ordering of the divine persons. We further saw that the hierarchy of each divine person over the others in his vocation is always a mutual hierarchy that allows each person to be kenotic in the exercise of his hierarchical vocation in such a way that each fosters the vocations of the others. This helps explain why John's Gospel in many ways emphasizes the Son in its narrative yet also opens out into the vocations of the Father and the Spirit. This kenotic conception of the divine vocations helps maintain the dignity of the Father and the Spirit as they work in their vocations to support the Son's vocation of redeeming mankind to the glory of the Father. Based on all of this I argued that my proposal fosters both the uniqueness and the dignity of the divine persons necessary for the full sociality of the divine persons

### **3.5. Chapter Conclusion**

That Balthasar is best thought of as a social Trinitarian may be seen in the fact that he emphasizes the dialogical relations of the divine persons in the economic Trinity. Here Balthasar emphasize the hierarchical sending of the Son by the Father and in this way is helpful for distinguishing between the persons. However, in connection with this hierarchical sending, Balthasar also speaks of the Son radically depositing his divine attributes with his Father during his life, cross, and descent into hell on Holy Saturday, and this causes a tension in his thought. This tension is most evident in the Son's descent into hell, which is the key redemptive period of his life for Balthasar. On the one hand, Balthasar continues to speak of the Father and the Son consistently interacting on Holy Saturday, although the hierarchy of the Father over the Son is

much more pronounced on Holy Saturday than during Jesus' life. On the other hand, Balthasar also speaks of the Father and the Son consistently not having interaction with one another on Holy Saturday as the Father in a unilateral manner loads the world's sins upon the dead Jesus in order to sacrifice him to pay for the sins of the world. In the context of these statements where the Father and Jesus do not interact with one another on Holy Saturday, Balthasar also speaks of Jesus, in addition to depositing his divine attributes, also depositing his human attributes with the Father. Balthasar thus admits that there is a tension in his own Trinitarian understanding between the Son consistently interacting with his hierarchical Father on Holy Saturday and the dead Son consistently not interacting with the hierarchical Father on Holy Saturday. Balthasar's hierarchical concepts that mediate between these two sets of statements only intensify the hierarchy of the Father over the Son both by more easily allowing the two hierarchical sets of statements to reinforce one another and by providing yet another way that the Father is hierarchical over the Son. In both sets of statements, and especially in the statements where the Father does not interact with his dead Son, as well as in the hierarchical mediating concepts, there is great hierarchy of the Father over the Son and little mention of their equality. We have seen, therefore, how Balthasar has a hierarchy-equality polarity or tension in his understanding of the economic Trinity that is integrally related to this other tension just described, and we have seen that Balthasar "resolves" his hierarchy-equality tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the hierarchical pole of the system.

In this chapter I have also argued that my proposal for a mutual hierarchy framework captures the sociality of the divine persons in the economic Trinity more consistently than Balthasar's proposal. Rather than seeing the hierarchy of the Father over the Son as basically master-slave in character during Jesus' life, as is the case in Balthasar in both of his two sorts of

statements about the Son on Holy Saturday as well as in his hierarchical mediating concepts, my proposal asserts that each divine person in connection with his vocation exercises authority over the other persons in a kenotic way that fosters the dignity of the other divine persons in their vocations. Moreover, my proposal has no need for concepts where the divine persons would not be capable of interacting with one another and it has no need for mediating concepts. Instead, I propose that the divine persons relate to one another in a dignified manner in their kenotic vocations. Balthasar accounts for the emphasis that the Johannine narrative places on the Son vis-à-vis the Father and the Spirit through stressing that the Father in sending the Son nearly unilaterally commands him, while the Son almost involuntarily performs his mission. By thus not accounting adequately for the volition of the Son, Balthasar also does not account adequately for either the Son's dignity or the dignity of the Father who commands him. In contrast, my proposal accounts for the emphasis that the Johannine narrative places on the Son by saying that the Son in his vocation as Glorifier of the Father freely works together with the Father and Spirit in a dignified way to serve creation. By emphasizing the dignity of each divine person as each exercises the hierarchy of his vocation in a kenotic way, my proposal more consistently than Balthasar's proposal accounts for the sociality of the divine persons, which sociality requires both their uniqueness and their dignity.

That Volf is best thought of as a social Trinitarian may be seen in the fact that he emphasizes the dialogical relations of the divine persons in the economic Trinity. Here Volf emphasizes the egalitarian relations of the divine persons, and in this way is helpful for promoting their dignity. Volf also posits the hierarchical sending of the Son and the Spirit by the Father in the economy and attempts to distinguish the divine persons thereby, but in comparison with the egalitarian relations of the divine persons this hierarchical sending receives little

attention in Volf's proposal. There is also a tension between the egalitarian relations of the divine persons and their hierarchical sending in Volf's system. This tension as well as Volf's egalitarian emphasis may also be seen in Volf's use of perichoresis as a mediating concept between the egalitarian relations and the hierarchical sending, since Volf associates perichoresis much more with the former than the latter. This tension can also be seen in Volf's treatment of the cross, which for him is the key redemptive period of Jesus' life. In general, Volf consistently places hierarchical sending into a larger, egalitarian framework of the Triune God's self-donation to the world. Volf emphasizes that at the cross the divine persons relate to one another in an egalitarian way as they mutually indwell one another and give themselves on behalf of mankind. Volf also asserts that the Father exercises a certain hierarchy over the Son at the cross, but this receives far less attention and weight than their egalitarian relations. Similarly, Volf can at times associate perichoresis at the cross with hierarchical sending but he primarily associates it with the egalitarian relations of the divine persons. In this regard Volf stresses that human beings can enter into the egalitarian relations and perichoresis of the divine persons as evident at the cross and in this way obtain salvation. Again Volf stresses the egalitarian relations and mainly egalitarian perichoresis of the divine persons and does not clearly show how hierarchical sending relates to these. Based on the heavy emphasis in his understanding of the economic Trinity upon the equality of the divine persons both in the mutual relations of the persons and in their perichoresis, we see how Volf "resolves" his hierarchy-equality polarity or tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the egalitarian pole of the system.

In this chapter I have also argued that my proposal for a mutual hierarchy framework captures the sociality of the divine persons in the economic Trinity more consistently than Volf's proposal. Rather than seeing homogenous vocations among the divine persons, as tends to be the

case in Volf in both the egalitarian relations of the divine persons and their mainly egalitarian perichoresis, my proposal asserts that each divine person has a unique vocation and is hierarchical over the other persons in the context of this vocation. Moreover, my proposal has no need of two opposing sets of statements and no need of mediating concepts. Volf accounts for the emphasis that the Johannine narrative places on the Son vis-à-vis the Father and the Spirit in such a way that it becomes difficult to ascertain whether only the Son is the agent in Jesus or whether the Father and the Spirit are as well as they indwell him. By not accounting adequately for Jesus being the agent of his own actions in his life, Volf does not account adequately for the uniqueness of the Son and the uniqueness of his suffering on the cross for mankind. In contrast to Volf, my proposal accounts for the emphasis that the Johannine narrative places on the Son by pointing both to the hierarchical uniqueness of the Son's vocation as Glorifier of the Father as well as to the fact that the unique vocations of the Father and the Spirit can complement the Son's vocation because they are unique. My proposal thus says that human redemption is achieved by the co-working of the unique divine persons during Jesus' life, culminating in the cross of Christ where each divine person plays a unique role in achieving human redemption. By emphasizing that the vocations of the divine persons are unique and hierarchical, my proposal more consistently than Volf's proposal accounts for the sociality of the divine persons, which sociality requires both their dignity and their uniqueness.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### TOWARDS A REVISED SOCIAL TRINITARIAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMMANENT TRINITY USING A MUTUAL HIERARCHY FRAMEWORK

The question this chapter will be trying to answer is “What is the place of the immanent Trinity in a social model of the Trinity?” We will approach this question by taking a look at the way that Balthasar and Volf evidence a hierarchy-equality polarity in their understandings of the immanent Trinity through their strong preference for hierarchy and equality, respectively. I will argue that a mutual hierarchy framework for understanding the immanent Trinity accounts more adequately for the *mutual constitution* of the divine persons than the proposals by Balthasar and Volf. In my proposal, the mutual constitution of the divine persons refers to each person possessing a power or hierarchy over the others in connection with his personal properties, even while each person uses this hierarchy in a dignified manner to build up and in fact constitute the other persons. This conception differs from how the Trinity is often understood, whether in other Trinitarian models or by other social Trinitarians. For example, a substance-oriented Trinitarian model tends to associate dignity with the unity of the divine persons in the divine substance. But my proposal asserts that dignity is rather associated with the way that each divine person uses his hierarchical personal properties to build up the other persons. Again, a person-oriented Trinitarian model associates hierarchy and power with the Father as the personal cause of the Son and Spirit. But my proposal asserts that power and hierarchy are rather associated with each divine person with their unique personal properties. By arguing for the mutual constitution of the divine persons, my proposal thus will attempt to consistently account for both their uniqueness and their dignity, both of which are necessary for their sociality.

The chapter will first present the basic contours of Balthasar's hierarchical understanding of the immanent Trinity. Next it will present the basic contours of Volf's egalitarian understanding of the immanent Trinity. After this, the positions of Balthasar and Volf will be compared and evaluated for how well they consistently account for the sociality of the divine persons. To again remind the reader, sociality in my proposal is achieved when both the uniqueness and dignity of each divine person is accounted for adequately. Next, I will utilize a mutual hierarchy framework in order to argue for the mutual constitution of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity. The chapter will conclude by comparing my understanding of the immanent Trinity with that of Balthasar and Volf in terms of how well each consistently accounts for the sociality of the divine persons.

#### **4.1. The Tension in Balthasar's Hierarchical Understanding of the Immanent Trinity**

Central to Balthasar's hierarchical understanding of the immanent Trinity is a tension present within it between what I term a hierarchical 'level of constitution' and a hierarchical 'level of relation' among the divine persons. The level of constitution refers to the Father's generation of the Son and the Father and the Son's spiration of the Spirit, which generation and spiration do not entail dialogical relations between the one(s) constituting and the one(s) constituted. The level of relation, on the other hand, refers to the divine persons' relating with one another (logically) after they have been constituted, where this relating does not contribute to the constitution of the persons.<sup>281</sup> In this section, we will see that since Balthasar emphasizes hierarchy and rarely mentions equality in both levels, he evidences a hierarchy-equality polarity

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<sup>281</sup> To my knowledge, Balthasar does not explicitly speak of a level of constitution and a level of relation. However, these terms harmonize with his position.

or tension in his understanding of the Trinity. We will see that Balthasar “resolves” his hierarchy-equality tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the hierarchical pole of the system. My method will be to look at the chapter “The ‘Primal Drama’ of the Father’s Begetting of the Son” from Margaret Turek’s book *Towards a Theology of God the Father: Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Theodramatic Approach* as the first of two steps in evaluating Balthasar’s understanding of the immanent Trinity. In doing so, I will not try to summarize all of Turek’s thoughts on Balthasar’s understanding of the immanent Trinity in the *Theo-Drama*, but will rather focus on a few key places where a tension, or a paradox as Turek calls it, is present in Balthasar’s Trinitarian proposal. The second and final step in evaluating Balthasar will be to supplement the work of Turek through a look at Balthasar’s understanding of the immanent Trinity based on two sections from the “Logos and Logic” chapter of the second volume of *Theo-Logic*.<sup>282</sup> Through analyzing the *Theo-Logic*, I will also show that Turek’s work contains certain misconceptions or omissions, such as that Turek does not clearly demarcate that Balthasar employs mediating concepts to connect his two levels in the immanent Trinity.

#### **4.1.1. Balthasar’s Tension in His Understanding of the Immanent Trinity as Presented by Margaret Turek**

Turek in the first section, “Contemporary Correctives and Concerns,” of her chapter “The ‘Primal Drama’ of the Father’s Begetting of the Son” seems to relate Balthasar’s understanding of the immanent Trinity to an attempt to synthesize what she calls the Western and the Eastern understandings of the immanent Trinity. Turek writes,

A possible synthesis of the theological concerns of both the Western/Latin and Eastern/Greek traditions emerges if we take as our point of departure for a Christian

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<sup>282</sup> See also section 1.3.1 of the dissertation where I quoted Balthasar’s description of his chapter-by-chapter methodology in second volume of *Theo-Logic*.

doctrine of God the biblical fact that God is revealed to be love through his sending of his only Son. Inasmuch as love is the activity that constitutes the divine substance, as a point of departure it can be rendered compatible with the Latin approach. Yet inasmuch as the divine love made manifest in salvation history is premierly paternal (God as sending his Son), it indicates at the same time—and not as conceptually subsequent—the Person of the Father who cannot be the Primal Lover except in an eternal relationship with the Absolute Beloved in the Spirit of their common love (and thus we are simultaneously in accord with the Greek approach). Indeed, we may take our cue from the ITC [International Theological Commission] and employ a “metaphysics of charity” in which person has a certain primacy over substance.<sup>283</sup>

Turek here implies that Balthasar seeks to synthesize a more “Western” position that stresses the divine substance as the ultimate ontological category in Trinitarian discourse and a more “Eastern” position that stresses the person of the Father as cause as the ultimate ontological category in Trinitarian discourse.<sup>284</sup> In the language of Turek, Balthasar seeks to synthesize a Western view that stresses love as that which eternally “constitutes the divine substance” with an Eastern view that stresses the Father as the “Primal Lover...in an eternal relationship with the Absolute Beloved in the Spirit of their common love.” However, in this synthesis Balthasar takes as his point of departure and emphasis the Eastern view where the Father is the Primal Lover who exercises hierarchy over the Son and Spirit. This may be seen in Turek’s comment that in the Trinity “person has a certain primacy over substance.” It may also be seen in Turek’s comment that neo-Scholasticism allegedly conceived of the work of the Trinity in the world according to

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<sup>283</sup> Turek, *Towards a Theology of God the Father*, 92.

<sup>284</sup> That Turek clearly distinguishes Balthasar’s Trinitarian thought from that of a person-oriented Trinitarian model that posits the person of the Father as cause as the ultimate ontological category in Trinitarian discourse may be seen in her comment about Balthasar’s “renovating” the Trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian Fathers (ibid., 99–100). Here, for example, Balthasar opposes the Cappadocian notion that the Son is the “mirror-image” of the Father, since for Balthasar this makes the Son too passive. Turek says that Balthasar in *Theo-Drama* rather conceives of the Father-Son relationship more along the analogy of an author-actor relationship from the field of drama.

a single principle of operation rather than on the communion of Trinitarian self-giving constitutive of the divine substance, and which originates in the Father as the primal source of absolute love.<sup>285</sup>

Here again Turek implies that Balthasar emphasizes the person of the Father as the source of the Trinity and only then conceives of the Son and Spirit as of the same substance with him. Thus we begin to see the type of hierarchy present in Balthasar's understanding of the immanent Trinity.

In the introduction to her book, Turek lays out her basic thesis for the second half of the book, which includes the chapter we are considering, and in the process already points to the type of tension, or paradox as she calls it, in Balthasar's understanding of the immanent Trinity. Turek writes,

Part Two of our study will present a schematic ordering and examination of the modalities and aspects integral to the manner of being divine proper to the Father. Preliminarily, we may identify the following: (i) the paternal mode of infinite freedom: unconditioned initiative as self-gift; (ii) the paternal kenosis; (iii) the paternal leaving-free; (iv) the paternal receptivity; (v) the paternal dependence and expectation; and (vi) the paternal affectivity of the immutable God. In regard to each aspect of the Father's mode of being God, we will develop an understanding in terms of its efficacy to engender its perfect reflection: the Son's begotten, answering mode of infinite love.<sup>286</sup>

What is especially noteworthy for our present purposes is the tension present in Balthasar's understanding of the immanent Trinity as evident in Turek's thesis statement. As already evident in the last sentence here quoted, this tension is related to the fact that "each aspect of the Father's mode of being God" engenders its perfect reflection in the Son. The tension revolves around the question of how one is to balance the Father's unilateral constituting of the Son at a level of

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., xxii.

constitution with the dialogical relations between the Father and the Son at a level of relation. As the above quotation already suggests, for Turek this tension, or “paradox” as she calls it, is basically the structuring principle for each section in her chapter. Finally, we note the hierarchical nature of the paradox as evident in Turek’s presentation of Balthasar, for in both levels the Father is hierarchical over the Son.

