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The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Western Theological Tradition

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**The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Western Theological Tradition:
Underdeveloped or Misunderstood?**

ABSTRACT: In contemporary theological discourse, the Western doctrine of the Trinity, as articulated by figures like Thomas Aquinas, is often criticized on the grounds that it presupposes an underdeveloped theology of the Holy Spirit that denies the third person of the Trinity the fullness of divine personhood. This paper will show that the standard critiques of the Western doctrine of the Holy Spirit spring from a misapprehension of the term 'person' as it has traditionally been used to refer to the divine persons. By elucidating the nature of divine personhood in the course of interpreting Aquinas' thought on the Trinity, the paper will throw into relief the full personhood of the Holy Spirit. On this basis, moreover, it will ultimately aim to demonstrate the unfounded nature of some of the other main critiques of Western Trinitarian doctrine.

In contemporary theological discourse, the Western doctrine of the Trinity, as articulated by figures like Augustine and Aquinas, is often criticized on the grounds that it entails an underdeveloped theology of the Holy Spirit that denies the third person of the Trinity the fullness of divine personhood that is enjoyed by the other two Persons.[1] With regard to the inner life of God, or the so-called 'immanent Trinity', for instance, many have argued that the Latin doctrine fails adequately to distinguish the Spirit's work from that of the other two Persons of the Godhead.[2]

By construing the third Person of the Trinity as the bond between those two persons, this doctrine supposedly treats him as the mere means through which they co-operate and thus fails to recognize his status as a divine person in his own right. When it comes to treating the 'economic Trinity', or the Incarnate Son's revelation of the Triune God, moreover, scholars have observed that the Latin doctrine seems to absorb the identity of the Spirit into that of the Second Person of the Trinity, through whom the work of the Father is accomplished on earth.

The purpose of this paper is to establish that such common criticisms of the Western doctrine of the Holy Spirit spring from a misapprehension of the term 'person' as it has traditionally been used to refer to the divine persons. By elucidating the nature of divine personhood in the course of interpreting Aquinas' thought on the Trinity, the paper will throw into relief the full personhood of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, moreover, it will provide a basis for demonstrating the unfounded nature of some of the other main critiques of Western Trinitarian doctrine, which will be shown to apply more accurately to the alternative renderings of the Trinity that have been formulated by its critics.

By way of context, the present discussion can be helpfully framed with reference to Karl Rahner's magisterial work on *The Trinity,* which initiated a revival of interest in Trinitarian theology in our time. In this work, Rahner assesses how Trinitarian theology has been affected by the modern rise of a concept of personhood that diverged quite significantly from preceding philosophical and theological tradition.[3] This tradition had been dominated by Boethius' definition of the person as an 'individual substance of a rational nature' (*naturæ rationalis individua substantia*).[4] Although this definition certainly allows for personal distinctiveness, it nonetheless emphasizes that individual human beings are ultimately part of a larger class of beings that share in common the rational nature, which involves both an intellect that knows and a will that motivates the intellect to pursue knowledge.

Thus, Boethius' definition implies that human beings are social creatures that properly cultivate their individual rational capacities in the context of a community, which nevertheless does not limit or define their personalities, as I will show further below. Already, this definition found competition in the high middle ages with the introduction of Richard of St Victor's idea of a person as an 'incommunicable substance of a rational nature'.[5] This notion of personhood laid greater emphasis on the irreducible individuality of human beings. In modern thought, that emphasis came to the fore in ways that quickly gave rise to an individualistic ideal of persons as a discrete centres of consciousness or wholly autonomous entities.[6]

As Rahner rightly recognized, such an ideal tends to generate tri-theism when it is projected, if inadvertently, onto the doctrine of the Trinity, in which there is and can only be one centre of consciousness, one substance, or one essence.[7] In response to this threat to the unity of God, Karl Barth among others have argued in favour of discarding the

language of divine personhood and have opted instead to explain the doctrine of the Trinity in other terms, which seemingly promise to render the notion of a divine person more intelligible under modern circumstances.[8] Thus, Barth famously referred to the Persons in terms of three 'modes of subsisting', namely, 'Revealer, Revelation, and Revealedness'.[9]