In Turek’s first two constructive sections of her chapter, the paradox she sees in Balthasar’s understanding of the immanent Trinity is clearly evident. For example, the title of the first section, “The Father-Begetter as Source of the Trinitarian Godhead,” points to the priority of the Father in constituting the Son through begetting him, and the title of the second section, “The Father’s Mode of Infinite Freedom: Unconditioned Initiative as Self-gift,” points to the fact that for Balthasar the Father is always relational since he *is* self-giving. The hierarchical paradox is evident here in that Turek’s first section can consider the Father “alone” as Begetter while the second section conceives of the Father as always in a (hierarchical) relationship with the Son. This paradox between the Father’s pure self-possession as Begetter and his consistent relations with the Son can be seen further within these first two sections. For example, in the first section, Turek can speak both of the Father being alone and paradoxically of his never being without the Son:

Even though God only exists as Father in his eternal act of begetting the Son, and so in this sense is never without the Son, yet inasmuch as it is *he*, in his singularity, who generates the Son—while requiring no fructifying from another—we can speak of a primordial beginning in which the Father acts “alone.”<sup>287</sup>

Similarly, in the second section, Turek characterizes Balthasar as rejecting

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 96, italics original.

any doctrine of the inner-divine begetting that would vitiate the Father's eternally simultaneous possession and dispossession of the divinity in an act expressive of absolute initiative and pure self-giving.<sup>288</sup>

Turek here points to the paradoxical nature of the coincidence of necessity and freedom in the Father.<sup>289</sup> Furthermore, Turek also notes a similar paradox in the case of the Son that flows from the Father begetting him:

We need to move on to acknowledge that the Father's self-donation begets its counterpoint mode in the Son such that the coincidence of necessity and freedom takes on an asymmetrical relation over against the Father.<sup>290</sup>

By speaking of the "asymmetrical relation" between the Father and the Son, Turek again indicates that the paradox she sees in Balthasar's thought is hierarchical in nature. It is because of the Father's activity as Begetter that the Son's existence is marked by the Trinitarian paradox. In other words, the paradoxical existence of the Son, being marked by the "coincidence of necessity and freedom," is dependent upon and logically consequent to the begetting activity of the Father.

Having already demonstrated in some detail the paradox in Balthasar's understanding of the immanent Trinity according to Turek, a couple of instances of how this paradox in Balthasar appears in the remaining sections of Turek's chapter will now be considered more briefly. For example, in "The Father's Kenosis" section Turek notes "the paradoxical character of theologic" where the Father has "super-kenosis" in his fully keeping the divine substance for himself and yet also fully giving it over to the Son.<sup>291</sup> This leads to

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 106.

yet another paradox closely associated in Balthasar's thought with this unoriginated "super-kenosis," a paradox which enters Balthasar's purview insofar as he considers the mystery of God's Paternity within the cadre of an interpersonal ontology: namely, that being-oneself and being-for-another are inseparable.<sup>292</sup>

Here Turek shows how for Balthasar (logically) after the Father begets the Son the Father paradoxically must always be thought of as in relation to the Son. Similarly, in the section "The Father's Dependence and Expectation," Turek notes that for Balthasar, although the Father "does not require being loved in order to love," there is an asymmetrical mutual dependence between the Father and the Son where the Father is also dependent upon the Son; here Turek says that to follow Balthasar on this paradox "we must walk the knife's edge."<sup>293</sup> The Father as Begetter does not depend on the Son's love (at a level of constitution), and yet, paradoxically, the Father is dependent on the Son in their relations with one another (at a level of relation). And again, because of the hierarchy of the Father over the Son evident in Balthasar's theology at both levels, the paradox is asymmetrical. Throughout her chapter on Balthasar's understanding of the immanent Trinity, Turek emphasizes the paradox in Balthasar between the Father as solitary Begetter at what I refer to as a level of constitution and the Father as consistently relating with the Son at what I refer to as a level of relation. At both levels, and especially at the level of constitution, the Father exercises great hierarchy over the Son. We see, therefore, how Balthasar "resolves" his hierarchy-equality polarity or tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the hierarchical pole of the system.

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<sup>292</sup> Turek, 91.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 162.



#### **4.1.2. Balthasar's Tension in His Understanding of the Immanent Trinity as Evident in the Second Volume of *Theo-Logic***

In this section, we will look more fully at the tension in Balthasar's understanding of the immanent Trinity through analyzing two sections in the chapter "Logos and Logic in God" in the second volume of *Theo-Logic*. In doing so we will confirm Turek's basic position that sees a paradox, or a tension as I call it, between a level of constitution and a level of relation in Balthasar's Trinitarian understanding. However, we will also criticize certain aspects of Turek's presentation. Most notably, we will see that Balthasar utilize certain mediating concepts, which concepts Turek does not clearly demarcate, to attempt to bridge the tension between his hierarchical level of constitution and his hierarchical level of relation. We will see that the effect of these mediating concepts is to intensify the hierarchy of the Father over the Son in Balthasar's Trinitarian system.

**4.1.2.1. The Hierarchy-Equality Tension Evident in the Section "Identity and Difference in God" in the Second Volume of *Theo-Logic*.** In Balthasar's discussion "The Essence of God in the Hypostases" in the "Identity and Difference in God" section, Balthasar seeks to guard against seeing the divine essence as a sort of fourth entity above the divine persons (and hence the title of the section says that the essence is *in* the hypostases). Central to his discussion here is a methodological principle that states that one can only approach the mystery of God based on two opposing propositions.<sup>294</sup> In connection with this methodological principle, Balthasar near the beginning of the section asks a central question of

whether God the Father knows himself by virtue of eternally possessing the divine essence or whether he knows himself (as Father) by placing his meaning-word, the

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<sup>294</sup> For the effects of this principle in the context of the economic Trinity for Balthasar see section 3.1.2 of the dissertation.

Son, vis-à-vis himself? If we opt for the second proposition, the Father would first come to know himself in the Son; if we opt for the first, it appears that his self-knowledge is (at least logically) prior to the generation of the Son, which, supposing we do not fall into Arianism, leads us to ask why such a generation is needed in the first place.<sup>295</sup>

Balthasar goes on to say that each of the two opposing propositions has some element of truth in it although neither is sufficient by itself. Balthasar says that certain medieval Roman Catholic theologians like Augustine and especially Anselm held to the second option, which option according to Balthasar is in danger of locating the divine substance above the divine persons. Considering that Balthasar associates the second option with what he elsewhere calls the “Western” tradition, Balthasar may have the “Eastern” tradition, or a person-oriented Trinitarian model, more in mind in the case of the first option. That Balthasar sees these two options as both integral to his understanding of the immanent Trinity is shown by the fact that he goes on to again bring up his rule of maintaining two opposing propositions: “We can talk about the immanent Trinity only using two *countervailing* propositions that resist being welded into a unity.”<sup>296</sup> Confirming Turek’s discussion above, there is a tension in Balthasar’s understanding of the immanent Trinity between the Father being (logically) prior to the Son at a level of constitution and the Father and Son (asymmetrically) relating to and depending on one another at a level of relation, which in the present case Balthasar associates with a person-oriented and a substance-oriented Trinitarian model, respectively.

Towards the end of “The Essence of God in the Hypostases,” Balthasar goes on to re-describe the issue he has been discussing from a slightly different angle by examining the relationship between the terms *processio* (procession) and *relatio* (relation). Balthasar notes that

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<sup>295</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, 2:128.

procession “expresses an act and a terminus,” whereas relation indicates “only the sheer bond between two beings.”<sup>297</sup> Implicit here for Balthasar is that some in what he calls the Western tradition could make the divine relations superordinate to the divine processions, whereas some in what he calls the Eastern tradition could make the divine processions superordinate to the divine relations. Balthasar is interested in allowing the two sorts of statements stand in tension with one another:

Faith knows from the facts of revelation that the hypostases really exist in their relative opposition, just as it knows from the same facts, and from their ecclesial interpretation, that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God. Any speculative grasp of the mystery of the identity of both aspects always requires the convergence [*Aufeinanderbewegung*] of two propositions—which resist every attempt to reduce them to one.<sup>298</sup>

The tension in Balthasar’s thought is clear here since the two propositions “resist every attempt to reduce them to one.” Balthasar in his own, constructive proposal associates the processions view with a level of constitution and the relations view with a level of relation. By largely leaving intact the two views or levels that contradict one another, merely juxtaposing them and saying that any questions about this mystery is “speculative,” one again sees the tension in Balthasar’s hierarchical understanding of the immanent Trinity between the Father in the processions at the level of constitution and the relations among the divine persons at the level of relation.

In the next section, “Love Cannot Be Anticipated by Thought,” the tension in Balthasar’s understanding of the immanent Trinity between the hierarchical level of constitution and the

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 132, italics original.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

hierarchical level of relation may again be seen. Here Balthasar looks at begetting from the perspective of the Father and tries to synthesize the Father's simultaneous possession of and non-possession of the divine substance:

The Father possesses it [the divine substance] insofar as he begets before thinking about it [*unvordenklich*]; he possesses it only as given away. To be sure, in order to forestall misunderstanding, one can say that, in generating, the Father has "not given over his substance to the Son so as not to keep it himself" (DS 805), but the opposite is equally true: he remains the eternal Father only insofar as he has eternally given over to the Son all that is his, including his divinity.<sup>299</sup>

Here especially through Balthasar's saying that his two ways of speaking are "opposite" one can again see the tension in Balthasar's understanding of the immanent Trinity between a hierarchical level of constitution and a hierarchical level of relation. However, we also see here that Balthasar employs a mediating concept when he says that the Father "begets before thinking about it." This concept is mediating since it does not really fit into either of the two levels. It does not fit with the level of constitution because the Father in this quotation does not have freedom to think, which freedom of the Father is required if the Father is to freely beget the Son and (logically) precede him; and it does not fit with the level of relation because the Father begets (logically) before thinking about it, which thinking is necessary in the dialogical relations of the Father with the Son. Although Balthasar somewhat mediates between the two levels, they still clearly are irreconcilable. This is likely why Balthasar goes on to assert that one must bow before this mystery "which thought can neither go behind nor exhaust" and which "is the ultimate ground for God's being incomprehensibly more than any finite concept can comprehend...."<sup>300</sup> By noting this hierarchical mediating concept, we thus move beyond the

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 135–36.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 137.

presentation of Turek, who does not clearly demarcate mediating concepts in Balthasar's understanding of the immanent Trinity. This is significant, because the effect of hierarchical mediating concepts in Balthasar is to intensify the hierarchy of the Father over the Son in the immanent Trinity both by more easily allowing the two levels to reinforce one another and by providing yet another way that the Father is hierarchical over the Son.

Balthasar goes on in the "Love Cannot Be Anticipated by Thought" section to describe another mediating concept. He says,

If we rightly assume that the *taxis* (sequential order) of the processions, while irreversible, is absolutely atemporal—so much that we can and must think of the Persons who proceed, the Son and the Spirit, as "letting themselves be brought forth"—does not the divine essence become something that is as much "in motion" as the event of the processions themselves?<sup>301</sup>

Here Balthasar points to the Son and the Spirit's atemporal "letting themselves be brought forth" in such a way as to mediate between the two opposing propositions—processions (at the level of constitution) and relations (at the level of relation). Again this mediating concept does not really fit with the level of constitution since Balthasar typically speaks, for example, of the Father somehow (logically) preceding the Son in begetting him whereas here the Son and the Spirit are aware that they are proceeding from the Father. And it does not fit with the level of relation since Balthasar is explicitly speaking of the processions. Finally, we note that this mediating concept is very hierarchical since the Son and the Spirit merely let the Father constitute them and contribute little to it.

Balthasar goes on to use perichoresis as another mediating statement:

Since the Persons are all hypostases of the divine nature in its concrete unity, with which each of them is really identical, their essential unity can also be described as

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 136.

their mutual indwelling, their *circumincessio* [circumincession], through which they constitute together the one, free, “personal” countenance of God.<sup>302</sup>

Here the mediating concept is mutual indwelling, a form of perichoresis, and here refers to the divine persons co-constituting the Trinity. This notion does not fit with Balthasar’s hierarchical level of constitution that says that in begetting the Son the Father (logically) precedes the Son so that the Son does not also constitute the Father. And it does not fit with Balthasar’s hierarchical level of relation that says that the divine persons consistently relate to one another but do not constitute one another through these relations. Rather, mutual constitution through perichoresis is a mediating concept in Balthasar’s understanding of the immanent Trinity. Although this perichoresis on the surface appears to be egalitarian, it again must be remembered that the Son and Spirit for Balthasar may only be identical with the divine essence because the Father has constituted them to be thus. Perichoresis thus here remains a hierarchical concept.

Finally, in Balthasar’s discussion “The Essential Properties in the Light of the Hypostases” in the current “Approaches and Demarcations” section, Balthasar employs yet another mediating concept in his understanding of the immanent Trinity. He says,

At the end of this reflection on how the hypostases determine the divine essence, we must mention a paradox that admits of no easy penetration. In all the properties, decrees, and works owing their foundation to the three hypostases, there are two factors that must be given equal weight: the order of the processions and the equal rank of the divine hypostases. We must on no account think that, because the Father

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 137. It is also worthy of note that Balthasar’s words leading up to this quotation show the clear connection between his understanding of the economic Trinity and his understanding of the immanent Trinity. Balthasar says, “No one doubts that, as the New Testament tells us, the Father’s act of giving up the Son and the Spirit in the economy is pure love, as is the Son’s and the Spirit’s act of freely letting themselves be given up. But how could this fundamental claim about the economy of salvation have no foundation in any property of the essence of the triune God? ‘The Father loves the Son and shows him everything that he does.... He has made over all judgment to the Son so that all may honor the Son as they honor the Father’ (Jn 5:20, 22f.); these statements, and others like them, surely have an intratrinitarian resonance and presupposition. Looked at in this way, the divine essence would not only be coextensive with the event of the eternal processions; it would also be concomitantly determined by the unrepeatably unique participation of Father, Son, and Spirit in this event and so would never exist except as fatherly, sonly, or spirit-ly” (ibid., 136–37).

is origin, he “commands” the other two; the Son and the Spirit are not, so to say, his obedient executors. The Son and Spirit have proceeded from the Father coeternally with him. Therefore it retroactively affects the origin itself without neutralizing the order of origination. The Son’s and Spirit’s equality of rank with the Father gives them an equal share in the properties and modes of conduct of the one God; the hypostases determine in their *circuminessio* what God is and wills and does.<sup>303</sup>

Besides the *circuminessio* (perichoresis) mediating concept already mentioned, here Balthasar uses another mediating concept that says that the Son and Spirit “retroactively affect” the generating Father.<sup>304</sup> Again this concept does not fit with the level of constitution since the begetting Father does not (logically) precede the Son and Spirit. And it does not fit with the level of relation because the processions are being discussed. It is vital to note here that, in the context of this mediating concept, even though Balthasar says that the divine persons are of “equal rank,” he also mentions the “order of the processions” in the same phrase. The divine persons may only equally determine the divine essence because the Son and Spirit proceed from the Father who (logically) precedes them and is hierarchical over them. Again we have an example of a mediating concept that is hierarchical, mediating between a hierarchical level of constitution and a hierarchical level of relation. We thus see how Balthasar “resolves” his hierarchy-equality polarity or tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the hierarchical pole of the system.

**4.1.2.2. The Hierarchy-Equality Tension Evident in the Section “The Position of the Logos in God” in the Second Volume of *Theo-Logic*.** In Balthasar’s discussion “The Logos between the Father and the Spirit” in the section “The Position of the Logos in God,” Balthasar

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 147–48.

<sup>304</sup> Balthasar’s notion of retroactivity in the immanent Trinity is vastly different than retroactivity in, say, Moltmann or Pannenberg. Balthasar uses it in an atemporal, purely logical manner whereas Moltmann and Pannenberg utilize it to say that things that occur in time retroactively affect the immanent Trinity. See also my discussion of retroactive causality in 1.1 and 1.2.

again evidences a tension between a hierarchical level of constitution and a hierarchical level of relation, only now in relation to the Holy Spirit. Balthasar discusses the procession of the Holy Spirit as follows,

I have shown elsewhere that these two (at bottom inseparable) directions in the production of the Holy Spirit correspond to the visions of Eastern and Western theology, respectively. Eastern theology sees an ultimate self-outpouring of the Father through the Son into the incomprehensible expanse and freedom of the Holy Spirit; Western theology sees the Son's "reversion" to the Father (which is one with the Son's divine knowledge that he is wholly from the Father and has to thank him for everything) as bringing about the procession of the Spirit.<sup>305</sup>

We first note that again Balthasar speaks of two opposing, but inseparable, ways of speaking about the immanent Trinity. Here it is interesting to look at the role of the Son in the spiration of the Spirit. For Balthasar, the "Eastern" vision seems to operate at the level of constitution since it speaks of the "production" of the Spirit by the Father (through the Son). Here the Father (logically) precedes both the Son and the Spirit. But the "Western" vision operates at the level of relation, at least as far as the relation between the Father and the Son is concerned, because the Son does not (logically) precede the Father but rather has knowledge of the Father and thanks the Father. By juxtaposing these two positions Balthasar again has a tension between a hierarchical level of constitution and his hierarchical level of relation.

In the aforementioned quote we begin to see that the tension in Balthasar's understanding of the Trinity also involves the Holy Spirit. Whereas we have focused on the tension between the Father and the Son in Balthasar's understanding of the immanent Trinity, Balthasar also sees a tension between the Father and Son, on the one side, and the Holy Spirit, on the other side. Here Balthasar sees the tension involving the Holy Spirit as an extension of the tension between the

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 153.



Father and the Son.<sup>306</sup> Balthasar's further discussion gives more information about the tension involved in the spiration of the Spirit:

we can add that the Spirit, who also, and *principaliter*, proceeds from the Father, pervades the entire event of the Son's origination from the Father."<sup>307</sup>

Just as we saw above that Balthasar used a mediating concept to say that the Son retroactively affects his own generation, so here Balthasar uses a mediating concept when he says that the Spirit retroactively "pervades the entire event of the Son's origination from the Father," implying that the Spirit also retroactively affects his own spiration. Balthasar again has a tension between a level of constitution and a level of relation in his understanding of the immanent Trinity, this time between the Father and the Son on the one side and the Holy Spirit on the other side.<sup>308</sup>

Balthasar's discussion in "Toward a Definition of the Processions: The Problem" further illustrates the tension present in his understanding of the immanent Trinity in the context of the Holy Spirit. Here, after recognizing a certain usefulness of a psychological analogy for the Trinity, Balthasar utilizes an analogy for the Trinity from the human nuclear family. Here Balthasar says that the fruitfulness of the mutual love of the Father and the Son issues in the Spirit, which finds an analogy in a human child's "issuance from its parents."<sup>309</sup> Elsewhere

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<sup>306</sup> That Balthasar focuses on the relationship between the Father and the Son in his understanding of the immanent Trinity according to Turek is clearly evident in her thesis statement quoted in 4.1.1. See also Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 217–18, where she says that Balthasar has little to say about the Holy Spirit on Holy Saturday in comparison with the Father and the Son.

<sup>307</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, 2:156.

<sup>308</sup> Balthasar also says that although all three divine persons have an existence that is both "from" and "toward" the others, the Father's existence is primarily towards the others, the Spirit's existence is primarily from the others, and the Son is in the middle "between the Father and the Spirit" and is both from the Father and toward the Spirit (*ibid.*, 152–53).

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

Balthasar uses the following diagram to illustrate his understanding of the Trinity, and in the present context it helps illustrate his thoughts about the family analogy:

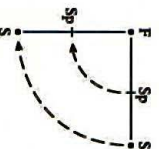


Diagram 1. The Sending of the Son.

What especially concerns us here is the horizontal axis in diagram 1 that represents the immanent Trinity, where the Spirit appears between the Father and the Son.<sup>30</sup> In order to rightly understand this diagram as Balthasar employs it, one must understand how he utilizes the analogy from the human nuclear family: the Spirit appears between the Father and the Son just as a child appears “between” his or her parents. For Balthasar, this does not violate the Son being the middle or second person in the taxis of the divine person, for he sees the wife as the second person in the human family even though the child for Balthasar is between the parents. For logically the father and mother relate first, and only *after* procreation does the child appear between them. Similarly, for Balthasar the Spirit at the level of relation may only be between the Father and the Son by being (logically) after the Father and Son at the level of constitution. But unlike in the family analogy, our previous quotation of Balthasar also showed that Balthasar utilizes a mediating concept when he says that the Spirit paradoxically pervades “the entire event of the Son’s

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<sup>30</sup> See also sections 3.4.3.1 and 4.4.2 of the dissertation where I appropriate this diagram from Balthasar.

origination from the Father.” Balthasar often utilizes an analogy for the immanent Trinity from the human nuclear family, and in Balthasar’s usage it illustrates the tension between the hierarchical level of constitution and the hierarchical level of relation in his understanding of the spiration of the Holy Spirit.<sup>311</sup>

Finally, Balthasar’s discussion in “Toward a Definition of the Processions: Word, Son, Image, Expression” in the section “The Position of the Logos in God” again evidences the tension between a hierarchical level of constitution and a hierarchical level of relation in Balthasar’s understanding of the immanent Trinity. Here Balthasar finds the thought of Bonaventure especially helpful:

The emphasis that Bonaventure places on the [Son as the] *expressio* [of the Father] brings out more clearly [than Aquinas’ understanding of the Son as the *verbum* of the Father] certain points that are important for us. First, as has been shown, the procession of the Son who expresses the Father is itself an act of the Father’s love (just as the man’s natural generative act is, or ought to be, the expression of the begetter’s love); Bonaventure reflects explicitly on the love between man and woman as an image for the common production of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son. Second, and as a consequence of the first point, the Son holds himself “at the Father’s disposal” (*dispositivus*) in every respect, for which reason he must serve as the *mundus archetypus* [archetypal world] of all that God can create.<sup>312</sup>

Here we again note that at a level of constitution (the “first point”) Balthasar conceives the Father as (logically) prior to the Son in generation and conceives the Father and the Son as

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<sup>311</sup> For another important example of Balthasar’s use of the analogy of the human family to illustrate the immanent Trinity, see *Theo-Logic*, 3:140–41. In general, Balthasar conceives the husband-wife relationship as analogous to the hierarchical Father-Son relationship. In John Sachs, “The Holy Spirit and Christian Form,” 388, Sachs, who is an otherwise quite sympathetic interpreter of Balthasar, says the following of the great hierarchy in the husband-wife Trinitarian analogy in Balthasar’s usage: “The ‘masculine-feminine’ typology is an example of a gender-symbolism which, widely present in patristic theology, is developed in a highly idiosyncratic way by Balthasar that is hardly credible today. Many of the underlying points are valid and can be made without appealing to questionable gender stereotypes.” See also John Sachs, “Deus Semper Major—Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam: The Pneumatology and Spirituality of Han Urs von Balthasar” for more discussion of Balthasar’s understanding of the spiration of the Spirit.

<sup>312</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, 2:167–68.

(logically) prior to the Holy Spirit in spiration. But at a level of relation (the “second point”) the Son “holds himself at the Father’s disposal in every respect,” thus showing both that the Son has consistent dialogical relations with the Father and that the Father exercises great hierarchy over the Son in these relations. Thus we again see that there is a tension between a level of constitution and a level of relation in Balthasar’s understanding of the Trinity, with the Father exercising great hierarchy over the Son and the Spirit at both levels, and especially at the level of constitution. Based on the hierarchy present at both levels and in the mediating concepts, we see how Balthasar “resolves” his hierarchy-equality polarity or tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the hierarchical pole of the system.

#### 4.1.3. Conclusion.

Balthasar posits great hierarchy emanating from the Father in the immanent Trinity. Margaret Turek rightly notes that a tension, or as she calls it, a paradox, exists in Balthasar’s understanding of the immanent Trinity between the Father’s eternal generation of the Son and the obedience of the Son to the Father. My reading of the “Logos and Logic in God” chapter from the second volume of *Theo-Logic* confirms Turek’s basic thesis. There is a tension in Balthasar’s understanding of the immanent Trinity between what I have termed, in contemporary Trinitarian language, a hierarchical level of constitution and a hierarchical level of relation. In the hierarchical level of constitution, the begetting Father (logically) precedes the Son. But in the level of relation, the Father and the Son consistently relate to one another, albeit with the Father always hierarchical over the Son.

My reading of the “Logos and Logic in God” chapter from the second volume of *Theo-Logic* also suggested that Turek in her book does not clearly demarcate the hierarchical mediating concepts in Balthasar that do not really fit into either of Balthasar’s two Trinitarian

levels. Such mediating concepts include, for example, the notion that the Son allows himself to be begotten by the Father. My reading of the second volume of *Theo-Logic* also more clearly than Turek's book brought out that the tension in Balthasar's understanding of the immanent Trinity also extends to the Holy Spirit, even while acknowledging with Alyssa Pitstick that the Father-Son relationship is more fundamental in Balthasar's trilogy. Thus the Spirit at the hierarchical level of constitution is logically consequent to the Father and the Son. And at the hierarchical level of relation the Spirit consistently relates with, although is subordinate to, the Son and especially the Father. Balthasar also utilizes mediating concepts in the case of the spiration of the Spirit, such as when he says that the Spirit retroactively pervades "the entire event of the Son's origination from the Father." Such mediating statements in Balthasar are hierarchical. By stressing the hierarchy of the Father over the Son and the Spirit and the hierarchy of the Father and Son over the Spirit in his level of constitution, level of relation, and mediating concepts, Balthasar "resolves" his hierarchy-equality polarity or tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the hierarchical pole of the system.

#### **4.2. The Tension in Volf's Egalitarian Understanding of the Immanent Trinity**

Volf's understanding of the immanent Trinity is generally egalitarian, although he also allows for a certain limited hierarchy among the divine persons. Volf stresses an egalitarian level of relation in the immanent Trinity even while also teaching a hierarchical level of constitution. In this section, we will see that since Volf pits equality and hierarchy against one another and chooses the latter, he evidences a hierarchy-equality polarity or tension in his understanding of the Trinity. In other words, we will see that Volf "resolves" his hierarchy-equality tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the egalitarian pole of the system. In this section my method will be to look at the general contours of Volf's egalitarian understanding of

the immanent Trinity as evident predominantly in the “Trinity and Church” chapter of *After Our Likeness*. First, through a look at Volf’s “Trinity and Church” chapter, I will look at Volf’s two-level solution for the immanent Trinity and the tension between these two levels. And second, again through a look at Volf’s “Trinity and Church” chapter, I will look at how Volf uses the notion of perichoresis as a mediating concept between the two levels in such a way as to associate it chiefly with the equality of the divine persons.

#### **4.2.1. An Egalitarian Level of Relation versus a Hierarchical Level of Constitution in Volf’s Understanding of the Immanent Trinity**

Volf’s main constructive discussion of the immanent Trinity in the “Trinity and Church” chapter begins in the “Relational Personhood” section. Here Volf closely associates his Trinitarian thought with Moltmann:

To do justice to the salvation history from which knowledge of the Trinity is actually acquired, one must conceive the Trinitarian persons as subjects.... Person and relation emerge simultaneously and mutually presuppose one another. This is one of the basic insights in Jürgen Moltmann’s doctrine of the Trinity: “Here there are no persons without relations; but there are no relations without persons either. Person and relation are complementary.” The divine persons are constituted through *generatio* and *spiratio* as subjects who, though different, are mutually related from the outset and are inconceivable without these relations; furthermore, they manifest their own personhood and affirm that of others through their mutual relations of giving and receiving.<sup>313</sup>

Volf’s social Trinitarianism seeks to stress that the divine persons are subjects that can only exist in communion.<sup>314</sup> One notices here that Volf already hints at his two-level solution to the immanent Trinity since he speaks of both the constitution of the persons through generation and

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<sup>313</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 205.

<sup>314</sup> Although Volf does not reject Moltmann’s description of the divine persons as “centers of consciousness,” he does elsewhere consciously adopt Pannenberg’s different description of the divine persons as “living realizations of separate centers of action” (*ibid.*, 215). Although this different description is not trivial in Pannenberg’s Trinitarian theology, Volf employ it as nearly equivalent to Moltmann’s description.

spiration as well as of the relations among the persons. Furthermore, one already anticipates a tension between the two levels. For at the level of constitution Volf speaks of generation and spiration, which activities Volf will later say are performed by the Father. But at the level of relation the persons relate in a fully mutual way. The Trinitarian tension in Volf is thus between a hierarchical level of constitution and an egalitarian level of relation.

Volf's "Relational Personhood" discussion also already anticipates his preference when it comes to emphasizing either the level of constitution or the level of relation. The title of the section already gives the answer that Volf heavily prioritizes the egalitarian level of relation. Volf has no corresponding section that would deal in detail with the hierarchical level of constitution. Furthermore, within the "Relational Personhood" section mention of the hierarchical processions is very infrequent. Rather, Volf typically makes statements such as the following:

*Ecclesial communion on this side of God's new creation can correspond to the perfect mutual love of the Trinitarian persons only in a broken fashion. The church's fellowship is always in transit between the historical minimum and the eschatological maximum of the correspondence to the love in which the Trinitarian persons live. The minimum consists in "being from others" and "being together with others," for only a communion of persons can correspond to the Trinity. The maximum consists in perfect "being toward others," in the love in which they give of themselves to one another and thereby affirm one another and themselves.<sup>315</sup>*

Here Volf says that in order to more fully image the Trinity, the church must be a communion of people that are always "towards" one another, that is, in mutual fellowship. This contrasts with Volf's hierarchical level of constitution where the Father unilaterally constitutes the Son and Spirit. Volf typically emphasizes the egalitarian level of relation over the hierarchical level of constitution.

We next move in the “Trinity and Church” chapter to the section “The Structure of Trinitarian and Ecclesial Relations,” which will occupy the rest of our time in the present section. Already in the first sentence the tension in Volf between his two levels is evident:

**The relations between the persons and their personal interiority presuppose the “generation” of the Son and the “procession” of the Spirit, since only persons who are already constituted can relate to one another and exist in one another.<sup>315</sup>**

Here Volf establishes a certain priority of the level of constitution over the level of relation to the extent that only persons that are already hierarchically constituted may then relate to one another in an egalitarian manner. This quotation is a good example of Volf’s tendency to use the level of constitution to help ensure the distinctness of the divine persons. However, we will see that Volf has little other use for the hierarchical level of constitution than this distinguishing function, which shows in a more negative fashion that Volf emphasizes the egalitarian relations of the divine persons.

We now come to the heart of Volf’s discussion of the two-level solution to the immanent Trinity. Volf begins by rejecting two Trinitarian positions contrary to his own two-level position:

**Either the relations dissolve into the processions, or the processions are understood as mutual relations. In the first case, the result is unilinear hierarchical relations between the divine persons; the Father begets the Son and spirates (together with the Son?) the Spirit, and sends the Son and (with him?) the Spirit.... In the second case, the divine persons dissolve into a common divine nature; all the persons mutually constitute and are conditioned by one another, and for that reason none can be distinguished from the others, unless following Hegel one completely equates the immanent and economic Trinity and from the outset understands the Son as the incarnate divine person and the Spirit as the person who brings the world to God.<sup>317</sup>**

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 207, italics original.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 216.



In chapter two, we looked at a version of the first option, according to Volf, when we looked at the Trinitarian thought of Zizioulas, and this will not be repeated here. We also saw a version of the second option, according to Volf, with the thought of Ratzinger and his alleged position that the divine persons are subordinated to the divine substance over them. However, this second option also has another, Hegelian version according to Volf where the immanent Trinity is absorbed into the economic Trinity. Volf in a footnote to this quotation implies that Wolfhart Pannenberg's understanding of the Trinity where he sees the processions as mutual relations is Hegelian. This is of great importance for this dissertation and thus now will be explored in more detail.

Volf in this footnote to our quotation lays out his argument against Pannenberg. Volf writes,

Wolfhart Pannenberg, who disputes the distinction between the level of constitution and that of relation, understands the constituting of the persons as strictly reciprocal. This leads him to insist on the *future* monarchy of the Father, for otherwise one could not distinguish between the persons. [For Pannenberg] the monarchy of the Father is thus less a requirement of the unity of the divine persons—the *divine* unity, which is the “result” of the perfect and loving “common operation of the three persons” (*Theology*, 1.325), does not need the monarchy of the Father as its “seal”—than the presupposition of their distinctions. If the future monarchy of the Father really were necessary for the unity of the triune God, then Pannenberg would be unable, as Ingolf Dalferth has critically remarked, “to present a trinitarian-theological solution to the problem of the unity of God that was more than an eschatological consolation in a future ‘later’ . . . .”<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 216, italics original.

Here Volf rejects Pannenberg's notion of seeing the divine processions as mutual relations.<sup>319</sup>

Volf here implies that Pannenberg's conception of the future monarchy of the Father is in danger of a process-like Hegelianism. He here allows that Pannenberg possibly conceives of the unity of the divine persons in an adequate manner so that Pannenberg would only conceive of their *distinction* as being achieved in a Hegelian manner.<sup>320</sup> Nevertheless, Volf's last sentence suggests that Volf believes that Pannenberg is Hegelian on both counts. It is striking, considering the value that Volf can place on the Trinitarian thought of Pannenberg, that Volf so quickly dismisses seeing the processions as mutual relations as simply being Hegelian. Volf does not even consider the possibility that the processions may be conceived of as mutual relations while at the same time avoiding Hegelianism and avoiding confusing the divine persons.<sup>321</sup> That a mutual hierarchy framework claims precisely this will be considered later in the chapter. For the present purposes we note that it is possible here that Volf wants to retain his two-level solution because through it he is actually able to minimize the importance of hierarchy in the doctrine of

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<sup>319</sup> However, Volf is not consistent on rejecting seeing the processions as mutual relations. For example, consider Volf, "The Trinity Is Our Social Program," 409: "As Colin Gunton points out in *The One, the Three, and the Many*, "the persons [of the Trinity] do not simply enter into relations with one another, but are constituted by one another in the relations." See further section 3.2.2 below about Volf's mediating concepts between the two levels of the Trinity.

<sup>320</sup> Volf seems to contradict himself here. In the previous paragraph I quoted Volf as saying that one who sees the processions as mutual relations can only distinguish the divine persons if that theologian dissolves the immanent Trinity into the economic Trinity in a Hegelian manner. But this would call into question Volf's discussion in the present quotation that says that Pannenberg adequately conceives divine unity. How according to Volf can Pannenberg simultaneously adequately conceive of divine unity and yet dissolve the immanent Trinity into the economic Trinity in a Hegelian manner? See also Volf's references in his footnote to Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 45, and O'Donnell, "Pannenberg's Doctrine of God," *Gregorianum* 72 (1991): 96, both of which suggest that Pannenberg is Hegelian in such a way that God would be dependent upon the incarnation of the Son in the world for his eternal existence.

<sup>321</sup> Other theologians besides Pannenberg who also hold to the divine processions involving mutual relations more resemble Balthasar and Volf in stressing the clear need for the immanent Trinity not to be dependent upon creation for its eternal existence. For example, Gunton, who sees the processions as mutual relations, in *The One, the Three*, 161, observes, "The objection to an attempt to restrict theology to the economy alone is not that it involves the world of becoming, decisively not, but rather that, as it stands, it does not allow for an ontological distinction between God and the world to be securely maintained."

the Trinity and instead focus on the fully egalitarian relations of the divine persons. The fact that Volf singles out for disapproval Pannenberg's stressing the Father's monarchy, a clearly hierarchical term, in the context of the relations of the divine persons supports this claim. So too does the fact that Volf restricts the relevance of the constitution of the divine persons to one's ability to distinguish among the divine persons. Whether or not Volf intentionally uses the hierarchical level of constitution to minimize hierarchy in the immanent Trinity, Volf at the very least heavily emphasizes the egalitarian relations of the divine persons and rarely mentions the hierarchical level of constitution, and does mention it mainly when he wishes to distinguish among the persons.

Volf continues his discussion by more clearly laying out his constructive two-level solution for the immanent Trinity. Volf writes,

The one constituting and the one constituted, however, are to be distinguished both conceptually and substantively from the constitutive process itself. This is why one must distinguish between the constitution of the persons and their relations. The Son and the Spirit are constituted by the Father. The Father is the source from which the Son and the Spirit receive their divinity; he constitutes the "hypostatic divinity" of the Son and Spirit. Just *how* all three divine persons exist as God, however, or their "innertrinitarian form," is determined by their mutual relations. The constitution of the persons and their relations are, of course, not to be conceived as two temporally sequential steps, but rather as two dimensions of the eternal life of the triune God. The constitution of persons through generation and procession grounds the distinctions among the persons, who are simultaneously constituted as standing in relations; these distinctions then manifest themselves in the salvation-historical differentiation of the persons.<sup>322</sup>

Here Volf clearly distinguishes the hierarchical level of constitution and the egalitarian level of relation, and one easily sees the tension that results. At the hierarchical level of constitution the Father is conceived of as (logically) prior to the Son and Spirit in the "process" of the

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<sup>322</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 216–17, italics original.

processions so that the Son and Spirit do not consciously relate to the Father.<sup>323</sup> But at the level of relation the divine persons consistently relate to one another in a fully egalitarian manner, a point of great emphasis for Volf, although this relating has nothing to do with the constituting of the divine persons. Perhaps sensing the tension between his two levels, Volf here employs a mediating concept by saying that the two levels are not two temporally sequential steps in the life of the Trinity.<sup>324</sup> The tension in Volf's understanding of the immanent Trinity between his hierarchical level of constitution and his egalitarian level of relation is clearly evident.

Finally, Volf concludes his discussion of the two levels in the section "The Structure of Trinitarian and Ecclesial Relations" by rooting them in the economy of salvation. Volf says,

Within salvation history they [the divine persons] do appear as persons standing in reciprocal relationships to one another. With regard to the immanent Trinity, salvation history thus allows us to infer the fundamental equality of the divine persons in their mutual determination and their mutual interpenetration; even if the Father is the source of the deity and accordingly sends the Son and the Spirit, he also gives everything to the Son and glorifies him, just as the Son also glorifies the Father and gives the reign over to the Father (see Matt. 28:18; John 13:31–32; 16:14; 17:1; 1 Cor. 15:24). Moreover, within a community of perfect love between persons who share all the divine attributes, a notion of hierarchy and subordination is inconceivable. Within *relations* between the divine persons, the Father is for that reason not the one over against the others, nor "the First," but rather the *one among the others*.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> By saying "process" Volf may not adequately conceive of the personality of the Father himself. In the chief section of *The Trinity and the Kingdom* that Volf points the reader to in his footnotes to the present quotation, Moltmann makes a statement that explicitly says that he sees the processions not in any way coming about by the will of the Father but rather purely "by nature" or "substantially." For example, Moltmann says, "The generation and birth of the Son come from the Father's nature, not from his will. That is why we talk about the *eternal* generation and birth of the Son. The Father begets and bears the Son out of the necessity of his being" (167, italics original). Whether or not this depersonalization of the Father is the case for Volf, we at least note that Volf himself speaks of the depersonalizing effects of one who lords authority over another, such as in Zizioulas' conception of the Father-Son relationship. See section 2.2.2.2 of the dissertation.

<sup>324</sup> However, the mediating concept that Volf almost always uses is perichoresis. This will be discussed further in the next section.

<sup>325</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 217, italics original. This quotation clearly shows the close connection between Volf's two-level understanding of the immanent Trinity and his understanding of the egalitarian relations and

Here Volf compares the economic activities of egalitarian glorification and hierarchical sending to the level of relation and the level of constitution, respectively. This is how Volf determines that the level of relation is supposed to be strictly egalitarian and the level of constitution strictly hierarchical. The tension between the two levels is again evident. However, Volf in his book seldom mentions the hierarchical level of constitution just as he rarely mentions hierarchical sending. This again points to the tension in Volf's Trinitarian understanding since Volf has little place in his doctrine of the immanent Trinity for the hierarchy he sees between the divine persons. It also points to my previous suggestion that Volf only infrequently acknowledges the hierarchical level of constitution in order to preserve the distinctness of the persons and to my previous suggestion that this may be part of why he rejects Pannenberg's seeing the processions as mutual relations.<sup>326</sup> In this regard, we also note in the present quotation that "within a community of perfect love... a notion of hierarchy and subordination is inconceivable." This again demonstrates that Volf's hierarchical level of constitution cannot allow something like the consciousness of the Son and the Spirit, for otherwise at the level of constitution one would have a community that actually allowed the inconceivable "notion of hierarchy and subordination." And again, even the Father may not be allowed consciousness or personality at the level of constitution, for in this case one would still have a person without a community, which seems in conflict with Volf's earlier definition of "relational personhood." Thus we see the nature of the tension in Volf's two-level understanding of the immanent Trinity where Volf heavily prioritizes

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hierarchical sending among the divine persons in the economic Trinity.

<sup>326</sup> That Volf sees the egalitarian relations of the person in the immanent Trinity as primary also may clearly be seen in his lack of any mention of hierarchy between the divine persons in such Trinitarian works of his as "Being as God Is: Trinity and Generosity," in *God's Life in Trinity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006); and "Trinity, Unity, Primacy: On the Trinitarian Nature of Unity and Its Implications for the Question of Primacy," in *Petrine Ministry and the Unity of the Church: Toward a Patient and Fraternal Dialogue*, ed. James Puglisi (Collegeville, MN:

the egalitarian level of relation and minimizes the significance of the hierarchical level of constitution.<sup>327</sup> Based on this heavy emphasis upon the equality of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity, we see how Volf “resolves” his hierarchy-equality polarity or tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the egalitarian pole of the system.

#### **4.2.2. Perichoresis as the Chief Mediating Concept between the Two Levels in the Immanent Trinity for Volf**

Besides teaching an egalitarian level of relation and a hierarchical level of constitution, Volf also uses the concept of perichoresis to try to mediate between the two levels. Volf in the section “Perichoretic Personhood” in the “Trinity and Church” chapter speaks of perichoresis in the context of the immanent Trinity and defines it as the mutual indwelling of the divine persons.<sup>328</sup> However, there is clearly an ambiguity in Volf’s understanding of perichoresis as he uses it to mediate between his two levels concerning whether perichoresis is hierarchical or egalitarian. For example, Volf says,

In their mutual giving and receiving, the Trinitarian persons are not only interdependent, but also *mutually internal*, something to which the Johannine Jesus repeatedly refers: “so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (John 10:38; cf. 14:10–11; 17:21). This mutually internal abiding and interpenetration of the Trinitarian persons, which since Pseudo-Cyril has been called περιχώρησις, determines the character both of the divine persons and of their unity.<sup>329</sup>

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Liturgical Press, 1999).

<sup>327</sup> Del Colle, “Communion and the Trinity: The Free Church Ecclesiology of Miroslav Volf—A Catholic Response,” 315, critiques Volf by saying that his two levels of the Trinity do not necessarily inform one another.

<sup>328</sup> Volf probably uses John 17 more than any other portion of the Bible to describe the Trinity. This is significant since John 17 is the main place in John’s Gospel, and probably the New Testament in general, that describes the mutual indwelling of the divine persons.

<sup>329</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 208, italics original.

Not surprisingly, Volf associates perichoresis with the egalitarian level of relation more than with the hierarchical level of constitution. In the present instance Volf associates the egalitarian “mutual giving and receiving” of the divine persons with the perichoresis of the divine persons evident in the various Johannine passages he cites. But Volf here is only suggestive, at most, of the hierarchical level of constitution by saying that perichoresis “determines the character of the divine persons and of their unity,” which statement may have certain connotations of the distinctness of the divine persons obtained at the level of constitution.<sup>330</sup> In what follows we will further see that in general Volf uses perichoresis ambiguously, usually associating it with the egalitarian level of relation but sometimes associating it with the hierarchical level of constitution.<sup>331</sup>

Volf continues in “Perichoretic Personhood” by describing in greater detail what he means by perichoresis. He says,

Perichoresis refers to the reciprocal *interiority* of the Trinitarian persons. In every divine person as a subject, the other persons also indwell; all mutually permeate one another, though in so doing they do not cease to be distinct persons. In fact, the distinctions between them are precisely the presupposition of that interiority, since persons who have dissolved into one another cannot exist in one another. Perichoresis is “co-inherence in one another without any coalescence or commixture.” This is why both statements can be made: “Father and Son are in one another,” and “Christians are in *them*” (“in us”—plural!; John 17:21).<sup>332</sup>

Perichoresis here is ambiguous even if it is mostly associated with the egalitarian level of relation. For example, Volf associates perichoresis with the fact that the divine persons

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<sup>330</sup> Otherwise, one would be left with the odd conclusion that the divine persons’ unity has nothing to do with their constitution.

<sup>331</sup> See “The Spirit and the Church,” 396–98, where Volf stresses the perichoresis, equality, and love of the divine persons as those aspects of the Trinity that are especially relevant for the church in its imaging the Trinity. Here Volf associates perichoresis with equality and sees this as relevant for ecclesiology.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, 209, italics original.

“mutually” permeate one another, which mutuality we have seen is excluded in the hierarchical level of constitution. But perichoresis here also somehow involves the level of constitution, since Volf brings up the “distinctions” of the divine persons, which distinctions we have seen for Volf arise from the level of constitution. Accordingly, here Volf says that these distinctions are the presuppositions for the mutual indwelling. Perichoresis here for Volf is ambiguous, but he emphasizes its association with the egalitarian level of relation.

Volf also has a telling footnote attached to the previous quotation that further shows that there is a tension in his understanding of perichoresis. Volf says,

The objection immediately seems to arise that the notion of “co-inherence without coalescence” is just as difficult to conceive as is the idea criticized above regarding personhood as pure relationality. It is important to note, however, that the respective points of departure are different. Perichoresis starts with persons who are then to be conceived as distinct persons in their mutual interiority; the understanding of person as pure relationality starts with relations which must then “harden” into persons. The idea of perichoresis starts with the story of revelation (Father, Son, and Spirit as acting and speaking persons), and then admittedly leads into what comes close to being a conceptual labyrinth; the idea of pure relationality, by contrast, must proceed first through the conceptual labyrinth in order to arrive at the story of revelation in the first place.<sup>333</sup>

Here Volf admits that perichoresis understood as “co-inherence without coalescence” is “difficult” and is a “conceptual labyrinth.” This sense about the difficulty of the concept of perichoresis by Volf is related to what I have referred to as the ambiguity in his conception of perichoresis. In the present instance, Volf, on the one hand, most associate perichoresis with the divine persons “acting and speaking” in the story of revelation, which fits with his egalitarian level of relation. On the other hand, Volf here also “presupposes” that perichoresis is integrally associated with the “distinctness” of the divine persons, which distinctness Volf associates with

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid.



the hierarchical level of constitution. Again Volf's mediating concept of perichoresis is ambiguous as to whether it includes hierarchy and again Volf most associates it with the egalitarian level of relation.

In Volf's following discussion, one again senses this ambiguity of perichoresis. Volf says,

The unity of the triune God is grounded neither in the numerically identical substance [which Volf rejects] nor in the accidental intentions of the persons, but rather in their *mutually interior being* [perichoresis]. By the power of their eternal love, the divine persons exist so intimately with, for, and in one another that they themselves constitute themselves in their unique, incomparable and complete union.<sup>334</sup>

Volf by here saying "with, for, and in" has elements that could refer to his constitutional level, relational level, and perichoresis, respectively. Yet each of these terms represents a way that the persons "constitute themselves" (emphasis mine), even though Volf has defined his level of constitution as being hierarchical in such a way that the Father would not be dependent on the Son and Spirit for his constitution. Even besides this, it is striking that in considering the divine unity Volf here so clearly rejects associating perichoresis with the "accidental intentions," or we might say the volition, of the divine persons. Volf here associates perichoresis with the hierarchical level of constitution since the egalitarian level of relation certainly involves the "accidental intentions" of the divine persons. Again, one can see that Volf uses the term perichoresis ambiguously.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 210, italics original.

<sup>335</sup> In a footnote Volf says that people are wrong to assert that Moltmann advocates unity only on the basis of the divine wills (recalling the level of relation) since Moltmann rather understands perichoresis as mutual indwelling. Volf here is trying to show that his position is the same as Moltmann's, and so we may conclude that Volf does not *only* associate perichoresis with the level of relation and the wills of the divine persons but also with the level of constitution. To the extent that Volf associates perichoresis with the level of constitution here, it appears impersonal, or even "substance-like," in nature since it is disconnected from the wills of the divine persons.

In this same footnote, Volf also says that Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:325, is wrong to say that Moltmann conflates the egalitarian level of relations and perichoresis. Again Volf is arguing here that Moltmann *also* associates perichoresis with the hierarchical level of constitution (in addition to the egalitarian level of relation).

In a footnote to the previous quotation, Volf further evidences the ambiguity in his understanding of perichoresis. He writes,

It is often assumed that perichoresis and the oneness of the divine substance are two complementary ways of conceiving the unity of God.... It is questionable, however, whether the two ideas are compatible. If one presupposes the one numerically identical substance of God, then the only content of the divine persons consists in their relations of origin. The Father, for example, has everything in common with the Son except being begotten. The persons are nothing more than the ἀγεννησία, γέννησις, and ἐκπόρευσις, and are such as “ways in which the one indivisible divine substance distributes and presents Itself” (Kelly, *Doctrines*, 266). If under the presupposition of the unity of the divine substance one wishes to speak of the coinherence of persons, then one must assert that the ἀγεννησία is in γέννησις, which is obviously nonsense. Although the Father can be in the Son (see note 84 above)—at least according to the Johannine Jesus—Fatherhood cannot be in Sonship. The coinherence of persons can come about only if the persons, while essentially standing in relations, nevertheless are not identical with those relations. This, however, presupposes that one abandons the numerical identity of the divine substance.<sup>336</sup>

Here Volf connects perichoresis with especially the egalitarian level of relation since he stresses the personality and volition of each divine person. For Volf here says that the coinherence (perichoresis) of the divine persons can come about only through their relations, which relations are not possible in Volf’s level of constitution.<sup>337</sup> Furthermore, Volf’s rejection of connecting perichoresis with the relations of origin would also seem to be a rejection of connecting perichoresis with Volf’s hierarchical level of constitution, even though we have seen that Volf himself sometimes makes this connection between perichoresis and the level of constitution. At

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But the following statement from Moltmann in *The Trinity and the Kingdom* shows that Pannenberg is right in seeing in Moltmann’s thought a very close connection between perichoresis and the egalitarian level of relation: “Through the concept of perichoresis, all subordinationism in the doctrine of the Trinity is avoided” (*The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 175).

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>337</sup> Here it is also not clear how these relations of the divine persons differ from the “accidental intentions” of the divine persons from the previous quotation.

any rate, again one is unsure if perichoresis allows for hierarchy or not, although again Volf mostly associates it with the egalitarian level of relation.

A second footnote attached to the quotation above similarly points to the ambiguity in Volf's understanding of perichoresis. Volf says,

When O'Donnell writes that the "union which Moltmann describes is only a moral union" ..., he overlooks precisely the decisive point, namely, that the divine persons *are* in one another. While this being in one another does presuppose the constitution of the persons..., the persons are constituted as being mutually internal to one another; they do not only later become mutually internal to one another.<sup>338</sup>

In seeming contradiction to the previous footnote, Volf here decisively connects perichoresis with the hierarchical level of constitution. In the present instance, the context is an accusation against Moltmann that Moltmann only sees divine unity as a moral union at the level of relation. Volf's response here strongly associates perichoresis with the level of constitution, for Volf here says that the divine persons are *constituted* as mutually internal to one another. We also note that perichoresis here in the context of the level of constitution is impersonal for at least the Son and the Spirit since it is dissociated from their volition. Again we see that Volf's usage of perichoresis is ambiguous, in this in one of Volf's rare instances where he chiefly associates perichoresis with the hierarchical level of constitution.

Finally, Volf returns to the notion of perichoresis at the end of "The Structure of Trinitarian and Ecclesial Relations." Volf begins by saying,

At the Trinitarian level, unity does not presuppose the unifying one, but rather is constituted through perfect love, which is the very nature of God and through which the divine persons exist in one another [perichoresis].<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 210, italics original.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 219.

Perichoresis here again is ambiguous. It does not fit into the level of constitution since it is not to be associated with the “unifying one” (the Father) and since it seems to *result* from “perfect love,” which love requires the reciprocal volition of the divine persons at the level of relation. But it does not fit into the level of relation since here perichoretic unity is *constituted* through perfect love, even though Volf has said that the level of relation does not involve the constitution of the divine persons, which constitution rather occurs at the hierarchical level of constitution. Again perichoresis in Volf is ambiguous as to whether it includes hierarchy, although he here chiefly associates it with the egalitarian level of relation. Based on Volf’s heavy emphasis in the immanent Trinity upon the equality of the divine persons in both his level of relation and perichoresis, we see how Volf “resolves” his hierarchy-equality polarity or tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the egalitarian pole of the system.

#### 4.2.3. Conclusion

In this section I have shown that Volf exhibits a tension between hierarchy and equality in his understanding of the immanent Trinity. Utilizing *After Our Likeness* I laid out the basic shape of this tension as Volf pits a hierarchical level of constitution against an egalitarian level of relation and greatly subordinates the former to the latter. Here there is a tension between the Father (logically) preceding the Son and the Spirit at the level of constitution and the consistent mutual interaction of the divine persons at the level of relation.

*After Our Likeness* also showed that Volf uses perichoresis as a mediating concept between the hierarchical level of constitution and the egalitarian level of relation in his understanding of the immanent Trinity. Volf clearly connects perichoresis most with the egalitarian level of relation and emphasizes this connection, but sometimes, especially when Volf is concerned to preserve the distinctness of the divine persons, he also vaguely associates perichoresis with the

hierarchical level of constitution. The result of this is that perichoresis is ambiguous in Volf's proposal because in each instance it is not clear whether it allows for hierarchy or not. The effect of this use of the concept of perichoresis is that Volf allows a minimal amount of hierarchy in his understanding of the immanent Trinity, typically only allowing hierarchy when the distinction of the divine persons is at issue. Based on this heavy emphasis in his understanding of the immanent Trinity upon the equality of the divine persons both at the level of relation and in the mediating concept perichoresis, we see how Volf "resolves" his hierarchy-equality polarity or tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the egalitarian pole of the system.

#### **4.3. A Brief Comparison of and Evaluation of Balthasar and Volf**

Various similarities and differences are evident in the understanding of the immanent Trinity by Balthasar and Volf. Balthasar has an overall hierarchical trajectory in his understanding of the immanent Trinity, while Volf has an overall egalitarian trajectory. Both have a hierarchy-equality tension in their social conceptions of the economic Trinity, but Balthasar "resolves" it in a hierarchical manner while Volf does so in an egalitarian manner. Otherwise stated, both Balthasar and Volf exhibit a hierarchy-equality tension or polarity in their respective understandings of the immanent Trinity, although the tension in each case is dealt with by moving towards one side of the polarity. Both Balthasar and Volf distinguish in the immanent Trinity between a level of constitution, where the Father (logically) precedes the Son and the Spirit, and a level of relation where the divine persons consistently relate. In Balthasar there is a tension between what I have referred to as a hierarchical level of constitution and a hierarchical level of relation. In both levels, Balthasar stresses the hierarchy of the Father over the Son and places comparatively little emphasis on their equality. Volf, on the other hand, has a tension between a hierarchical level of constitution and an egalitarian level of relation, with Volf

overwhelmingly emphasizing the latter over the former. The tension between hierarchy and equality is thus more explicit in Volf than in Balthasar since Volf explicitly contrasts hierarchy and equality (and chooses the equality pole of the polarity) whereas Balthasar simply talks about and emphasizes hierarchy and does not often mention equality (and in this way chooses the hierarchy pole of the polarity).

Both Balthasar and Volf also employ concepts that seek to mediate to some extent between their two levels in tension with one another. However, these mediating statements function differently in the two theologians. The effect of Balthasar's hierarchical mediating concepts is to intensify the hierarchy of the Father over the Son in the immanent Trinity both by more easily allowing the two levels to reinforce one another and by providing yet another way that the Father is hierarchical over the Son. But Volf sees his mediating concept of perichoresis as primarily egalitarian and associates it chiefly with the egalitarian relations of the divine persons while making much less of a connection between perichoresis and the hierarchical level of constitution. Thus, in Volf the mediating concept perichoresis allows a minimal amount of hierarchy among the divine persons, usually in order to better distinguish between them. Finally, the fact that for both Balthasar and Volf the level of relation and the mediating concepts generally speak of the divine persons consistently relating to one another reinforces viewing both Balthasar and Volf as social Trinitarians.

Having briefly compared Balthasar's and Volf's proposals for the immanent Trinity, I will now briefly evaluate them for how well they account for the sociality of the divine persons. A strength of Balthasar's understanding of the immanent Trinity is that it generally distinguishes the divine persons in the level of constitution, in the level of relation, and in the mediating concepts. But if Balthasar accounts for the uniqueness of the divine persons, he does not account

adequately for their dignity. Thus Balthasar understands the hierarchical level of constitution in an almost master-slave fashion since, for example, the Father (logically) precedes the Son. As for the hierarchical level of relation, Balthasar here too conceives of the Father-Son relationship as basically master-slave in character since the Son is characterized by such things as obedience and thankfulness to the Father for his existence received from him in the level of constitution. And since Balthasar's mediating concepts have the effect of intensifying the hierarchy of the Father over the Son in Balthasar's understanding of the immanent Trinity, they also contribute to Balthasar's tendency to view the hierarchy of the Father over the Son in a master-slave fashion. In the level of constitution, the level of relation, and the mediating statements, Balthasar thus conceives the hierarchy of the Father over the Son as basically master-slave in character and in this way detracts from the dignity of the Son and, in the process, of the dignity of the Father himself, since the Son is portrayed as compelled by the Father and the Father is portrayed as not sufficiently taking into account the worth of the Son. Here we may also note that for Balthasar the master-slave character of the Father's hierarchy over the Son in the level of constitution, level of relation, and mediating concepts in the immanent Trinity mirrors the similar master-slave hierarchy of the Father over the Son in the corresponding three areas in the economic Trinity as evident in my discussion in section 3.3 of the dissertation. A similar conclusion also follows for Balthasar's understanding of the Holy Spirit relative to the Son and especially relative to the Father in his spiration from them. Balthasar portrays the Father as exercising great hierarchy over the Son and the Spirit as the Father and the Son spirate the Spirit. At the level of constitution, the Father and Son logically precede the Spirit; at the level of relation, especially the Father (who commands the Son) exercises an almost master-slave hierarchy over the Spirit; and in the mediating concepts, the Father and Son again exercise an almost master-slave

hierarchy over the Spirit. Again this sort of hierarchy detracts from the dignity of all three divine persons. And by detracting from the dignity of the divine persons, Balthasar does not account adequately for their sociality.

As for Volf, he too does not account adequately for the sociality of the divine persons. A strength of Volf's understanding of the immanent Trinity is that it seeks to foster the dignity of the divine persons in the level of relation and in the mediating concept of perichoresis. But if Volf generally accounts for the dignity of the divine persons, he does not account adequately for their uniqueness. Thus Volf in his egalitarian level of relation conceives of the divine persons in such a way that they are not adequately distinguished from one another. This is even more apparent in Volf's understanding of the generally egalitarian mediating concept of perichoresis. The effect of perichoresis in Volf is to blur the distinctness of the divine persons since perichoresis functions to permit only a minimal amount of hierarchy to enter Volf's understanding of the immanent Trinity. Furthermore, in the mediating concept of perichoresis itself, Volf does not account adequately for the agency of each divine person as, for example, Volf says that the consciousnesses of the divine persons overlap as they mutually indwell one another. Here for Volf the egalitarian trajectory of the divine persons in the level of relation and in the mediating concept of perichoresis in the immanent Trinity mirrors their similar egalitarian trajectory in their egalitarian relations and perichoresis in the economic Trinity as evident in my discussion in section 3.3 of the dissertation. Especially by detracting from the uniqueness of the divine persons, Volf does not account adequately for their sociality.<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> An argument could be made that, largely due to the hierarchy-equality polarity present in each, the two theologians in the end are not as different from one another as one might think. For example, Balthasar's conception of the relations between the Father and Son is basically master-slave; however, even though the Father for Balthasar commands the Son and not vice versa in Balthasar's presentation, the Son sometimes almost appears as the mirror



#### **4.4. Towards a Revised Social Trinitarian Understanding of the Immanent Trinity**

We now move on to my constructive proposal where I argue for a mutual hierarchy framework in the context of a revised social Trinitarian understanding of the immanent Trinity. In doing so, I will argue for the mutual constitution of the divine persons. First, I will offer a general description of how a “mutual hierarchy” framework functions in the context of the immanent Trinity. Next, I will discuss in more detail the mutual hierarchy of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity in light of their mutual hierarchy in the economic Trinity. Finally, I will look in greater detail at the personal properties and the mutual constitution of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity.

##### **4.4.1. An Initial Description of the Mutual Hierarchy of the Divine Persons in the Immanent Trinity**

In my mutual hierarchy proposal, the word *hierarchy* in the context of the immanent Trinity points to the fact that each divine person is unique, possessing personal properties not present in the others and having a certain power in connection with these properties. This means that the divine persons are differentiated and that each person in connection with his personal properties exercises a hierarchy or authority over the other two persons in the context of those properties.

This quickly brings us to the word *mutual* in the context of the immanent Trinity. The hierarchy of one divine person over the others in connection with his personal properties must also be thought of as allowing for mutuality in those hierarchical relationships. Here each divine person fosters the dignity of the other divine persons he is hierarchical over. Here a divine person

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image of the Father. Similarly, Volf at the level of relation homogenizes the divine persons. But an argument could be made that in so doing he detracts from their dignity.

as appropriate limits the use of his power associated with his personal properties in order to serve and foster the dignity of the other divine persons with their personal properties and power. In this mutual hierarchy, all three divine persons in a mysterious way continually constitute the existence of the others even while being constituted by them.

#### 4.4.2. The Mutual Hierarchy of the Divine Persons in the Immanent Trinity in Light of the Economic Trinity

In the previous chapter I utilized two diagrams in order to help illustrate the differentiated vocations of the divine persons as evident in John's Gospel. Here we will again utilize these diagrams as a starting point for understanding the mutual hierarchy of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity. The first diagram focused especially upon the sending of the Son:

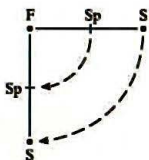


Diagram 1. The Father's Sending of the Son in the Holy Spirit.

We recall here that the horizontal line in the diagram represents the immanent Trinity. In chapter three we noted that although John's Gospel emphasizes the person of the Son and his vocation as Glorifier of the Father in its narrative, the Son in this very vocation points up to the Father as the hierarchical sender of the Son. Although John at times teaches the mediation of the Spirit between the Father and the Son during Jesus' life, John's main concern was the Spirit's vocation in the post-Easter church. Thus we saw that the Son was second in the Father-Son-Spirit ordering

of the economic Trinity.<sup>28</sup> In harmony with the notion that the economic Trinity reveals the immanent Trinity, Diagram 1 is helpful for demonstrating in the immanent Trinity that the Father generates the Son in the Holy Spirit. Here the generation of the Son in the immanent Trinity places the Son second in a Father-Son-Spirit ordering of the immanent Trinity, even while teaching a certain role of the Holy Spirit in the generation of the Son.<sup>29</sup>

If the first diagram from chapter three helps us better understand the generation of the Son, the second diagram helps us better understand the spiration of the Spirit by the Father and the Son. Again we should look at this second diagram:



Diagram 2. The Father's and the Son's Sending of the Holy Spirit.

In chapter three we noted that although John's Gospel emphasizes the person of the Son and his vocation as Glorifier of the Father in its narrative, the Son also points down to the Spirit whom he sends into the post-Easter church. Although John at times teaches the mediation of the Spirit between the Father and the Son during Jesus' life, John's main concern was the Spirit's vocation in the post-Easter church. Thus we saw that the Spirit was third in the Father-Son-Spirit ordering of the economic Trinity. John emphasizes that the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit, not vice versa. This reveals that the Holy Spirit is also ordered third in the immanent Trinity as well.

<sup>28</sup> See section 3.4.3 of the dissertation.

<sup>29</sup> See also Mönkem, *Sender, Bearer, and Giver of God's Spirit*, 103–06, for an extended discussion of the Father's generation of the Son in the Holy Spirit (*in spiritu*). See also Mönkem, *Pneumatologie: St. Spiritus Sanctus y la Spiritu Sancto de la Iglesia* (St. Louis: Editorial Concorde, 2005), 110–22, for further discussion on the generation.

Diagram 2 thus is helpful for demonstrating in the immanent Trinity that the Father and the Son spirate the Holy Spirit. This spiration of the Spirit in the immanent Trinity places the Spirit third in a Father-Son-Spirit ordering of the immanent Trinity, even while teaching that the Spirit is located between the Father and the Son who bound and encompass him.

An illustration from a human nuclear family helps illustrate how the Spirit can be ordered third in the immanent Trinity and yet be located between the Father and the Son. For example, Ephesians 5:21–6:4 points to a husband as the leader in a Christian family, to the wife as second as his complement, and to the child as ordered third. However, even though the child is ordered third in the family, he or she is best thought of as between his or her father and mother since they have the responsibility of nurturing and taking care of him or her.<sup>343</sup> Analogously, the Spirit is ordered third in the immanent Trinity but is located between the Father and the Son.

But if in chapter three there was a certain hierarchical Father-Son-Spirit ordering of the divine persons in the economic Trinity, the more fundamental concern in John's Gospel was that each divine person exercises a hierarchy over the others in the context of the unique vocation of each. Similarly, if there is a certain hierarchical Father-Son-Spirit ordering of the immanent Trinity, each divine person nevertheless exercises hierarchy over the others in the context of the

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of the Son in the Spirit.

<sup>343</sup> Significantly, Ephesians 5:21–6:4 is marked by a mutual hierarchy framework. Ephesians 5:21 (“and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ”) provides the overall framework for the entire pericope. Here each family member exercises hierarchy over the others, as all live together under Christ. See also 1 Corinthians 11:3 where Paul ultimately grounds this analogy from the human family in the Trinity: “But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.”

It is also noteworthy that familial Trinitarian themes are extensive in John's Gospel. For example, Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, 205, cites Vincent Taylor to show that ‘Father’ occurs 121 times in John's Gospel and 16 times in his letters, compared to 123 times in the rest of the New Testament. From this Erickson concludes, “This certainly suggests that for John the Father-Son relationship was the dominant category for a description of the relationship.” Further showing John's preference for the term Father rather than the term God for the first person of the Trinity is that John 1:1; 1:18; and 20:28 speak of Jesus as God rather than the Father (*ibid.*, 208–9).

personal properties of that divine person. Consider the following diagram of the immanent Trinity:

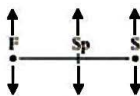


Diagram 3. The Mutual Hierarchy of the Divine Persons in the Immanent Trinity

This diagram illustrates how each divine person has a certain authority over the others in the context of his personal properties. The horizontal line in Diagram 3 is the same as the horizontal line in Diagram 1 and Diagram 2 and in conjunction with them it shows how the Father is ordered first, the Son second, and the Spirit in between them as third in the immanent Trinity. For example, the Father appears at the left in Diagram 3 in order to show a certain hierarchy and leadership over the Son and Spirit in the immanent Trinity. This corresponds to Diagram 1 and Diagram 2 where the Father exercised a leadership role as he was a stable “pivot” around whom the sending of the Son and the Spirit in the economy occurred. But more importantly, in Diagram 3 the up arrow above each divine person points to the hierarchy that each divine person exercises over the others in the immanent Trinity in connection with the personal properties of that person. Thus, for example, the arrow pointing up above the Father in Diagram 3 points to a certain hierarchy he has as the first person of the Trinity over the Son and the Spirit in connection with his unique personal properties. In this context, the arrows of Son and the Spirit point down as they defer to the Father and his personal properties. A similar alignment of an up arrow corresponding to a hierarchy of a divine person with his personal properties holds true for the Son and the Spirit as well.

However, besides illustrating the hierarchy of each divine person over the others in connection with his personal properties, Diagram 3 also illustrates how a divine person uses his personal properties in order to foster the personal properties of the others. We saw in chapter three that besides each divine person having a certain hierarchy over the others in connection with the unique vocation of each during Jesus' life, each divine person also limited his power in his vocation in such a way as to foster the dignity of the other persons as they all worked together for human redemption. This reveals that in the immanent Trinity each person in connection with his personal properties both has hierarchical power over and yet limits his power over the other divine persons in such a way as to foster their dignity. For example, although the Father has a certain hierarchy over the Son and the Spirit in connection with his unique personal properties, the Father also exercises this hierarchy in such a way as to foster the personal properties and dignity of the Son and the Spirit. In this context the arrow of the Father points down as he utilizes his personal properties in such a way as to build up the Son and Spirit. Similarly, in the context of the Father's building up the Son and the Spirit, the arrows of the Son and the Spirit point up. This same procedure that we have applied to the Father with his personal properties holds true for the Son and the Spirit as well. As each divine person utilizes his personal properties in order to build up the other divine persons and their personal properties, the dignity and mutuality of the divine persons is also fostered. In light of the mutual hierarchy of the persons evident during Jesus' life, my proposal argues for their mutual hierarchy in the immanent Trinity and in this way consistently accounts both for the unique, hierarchical personal properties of each divine person as well as for the dignity of each person in the exercise of his personal properties. By accounting both for the uniqueness and dignity of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity, my proposal also fosters their sociality that requires both of these things.

#### **4.4.3. The Personal Properties of and the Mutual Constitution of the Divine Persons in the Immanent Trinity**

Having seen how the mutual hierarchy of the divine persons in the economy reveals their mutual hierarchy in the immanent Trinity, we will now look in more detail at the personal properties of and the mutual constitution of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity. In this regard we will also suggest two corollaries that are necessary for the mutual hierarchy of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity. In doing these things we will show how a mutual hierarchy framework fosters the sociality of the immanent Trinity. My following remarks are only sketches and much more could be added, and I am certainly open to the supplementation of others. This disclaimer is especially important because, as was perhaps already apparent in our analogy from a human family, there is an inherent difficulty in describing the fundamental characteristics of persons, whether human or especially divine.

We have seen that a mutual hierarchy framework allows both that a divine person has a hierarchy over the other persons in connection with his personal properties and that a divine person exercises this hierarchy in such a way that he fosters the dignity of the other persons. We now will look at this in more detail, beginning with the Father. The Father is the divine person who generates the Son in the Spirit and the one who with the Son spirates the Spirit. As such, the Father is the leader in the immanent Trinity, the one who takes a certain initiative in the divine life and in this context has authority over the Son and the Spirit. The Father is the one around whom the Trinity is organized or structured, a sort of ground or anchor. In this regard, the Son and the Spirit are dependent upon the Father and his hierarchical personal properties. And yet the Father in his unique, leading position in the immanent Trinity uses his power in order to foster the dignity of the Son and the Spirit. As the one around whom the Trinity is organized, the Father uses his power in order to give the Son and the Spirit the structure whereby they can exercise

their personal properties. Here the Father collaborates with the Son in order to lead the Holy Spirit most effectively and in this seeks their dignity. Similarly, the Father in his leading position collaborates with the Spirit as he leads the Son who in turn also leads the Spirit. Here again the Father in exercising his power builds up the Son and the Spirit with their personal properties and dignity. The Father both possesses his own unique, hierarchical personal properties and fosters the dignity of the Son and Spirit with their personal properties in the mutual fellowship of the immanent Trinity.

The Son too has authority over the other divine persons in connection with his unique personal properties. The Son is unique for collaborating with the Father as a sort of 'second in command' who is adept in synthesizing the will of the leading Father with his own. The Son as generated by the Father thus also has a reciprocal influence upon the Father.<sup>344</sup> The Son is not so much eternally obedient to the Father in a slavish manner but rather is in a mutual relationship with the Father.<sup>345</sup> We might say that the Son offers unique contributions to the Father that complement the Father in such a way that the Father would not have devised them if he were by himself (if that were possible). Here the Father is dependent upon the Son and his hierarchical properties. The Son also collaborates with the leading Father in spirating the Spirit. The Son in this spiration of the Spirit is also in a unique position to collaborate with the Spirit so that the Son best supports the Father in spirating the Spirit. Again, the Son here is in a unique position in his leading and relating with the Holy Spirit to aid the Father in the Father's overall leadership

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<sup>344</sup> See also Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:312: "Athanasius, however, forcibly argued against the Arians that the Father would not be the Father without the Son. Does that not mean that in some way the deity of the Father has to be dependent on the relation to the Son, although not in the same way as that of the Son is on the relation to the Father?"

<sup>345</sup> This is not to deny that there is an element of obedience of the Son to the Father in the immanent Trinity. Rather, this obedience must be thought of in the context of mutuality rather than as in a master-slave relationship.



role in the Trinity. Here the Father and the Holy Spirit are dependent upon the Son and his hierarchical properties. In all of these things the Son utilizes the power associated with his personal properties in such a way as to foster the dignity of the Son and Spirit with their personal properties. The Son thus utilizes his power in order to foster the dignity and personal properties of the Father and Spirit, which ultimately means that the Son will also limit the use of his powers as the Father and Spirit utilize the power associated with their personal properties.

Finally, the Spirit too has hierarchy and authority over the other divine persons in connection with his unique personal properties. The Spirit has unique power through his dwelling between the Father and the Son, encompassed by their love. He is involved in some way in the generation of the Son and similarly also has a reciprocal influence on the Father and Son in his own spiration. Moreover, in his own spiration the Spirit follows the lead of the Father and the Son, even while also providing his own unique input.<sup>346</sup> Here the Spirit is unique for his ultimate synthesizing ability. He is adept at taking unique input from both the Father and the Son and yet still knowing how to increase upon it. In a related way, the Spirit helps mediate the relationship between the Father and the Son in the generation of the Son as the Spirit uniquely adds to the fellowship between the Father and the Son. In all of this, the Father and the Son are dependent upon the Spirit and his hierarchical properties. And yet in all of this the Spirit utilizes his power in order to foster the dignity and personal properties of the Father and Spirit, which ultimately means that the Spirit will also limit the use of his powers as the Father and Son utilize the power associated with their personal properties.

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<sup>346</sup> As to the question of the *filioque*, I indeed hold that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. However, I hold that the Father has a certain leadership over the Son as they together spirate the Spirit.

Having briefly considered the personal properties of the divine persons, we will now conclude our main discussion by reflecting on the *mutual constitution* of the divine persons.<sup>347</sup> This concept ties together and expand upon what I have said constructively about the immanent Trinity. I have showed that there is an overall hierarchical Father-Son-Spirit ordering of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity even though each divine person is hierarchical over the others in connection with the personal properties of that divine person. Now we assert that this uniqueness of each divine person is necessary for the mutual constitution of the divine persons to occur, for homogenous persons would have nothing to contribute to one another that the others did not already have (if that were possible). Utilizing a distant human analogy, consider three human beings who wanted to put on a play. If all three were play authors but could not act or if all three were actors but could not write a play, it would be difficult for the show to go on. But if one person was an author, one was a director, and one was an actor, they would complement one another and the play could be performed.<sup>348</sup> In the case of the immanent Trinity, each divine person is unique and has hierarchical personal properties so that when the divine persons relate to one another they complement one another. There is a relative independence of each divine person with his personal properties that is integral to the mutual constitution of the divine persons.

Similarly, I have also argued that each divine person uses his hierarchy over the others in such a way as to foster their dignity in the divine communion. Now we assert that in fact the

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<sup>347</sup> For more background on the mutual constitution of the divine persons, see 1.1 above where I discuss Pannenberg and his views on seeing the processions as mutual relations.

<sup>348</sup> Balthasar makes extensive use of this author, director, actor analogy for the Trinity in *Theo-Drama*. See especially Steffen Lösel, "Murder in the Cathedral: Hans Urs von Balthasar's New Dramatization of the Doctrine of the Trinity," 427–39, for a discussion of this.

mutual interaction of dignified divine persons is necessary for the mutual constitution of the divine persons to occur. For even if each divine person had a hierarchy over the others, if each exercised this hierarchy in an oppressive manner, this would lead to the destruction of the Trinity (if that were possible). Again utilizing our analogy from a play put on by three human beings, consider that an author, a director, and an actor wanted to put on a play. But now consider that the play author sought to sabotage the director and actor, the director sought to sabotage the author and actor, and the actor sought to sabotage the author and director. When the time for the play came, it would not be pretty! Rather, for the best chance at a successful play, a play author needs to do what he can to bring out the best in the director and actor, and so on. In the case of the immanent Trinity, each divine person relates to the others in such a way as to build them up, forming their identities in a dignified manner and allowing himself to be formed by them. This dignified use by each divine person of the power associated with his personal properties is thus necessary for mutual constitution in the Trinity. My proposal utilizing a mutual hierarchy framework thus advocates the mutual constitution of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity in such a way that both the uniqueness and dignity of the divine persons is accounted for so that the sociality of the divine persons is fostered.<sup>349</sup>

Having thus described two key aspects of the mutual constitution of the divine persons according to a mutual hierarchy framework, it now must be emphasized that how this mutual constitution can occur remains a mystery to us. An analogy from the human family can show that

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<sup>349</sup> Stanley Grenz's book *The Social God and the Relational Self* is also helpful for supporting my two points here about the uniqueness and dignity of the divine persons. His book is especially helpful for marking out two positions that must be avoided if true community is to occur. Grenz emphasizes that community is not possible if persons, whether human or divine, are thought of as either completely 'centered' selves in the sense of isolated selves or if persons are thought of as completely 'de-centered' selves that only receive their identity from others and in this way have no individual identity of their own.

each family member has a unique hierarchy relative to the others in such a way that each family member simultaneously forms the identity of the others and has his or her own identity formed by them. But one major difference in the case of the immanent Trinity is that rather than merely having one's identity partially formed by others in a family, each divine person continually constitutes the very existence of the others.<sup>350</sup> Based on this element of mystery in the immanent Trinity, it should also be clear that one should not be forced to choose between the unity of an individual divine person and the unity of the divine community as a whole; we can simply say that the former tends to be fostered by the term *hierarchy* while the latter tends to be fostered by the term *mutual*. One can say that there is one divine community—one God—made up of three persons—one Father, one Son, and one Holy Spirit. Aspects of the mutual constitution of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity can be illuminated by a mutual hierarchy framework, but its mystery nevertheless remains.<sup>351</sup>

The mutual constitution of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity also entails two corollaries integrally related to what we have discussed thus far: a 'spatial' and a 'durative'

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<sup>350</sup> Even in procreation in a human family, the father and mother's very existence is not dependent upon their child. Rather the father and mother only exist due to their parents. Furthermore, in a human family, even though a child comes into being through the mediation of his or her parents, a child's fundamental identity—his or her relation to God—is clearly distinct from the child's relation to his or her parents.

<sup>351</sup> This discussion of mystery in God is a good place to discuss the divine substance as well. Numerous commentators have noted that the teaching that the Son is *homoousios* with the Father from the council of Nicea is somewhat ambiguous. Leo Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 61, notes, "However, *homoousios* was at the time [of the council of Nicea] a notoriously slippery word and could have three principal meanings. First, it could be generic; of one substance could be said of two individual men, both of whom share human nature while remaining individuals. Secondly, it could signify numerical identity, that is, that the Father and the Son are identical in concrete being. Finally, it could refer to material things, as two pots are of the same substance because both are made of the same clay." Davis goes on to say that the third meaning was likely not what the council intended, but that both of the first two are possibilities. In terms of my proposal, both of these meanings have a place. More in harmony with the first meaning, my proposal argues that the divine persons are each unique and each divine. More in harmony with the second meaning, my proposal argues that each divine person seeks the dignity of the others so that there is one divine community. For more helpful discussion of the Nicene *homoousios*, see, for example, Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 167; and Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:271–75.

dimension of the divine communion. These terms may only be applied in an analogous way to the divine community; nevertheless, they are required for the success of a mutual hierarchy framework.

First, the mutual constitution of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity requires some consideration of the spatial dimension of the persons. Here we do well to briefly consider their perichoresis, which should be understood according to both their *circumincessio* and their *circuminsessio* (notice the difference in spelling between *circuminsessio* and *circumincessio*).<sup>352</sup> In my proposal, perichoresis refers preeminently to the *circumincessio* of the divine persons where *circumincessio* refers to the “face-to-face” encounter of the divine persons.<sup>353</sup> Face-to-face here connotes an external encounter of the divine persons as they each relate to one another in a personal way. This *circumincessio* of the divine persons should be seen as primary relative to their *circuminsessio*, which I understand as “spatial nearness.”<sup>354</sup> Although a mutual hierarchy framework prioritizes the *circumincessio* of the divine persons over their *circuminsessio*, in

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<sup>352</sup> Note that only one letter distinguishes the terms *circumincessio* and *circuminsessio* (the letter *c* versus the letter *s*). The English word ‘interceding’ when used of the Son ‘interceding’ to the Father for us helps bring out the connotation of face-to-face encounter present in *circumincessio*; the English word ‘session’ when used to describe the Son’s session at the right hand of the Father helps bring out the spatial connotation of this word as well as its more intransitory nature in relation to the more transitory *circumincessio*. We also note that the word ‘processions’ (notice the letter *c* in this word rather than the letter *s*) is related to the word *circumincessio*.

<sup>353</sup> By saying “face-to-face” I am certainly not saying that all three divine persons have physical bodies like human beings. However, we must assert that the divine persons do have some sort of spiritual bodies. The appropriateness of this seems further supported by such things as mankind being made in the image of God and especially the fact that the Son was willing to assume human flesh at the Incarnation unto eternity.

<sup>354</sup> Some may perhaps be uncomfortable at my use of spatial nearness to describe the *circuminsessio* of the divine persons since it is obviously a phrase with spatial connotations. However, here it is important to note that understanding perichoresis as the mutual indwelling of the divine persons is every bit as spatial in connotation as is spatial nearness.

Although I am not aware of Gunton using the term ‘spatial nearness,’ this is clearly his intention in *The One, the Three, and the Many*, 163–66, where he criticizes those who interpret *circuminsessio* to only mean a static mutual indwelling. Here it is also vital to note that the biblical narrative itself much more often speaks of the divine persons in dynamic, spatial-laden terms than in terms of a static mutual indwelling. A great number of paintings and icons in church history could also be adduced here for portraying the divine persons in a similar manner as I have

reality the two terms have some overlap and mutually require one another. Face-to-face encounter requires some sort of spatial nearness and spatial nearness seems empty without some sort of face-to-face encounter. This is not to deny the possibility of some sort of eternal mutual indwelling of the divine persons, but it is rather to stress the more fundamental concept of the eternal relational encounter of the divine persons. These external relations of the divine persons are necessary to fully account for the uniqueness, or hierarchy, of each person relative to the others that a mutual hierarchy framework and the mutual constitution of the divine persons requires.

Second, the mutual constitution of the divine persons requires some consideration of duration in the immanent Trinity in connection with the stability and spontaneity of the divine communion.<sup>355</sup> The spontaneity of the divine persons refers to the persons dynamically relating to one another in such a way that the freshness of the divine communion is never exhausted. Each divine person seeking to foster the dignity of the others is a matter of continual delight to them, and there needs to be a continual opportunity or horizon in which this can occur. However, the spontaneity of the divine persons also requires and involves the stability of the divine communion. The Trinity obviously should not be so conceived that the divine persons are so spontaneous as they seek the dignity of the others that they have no idea what to expect from one another. Rather a mutual hierarchy framework and the mutual constitution of the divine persons requires that this mutual fostering of dignity, while always fresh, also is always familiar.

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described.

<sup>355</sup> See 1.2 where I reject retroactive causality in Moltmann and Pannenberg. This philosophical framework does not account adequately for the duration necessary for the interaction of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity.

#### **4.4.4. Conclusion**

In this section I have argued for a mutual hierarchy framework and the mutual constitution of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity. Building upon my analysis of the economic Trinity as evident in John's Gospel from chapter three, I argued that each divine person is unique within an overall Father-Son-Spirit ordering of the immanent Trinity with the Spirit being located between the Father and the Son. Here my proposal is in agreement with Balthasar's proposal. However, my proposal differs from Balthasar's in that I went on to argue that each divine person within this ordering exercises hierarchy over the others in connection with the unique personal properties of that person. Here each person utilizes this hierarchy in order to foster the dignity of the others with their personal properties so that the mutuality of the divine communion is fostered. I also reflected upon how in the Father's generation of the Son in the Spirit and in the Father and the Son's spiration of the Spirit, each person is unique and utilizes his power associated with his personal properties in order to foster the dignity of the others as well in the divine communion.

After this, I argued that not only do the divine persons thus relate to one another in the immanent Trinity, but in this relating the divine persons mutually constitute one another. I argued that there is an element of mystery to this Trinitarian mutual constitution that is beyond our understanding, but that a mutual hierarchy framework is nevertheless helpful for understanding some basic aspects of it. Finally, I argued that spatial and durative corollaries are required for the mutual constitution of the divine persons in order to account for the hierarchical uniqueness and dignity, respectively, of the persons that my proposal seeks. By thus accounting for both the uniqueness and the dignity of the divine persons, my proposal for a mutual hierarchy framework fostered the sociality of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity.

#### 4.5. Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen that there is a tension in Balthasar's understanding of the immanent Trinity between what I have termed, in contemporary Trinitarian language, a hierarchical level of constitution and a hierarchical level of relation. In the hierarchical level of constitution, the begetting Father (logically) precedes the Son, and the spirating Father and Son (logically) precede the Spirit. But in the level of relation, the divine persons consistently relate to one another, albeit with the Father always being hierarchical over the Son, and the Father and the Son hierarchical over the Spirit. At both levels, and especially at the level of constitution, there is great hierarchy of the Father over the Son, and great hierarchy of the Father and the Son over the Spirit. We have seen, therefore, how Balthasar has a hierarchy-equality polarity or tension in his understanding of the immanent Trinity that is integrally related to this other tension just described and that Balthasar "resolves" his hierarchy-equality tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the hierarchical pole of the system.

We have also seen that Balthasar utilizes certain hierarchical concepts that mediate somewhat between his two levels. For example, Balthasar speaks of the Son and the Spirit "letting themselves be brought forth" in the processions of generation and spiration. In Balthasar's usage, such mediating concepts intensify the hierarchy, for example, of the Father over the Son both by more easily allowing the two hierarchical levels to reinforce one another and by providing yet another way that the Father is hierarchical over the Son. Thus these hierarchical mediating concepts further show that Balthasar "resolves" his hierarchy-equality polarity or tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the hierarchical pole of the system. The strength of Balthasar's understanding of the immanent Trinity is that it generally distinguishes the divine persons in the level of constitution, in the level of relation, and



in the mediating concepts. And the fact that Balthasar at both the hierarchical level of relation and in his various hierarchical mediating statements generally speaks of the consistent interaction of the divine persons also shows that Balthasar is best thought of as a social Trinitarian.

Nevertheless, in this chapter I have also argued that my proposal for a mutual hierarchy framework captures the sociality of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity more consistently than Balthasar's proposal. Rather than seeing the hierarchy of the Father over the Son and the hierarchy of the Father and the Son over the Holy Spirit as basically master-slave in character—as tends to be the case in Balthasar in his hierarchical level of constitution, hierarchical level of relation, and hierarchically-resolved mediating concepts—my proposal asserts that each divine person in connection with his personal properties exercises authority over the other persons in such a way as to foster the dignity of the other divine persons with their personal properties. Moreover, my proposal has no need of either a level of constitution or mediating concepts. Instead, I propose that as the divine persons relate to one another in a dignified manner they also mutually constitute one another. Finally, by accounting for the dignity of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity, my proposal also accounts more adequately for their spontaneity in the duration of the immanent Trinity. Here each divine person continually seeks to foster the dignity of the others in a fresh, yet familiar, divine communion and in this way the persons continually mutually constitute one another. By emphasizing the dignity of each divine person as they mutually constitute one another, my proposal more consistently than Balthasar's accounts for the sociality of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity, which sociality requires both their uniqueness and their dignity.

In this chapter we have also seen that there is a tension in Volf's understanding of the immanent Trinity between a hierarchical level of constitution and an egalitarian level of relation.

In the hierarchical level of constitution, the Father (logically) precedes the Son and the Spirit who proceed from him. But in the egalitarian level of relation, the divine persons consistently relate to one another in a fully mutual way. Volf heavily emphasizes the egalitarian level of relation over the hierarchical level of constitution. We have seen, therefore, how Volf has a hierarchy-equality polarity or tension in his understanding of the immanent Trinity and that Volf “resolves” his hierarchy-equality tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the egalitarian pole of the system.

We have also seen that Volf utilizes the concept of perichoresis to mediate somewhat between his two levels. Most of the time Volf connects perichoresis with the egalitarian level of relation but sometimes, especially when Volf is concerned to preserve the distinctness of the divine persons, perichoresis is also associated with the hierarchical level of constitution. The effect of this use of the concept of perichoresis is that Volf allows a minimal amount of hierarchy in his understanding of the immanent Trinity, typically only allowing hierarchy when the distinction of the divine persons is at issue. Thus these egalitarian mediating concepts further show that Volf “resolves” his hierarchy-equality polarity or tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the egalitarian pole of the system. The strength of Volf’s understanding of the immanent Trinity is that it seeks to foster the dignity of each divine person especially in the level of relation and in the mediating concept of perichoresis. And the fact that Volf at both the egalitarian level of relation and in his egalitarian mediating statement of perichoresis generally speaks of the consistent interaction of the divine persons also shows that he is best thought of as a social Trinitarian.

Nevertheless, in this chapter I have also argued that my proposal for a mutual hierarchy framework captures the sociality of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity more consistently

than Volf's proposal. Rather than homogenizing the divine persons, as tends to be the case in Volf in his egalitarian level of relation and his mainly egalitarian mediating concept of perichoresis, my proposal asserts that each divine person has unique personal properties which entail a hierarchy over the other persons in the context of these properties in such a way that the divine persons are adequately differentiated from one another. Moreover, my proposal has no need for either a level of constitution or mediating concepts. Instead, I propose that the uniqueness and hierarchy of each divine person contributes to the mutual constitution of the persons, such as by allowing the personal properties of the divine persons to complement one another in connection with their uniqueness. Finally, by accounting for the uniqueness of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity, my proposal also accounts more adequately for their *circumincessio* (face-to-face encounter) in light of spatial considerations for the immanent Trinity. By distinguishing spatially between the divine persons, my proposal further fosters the uniqueness of the divine persons in contrast to the more static mutual indwelling of the divine persons often evident in Volf's proposal. In this way my proposal further argues for the uniqueness of the divine persons as they mutually constitute one another. By emphasizing the hierarchical uniqueness of each divine person as they mutually constitute one another, my proposal more consistently than Volf's proposal accounts for the sociality of the divine persons in the immanent Trinity, which sociality requires both their dignity and their uniqueness.

## CONCLUSION

The social Trinitarian movement has much potential in contemporary Trinitarian discourse. Social Trinitarian proposals have made certain advancements beyond person- and substance-oriented Trinitarian models. The reader will recall that person- and substance-oriented models assert, respectively, the relative independence of the divine hypostases (in particular, the person of the Father as cause) and the one divine substance (understood as a sort of fourth entity or concept that logically precedes the divine persons) as ultimate ontological categories in Trinitarian discourse. We have argued that a revised social Trinitarianism that posits community among the divine persons as the ultimate ontological category in Trinitarian discourse accounts more adequately for what I have called the sociality of the divine persons than person- and substance-oriented models do by themselves. The term sociality here refers to such things as the personal character of the divine persons, their relating with one another, as well as *both* their uniqueness (stressed to a point in a person-oriented model) and dignity (a concern expressed to a point in a substance-oriented model).

Although social Trinitarian proposals have much potential relative to the aforementioned Trinitarian models, we have shown that social Trinitarian proposals also evidence a hierarchy-equality polarity or tension that causes them to not account adequately for either the uniqueness or the dignity of the divine persons (depending on whether the social Trinitarian trajectory is hierarchical or egalitarian). We identified the field's inherent polarity at work in the following three areas: (1) the social Trinitarian critique of other Trinitarian models; (2) its understanding of the economic Trinity with particular emphasis on the place of the Son during his life vis-à-vis the

other divine persons; and (3) its understanding of the immanent Trinity. Such polarization led to the need for a revised social model.

In order to address these areas of tension present in social Trinitarian proposals, I have argued for a mutual hierarchy social model of the Trinity as a narrowly-defined contextualized Trinitarian model. In other words, my framework has sought to answer questions related to the problem of the bipolarity in social Trinitarian systems, not to answer all questions related to the Trinity.

In arguing for this mutual hierarchy social model of the Trinity, we have seen that it upheld both the uniqueness and the dignity of the divine persons. It accounted for the uniqueness of each divine person by asserting that each person exercises a hierarchy over the others in connection with each person's personal properties and vocation. It also accounted for the dignity of each divine person by asserting that each person utilizes his hierarchy and power over the others in such a way as to serve them. By accounting for both the uniqueness and the dignity of the divine persons, a mutual hierarchy framework also fostered their sociality.

A number of significant conclusions follow from my investigation. First, we have seen that Balthasar, as a representative of a hierarchical social Trinitarian trajectory, generally accounts for the uniqueness of the divine persons but does not account adequately for their dignity. That Balthasar is best thought of as a social Trinitarian may be seen in the fact that he accounts for such things associated with the sociality of the divine persons as their personal character, their relating with one another, and their uniqueness. However, in all three areas of tension Balthasar emphasizes the Father's hierarchy over the Son, as well as the Father and the Son's hierarchy over the Holy Spirit, and he portrays this hierarchy as basically master-slave in character. This means that he does not account adequately for the dignity of the divine persons who are

“oppressed” and the persons who “oppress.” In this way Balthasar “resolves” his hierarchy-equality tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the hierarchical pole of the system while giving little attention to the equality pole. In the process, he does not account for the full sociality of the divine persons, which in my proposal requires both the uniqueness and the dignity of the persons.

Second, we have seen that Volf as a representative of an egalitarian social Trinitarian trajectory generally accounts for the dignity of the divine persons but does not account adequately for their uniqueness. That Volf is best thought of as a social Trinitarian may be seen, similar to as in the case of Balthasar, in the fact that he accounts for such things associated with the sociality of the divine persons as their personal character, their relating with one another, and their dignity. However, in all three areas of tension mentioned above, Volf emphasizes the equality of the divine persons and portrays this equality in a way that homogenizes the persons. This means that he does not account adequately for the hierarchical uniqueness of each divine person. In this way Volf “resolves” his hierarchy-equality tension by giving logical priority in his social Trinitarianism to the equality pole of the system while giving little attention to the hierarchy pole. In the process, he does not account for the full sociality of the divine persons, which in my proposal requires both the dignity and the uniqueness of the persons.

Third, as we intimated at the beginning of this conclusion, a mutual hierarchy social Trinitarian critique of person- and substance-oriented Trinitarian models was able to both acknowledge significant agreement with these other models and account for some of their key concerns. Furthermore, my mutual hierarchy critique was also applied to social Trinitarianism itself by identifying a hierarchy-equality polarity in the system. Like many social Trinitarian proposals, including Balthasar’s and Volf’s proposals, mine critiqued person- and substance-

oriented Trinitarian models for not accounting adequately for the dignity and uniqueness, respectively, of the divine persons in connection with the question of hierarchy. But unlike the critique of other Trinitarian models by other social Trinitarian proposals, my proposal was able to account for both the uniqueness and the dignity of the divine persons simultaneously.

For example, I acknowledged that Augustine's substance-oriented Trinitarian model emphasizes the equality of the divine persons and seeks to account for their dignity in the face of an Arian threat. Since my mutual hierarchy critique of Augustine's substance-oriented Trinitarian model was concerned about the *manner* in which Augustine understood a term like 'equality' and did not simply oppose Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity for not being hierarchical enough, as was the tendency in Balthasar's corresponding critique, my proposal critiqued Augustine for not accounting adequately for the uniqueness of the divine persons even while sharing his concern to account for their dignity. Similarly, I pointed out that Zizioulas' person-oriented Trinitarian model emphasizes the hierarchy of the Father over the Son and the Spirit and seeks to account for each person's uniqueness. Since my mutual hierarchy critique of other Trinitarian models was concerned about the *manner* in which Zizioulas understood a term like 'hierarchy' and did not simply oppose Zizioulas's doctrine of the Trinity for not being egalitarian enough, as was the tendency in Volf's corresponding critique, my proposal critiqued Zizioulas for not accounting adequately for the dignity of the divine persons even while sharing his concern to account for their uniqueness. By accounting simultaneously for both the uniqueness and dignity of the divine persons in its critique of other Trinitarian models, my proposal accounted for the sociality of the divine persons—a sociality that has not been accounted for adequately by other social Trinitarian critiques of other Trinitarian models.

Fourth, a mutual hierarchy social model of the Trinity connects the kenosis of the Son relative to the world as evident in the Gospel of John with the Son's openness to the co-working of the Father and the Spirit also evident in this Gospel in a way that accounts for both the uniqueness and dignity of the Son. Admittedly, kenosis has traditionally been used only as a Christological category to show that Jesus in his humiliation has divine power relative to the world but partially refrains from using this power for the sake of redeeming the world. While my proposal agrees with this Christological precedent, it also argues that the Trinitarian implications of Jesus' kenotic vocation have not been fully appreciated by social Trinitarians. There is some precedent in social Trinitarianism for connecting the Son's kenosis relative to the world with his openness to working with the Father and the Spirit. For example, Balthasar connects Jesus' kenosis relative to the world in his vocation with his openness to the Father, but conceives of the Son as obedient to the Father after the analogy of a slave to a master. Volf accounts for the kenosis, or 'self-giving' as he calls it, of the Son in the context of the self-giving of all three divine persons, but in connection with Volf's homogenization of the divine persons he stresses the kenosis of the persons *relative to creation* rather than relative to one another.

In my proposal Jesus in his humiliation exercises the unique power of his vocation in a kenotic way not only relative to creation but also relative to the Father and the Spirit. For example, in John's Gospel, Jesus glorifies the Father by using his power in a kenotic way, voluntarily laying down his life in order to take away the sin of the world. Here the Son in his vocation in John's Gospel has a certain hierarchy over the Father who sends him since the Father as the transcendent Creator who sends the Son is also dependent upon the Son for his own glorification in the world. And yet Jesus exercises this hierarchy over the Father in a kenotic way, deferring to the Father's leadership in his life. Similarly, in his vocation of glorifying the



Father, the Son is in a certain sense hierarchical over the Holy Spirit whom he will send into the church after his resurrection. And yet the Son exercises this hierarchy over the Holy Spirit in a kenotic way since, by sending the Spirit, the Son also defers to and is dependent upon the Spirit and his vocation to glorify him (i.e., the Son) and the Father in the church. In this way, within the overall Father-Son-Spirit ordering of the divine persons in the economy that is seen often in the Gospel of John, the Gospel emphasizes the unique vocation of Jesus as the Glorifier of the Father, involving both Jesus' hierarchy over the Father and the Spirit as well as his (i.e., Jesus') kenotic exercising of this hierarchy as he voluntarily opens himself to them, allows them to help him, and depends upon them. Thus we see the uniqueness and dignity of the Son relative to the Father and the Spirit in the economy and hence one way that the Gospel of John teaches the sociality of the divine persons—a sociality that has not been accounted for adequately by other social Trinitarian proposals.

Fifth, a mutual hierarchy social model of the Trinity also accounts for the kenosis of the Father and the Spirit relative to the Son and to each other, as evident in the Gospel of John, in such a way that the Father and the Spirit have a hierarchical uniqueness and dignity in their vocations. That the Son's kenotic vocation also affects the Father and the Spirit suggests that the Father and the Spirit themselves have kenotic vocations during Jesus' life. For example, according to John's Gospel, the Father as the transcendent Creator who sends the Son and the Spirit into the world has a certain overall hierarchy and power over the Son and Spirit. And yet, in this very sending he is kenotic in that in their missions he also relates with them in the world, is affected by what happens to them in the world, and is dependent upon them for his own glorification in the world. Similarly, according to John's Gospel, the Spirit in his vocation is hierarchical over the Father and the Son in the sense that they depend upon him and his vocation.

For example, they depend upon him as the Spirit of truth to witness to them and glorify them in the world. And yet in this very vocation he is quiet and kenotic relative to the Father and the Son since as the Spirit of truth he points human beings away from himself to the Son and the Father. In this way, the Gospel of John teaches that the Father and the Spirit also have hierarchically unique and yet kenotically dignified vocations relative to the Son and relative to each other. This is another way that my proposal accounts for the sociality of the divine persons in the Gospel of John—a sociality that has not been accounted for adequately by other social Trinitarian proposals.

Sixth, a mutual hierarchy social model of the Trinity also accounts for the kenosis of the Father and the Spirit relative to creation, as evident in the Gospel of John, in such a way that the Father and the Spirit in their vocations are hierarchical and yet dignified relative to creation. That the Father and the Spirit are kenotic relative to the Son during his life also suggests that they are also kenotic relative to creation itself. The Father as the transcendent Creator is kenotic relative to creation in an indirect manner, through his relations with the Son and the Spirit in the world. Thus, in John's Gospel the Father sends the Son and Spirit *to the world*. Here the Father has a hierarchy over the world evident in the hierarchy of the Son and the Spirit over the world. And yet the Father is kenotic in the exercise of this hierarchy. Thus the Father sends the Son "away" from himself in order to redeem the world that languishes in sin. Similarly, the Father, by sending the Spirit (with or through the Son) into the post-Easter church, is in a certain sense himself deprived of the Spirit for the sake of the post-Easter church that needs the Spirit. Similarly, the Spirit who is sent into the post-Easter church voluntarily allows himself to be sent by the Son (and the Father) for the sake of this church even though as the Paraclete, or Helper, he will be present with the persecuted church and thus will be affected by its misery in the world. In

this way, the Gospel of John teaches that the Father and the Spirit also have hierarchically unique and yet kenotically dignified vocations relative to creation. This is another way that my proposal accounts for the sociality of the divine persons in the Gospel of John—a sociality that has not been accounted for adequately by other social Trinitarian proposals.

Finally, a mutual hierarchy social model of the Trinity also accounts for the hierarchical uniqueness of the divine persons apparent in the immanent Trinity but does so in such a way that this hierarchy is exercised in a dignified manner as the divine persons mutually constitute one another. Neither Balthasar nor Volf allow fully for the mutual constitution of the divine persons, but rather each distinguishes between a level of constitution and a level of relation. Balthasar conceives both levels in a hierarchical fashion and in the process does not account adequately for the dignity of the divine persons. Volf conceives of and emphasizes the level of relation in an egalitarian fashion in such a way that he does not account adequately for the hierarchical uniqueness of the divine persons. It is true that Pannenberg and a few other social Trinitarians do teach the mutual constitution of the persons. However, Pannenberg's conception of hierarchy in his understanding of this mutual constitution is not that different from Balthasar's understanding of hierarchy, and this causes him, like Balthasar, to not account adequately for the dignity of the persons. Similarly, Boff, Erickson, Gruenler, and Gunton conceive of equality in the mutual constitution of the divine persons in a way that is not much different from Volf's understanding of equality. This causes them, like Volf, to not account adequately for the hierarchical uniqueness of each divine person. In fact, a case could be made that at least Volf with his two-level understanding of the immanent Trinity is more forthcoming than other social Trinitarians are in admitting that some sort of hierarchy among the divine persons is necessary in order to distinguish between them in the immanent Trinity.

In my proposal each divine person in the immanent Trinity has a hierarchy over the others in connection with each person's personal properties. And yet each exercises this hierarchy in such a way as to foster and even constitute the other persons with their personal properties. My proposal thus says that unique divine persons relate with one another in a dignified manner and in this way actually constitute one another. Here there is no hierarchy-equality polarity but rather hierarchy is understood in such a way that it is seamlessly woven into the eternal relations between the divine persons by which they constitute one another. This is the highest form of sociality imaginable—a sociality that has not been accounted for adequately by other social Trinitarian proposals.

Having considered some of the conclusions and strengths of the dissertation, various potential weaknesses or limitations of a mutual hierarchy framework will now be considered. One such limitation is connected to my focus on systematic theology in the dissertation. In dealing with the Trinitarian thought of Balthasar and Volf, I have focused on their systematic theology and have not dealt in much detail with their historical location or concerns. In this regard we note that both theologians are concerned to illustrate how the doctrine of the Trinity should affect how we should understand human relations, such as in the church. I am aware of this limitation of my proposal and would recommend for future research a more extensive analysis of the social and historical context of the Trinitarian thought of Balthasar and Volf.

Another potential limitation of my proposal is that in theory a mutual hierarchy framework could be so conceived that each divine person is unique and exercises hierarchy over the others but does not use this power in order to serve the others. I mentioned this in section 4.4.3 of the dissertation where I spoke of a play author, director, and actor sabotaging one another as they work together to put on a play. Here each person could have a certain authority over the others

and consistently relate to them so that there was a certain mutuality in the relationship, albeit a destructive mutuality. In light of this, we must be clear about exactly what sort of mutuality we mean when we speak of mutual hierarchy, namely, that each person seeks to foster the dignity of the others and not simply that each person exercises any kind of hierarchy over the others. If one does not understand mutuality in this fashion, a mutual hierarchy social Trinitarianism will be guilty of some form of tritheism. When misunderstood, a potential limitation of a mutual hierarchy framework, therefore, is that it could be understood in oppressive ways and lead to forms of ontological subordinationism. My proposal has been careful not to fall into these potential dangers.

Another potential limitation of a mutual hierarchy framework as I conceive it is that persons in a community could have a hierarchical uniqueness and exercise this hierarchy in a dignified manner and yet still not relate with one another. To again use a human illustration, we could think of leader of a country, a leader of an area within that country, and a citizen within that area of the country who each perform their vocations in a dignified manner. Here each of the three persons could have an authority over the others in the context of their vocations where each is dependent to some extent on the others. And yet these three persons may not know each other and even may have never met one another. Here we should recall my assumption in the introduction to the dissertation that full Trinitarian sociality actually requires more than simply the uniqueness and dignity of each person in a community. In order for the divine persons to be consistently social, we must say, as we did in the introduction, that the divine persons need to be not only unique and dignified but they also must consistently relate to one another. Again, if one conceives of a mutual hierarchy framework in such a way that it does not account for the

consistent relations of the divine persons, it will be guilty of some form of tritheism or subordinationism.

Another potential limitation of a mutual hierarchy framework is that, besides continuity with analogies from human communities, there are also major discontinuities with them. We have at times touched upon this in the dissertation. In section 4.4.3, for instance, I mentioned that unlike human families that come into existence through procreation, the divine persons have always existed in fellowship with one another. Although this is a limitation of a mutual hierarchy framework, it is actually a limit of any understanding of the Trinity, which understanding will of necessity involve some sort of projection from the human realm onto the divine.

Another potential limitation of a mutual hierarchy framework as I have presented it concerns my understanding of Trinitarian kenosis. Although I have argued that each divine person in the economy exercises his power in a kenotic way, this is not the only way that this could be understood or expressed. My main concern in chapter three was to argue for the mutual dependence of the divine persons in terms of each person exercising his power over the others in such a way as to serve them. Here one could have rather said that the Father and Spirit simply limit the exercise of their power as they use this power to serve in the economic Trinity, whereas the Son partially “empties” himself in taking on the sins of mankind. Doing this would reserve the term kenosis for the unique vocation of the Son. In this regard, we can also note here that in chapter four I did not use the language of kenosis to describe the immanent Trinity but rather the language of each divine person both using his power and deferring to the power of the other persons. Although I prefer the language of the unique kenosis of the Father and the Spirit in the economy, others could legitimately speak according to a mutual hierarchy framework rather of

something like the Father and the Spirit merely limiting their powers in the economy and using these powers to serve the divine communion and creation.

A final potential limitation of a mutual hierarchy framework, related to some of the previous ones, is that it tends to conceive of relationships in terms of power, without necessarily involving love in these relationships. In each of my three core chapters, I emphasized that each divine person has a hierarchical uniqueness over the others and yet uses this power in a dignified manner by limiting his power in order to serve the others. However, from our knowledge of human communities we can conceive of a community where each person within that community has a hierarchical uniqueness relative to the others and uses his power in order to build up the others, and yet this community would not necessarily be a community of love. To briefly illustrate the point using an extreme and dreary example, one could possibly argue that the top leaders in Nazi Germany could to a certain extent be characterized by mutual hierarchy. For example, one could say that Hitler, Himmler, and Goebbels each exercised a certain hierarchy over the others and sought to use his power in order to glorify the others and further each other in their common goals. Whether or not this was the case (and it very well may not have been), it does help illustrate the principle that without love, a framework is empty. A biblical example of this sort of unloving community may also be seen in the book of Revelation where we behold the dragon, the beast out of the sea, and the beast out of the earth. Here each demonic figure has authority and each tries to support the others, but this “community” is diametrically opposed to the church. Here we do well to heed 1 Corinthians 13:1: “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.” A limitation of a mutual hierarchy framework thus is that it does not guarantee that a community will be conceived of as loving.

This discussion of the relationship between power and love makes for a good transition from the limitations of a mutual hierarchy framework to a discussion of suggestions for further study. Here it is imperative to note that even though a mutual hierarchy framework as I have conceived it does not guarantee a loving community, a loving community arguably requires mutual hierarchy. In other words, although power certainly does not guarantee love, love requires some consideration of power among persons. Future study could look at the relationship between the theme of love (also a venerable theme in Trinitarian theology) and a mutual hierarchy framework in the context of the three questions discussed in this dissertation. For example, in considering the immanent Trinity, whereas a hierarchical social Trinitarianism might be in danger of conceiving love in terms of a master-slave relationship, and whereas an egalitarian social Trinitarianism might be in danger of conceiving love in terms of self-love, a mutual hierarchy framework that suggests the mutual constitution of the divine persons might be more helpful for considering the mutual love of the persons.

Future study could also look at the relationship between the mutual hierarchy of the divine persons and the doctrine of creation. For example, as the divine persons prepare to create, how does the hierarchical uniqueness of the divine persons come into play and how does each divine person work to serve the others in the act of creation? Here it seems significant that the Father arguably creates as one who will be transcendent relative to creation, the Son creates as one who will become incarnate in that creation, and the Spirit creates as one who will be the Paraclete, or Helper, of mankind in that creation. Another related question here might be, how does the creation of man in the image of God as male and female relate to the mutual hierarchy of the divine persons?



One could also look at the relationship between the doctrine of the Trinity and ecclesiology. For example, how does the hierarchy of a pastor over a congregation relate to the mutual hierarchy of the divine persons? Here one could look at how a pastor and his flock are unique, and hierarchical, relative to one another and yet use their power in order to promote the vocations of the other. Again, one could look at how congregations in a denomination are unique, and hierarchical, relative to one another as each has its own strengths relative to the others and yet uses those strengths in order to build up the others in the body of Christ, giving a more trans-local character to the way that individual local churches express and live out their unity.

A Trinity and church theme also brings up the question of ethics. In section 4.4.2 of the dissertation I mentioned that the Ephesians 5:21–6:4 pericope that deals with a Christian family works according to a mutual hierarchy framework. Here each family member has a certain hierarchy and right relative to the others and yet Ephesians 5:21 (“and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ”) provides the overall framework for the entire pericope so that each family member should use his or her uniqueness and hierarchy in order to serve the others in Christ.

Finally, future study could look at how the mutual hierarchy of the divine persons could influence how we think about power in society—a topic normally associated with the field of social Trinitarianism. A mutual hierarchy framework would oppose conceiving rulers as exercising a unilateral master-slave authority over their subjects. It would also oppose conceiving all members of society as so equal to one another that no room is left for leadership or even the unique strengths of the various members of society. Reflection on society would especially seem to require much thought about how mutual hierarchy operates in the context of great evil in the world. In this regard, a mutual hierarchy framework would seem to allow for the

sort of strong leadership that is arguably necessary for life in an evil world, and yet it could also allow for citizens to have their own sort of hierarchy over leaders in such a way that they might complement their leaders as well as serve as a check and balance to their exercise of power.

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