This bold move of course invited charges of modalism or sabellianism, that is, the unorthodox belief that the three Persons are really just modes or aspects of one divine being, which have no distinctness in themselves. Although these charges on the part of Jürgen Moltmann, for example, do not seem entirely fair in that they tend to overlook the nuances of Barth's position, nevertheless, they reveal the difficulties involved in accounting for the unity-in-distinctness of the three Persons when modern notions of personhood are at play.[10] In this context, the only alternatives that immediately present themselves are tri-theism and modalism. Yet these are false alternatives that can and arguably must be transcended by the formulation of a more adequate conception of divine personhood.

To this end, Rahner, by contrast to his earlier contemporary Barth, sought to preserve the idea of divine persons, first by defending it against misunderstandings, and especially by invoking more contextually relevant terminology to elucidate and interpret it for those to whom it might seem foreign.[11] In this regard, Rahner admits that he is largely motivated by a desire to honor the Catholic magisterium's moratorium on changes in the language that had long been employed to articulate the doctrine of the Triune God. In that sense, the reader cannot help but wonder whether he might simply have abandoned talk of divine personhood if he, like the Protestant Barth, had not been constrained by Roman authority.

A Thomistic Conception of Divine Personhood

Where Barth and Rahner found ways to re-cast the traditional idea of divine persons and a broadly Western tradition of Trinitarian thinking more generally, I will endeavour in what follows to rehabilitate it. To this end, I will interpret Aquinas' account of divine personhood in the wider context of his Trinitarian thought. At the outset of this discussion, it bears acknowledging that the doctrine of the Trinity that Aquinas presents in his magisterial *Summa Theologiae* has recently become the subject of a significant controversy, instigated by none other than Karl Rahner.[12] According to Rahner, Aquinas was the first major theologian to divide his discussion of the one God (*de Deo uno*) from his subsequent account of the Triune God (*de Deo trino*), although he admits there is some precedent in this regard in the work of Augustine.[13]

In Rahner's view, this division is problematic because it implies that Christianity is effectively a monotheist religion in which the doctrine of the Trinity constitutes a mere afterthought.[14] As part of a wider effort to demonstrate the doctrine's relevance to Christian faith and life, Rahner takes great pains—as Barth did in his own way—to establish the connection between the economy of salvation in Christ, that is, the Incarnation, and the inner life of the Triune God. Thus, he famously formulated his rule, according to which, 'the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity'.[15] The upshot of this rule is that knowledge of the Trinity

cannot be obtained by human beings apart from the Incarnation of Christ, even if it is attainable this way by God.

On these grounds, Rahner concluded that the doctrine of the Trinity is and must be inextricably linked to faith in Christ, while the Christian faith cannot be practically monotheist. This contention gave rise to a wave of literature on the relationship between the doctrine of the Trinity and ordinary life, some of which has gone so far as to argue that there is no immanent Trinity without the economic Trinity, even for God. In other words, as one author has put it, God is who he is 'for us', and as such, he has no identity independent of his relationship to us.[16] Although some of Rahner's followers have advanced this claim on the assumption that doing so is the only way to maintain the link between *Deus unus* and *Deus trinus*—and thus the Trinity and Christian life—I will demonstrate below that it is precisely this link that Aquinas establishes in his account of the Triune God.

Thus, I turn now to elucidate Aquinas' understanding of the Trinity, starting with his discussion of the two 'processions' or ways of coming forth from God the Father that characterize the Son and Spirit, respectively.[17] Whereas the Father alone is 'innascible', not begotten or produced in any way by another, the Son proceeds from the Father by way of knowledge or intellect, because his relationship to the Father is like that of one known by a knower.[18] When the Father knows the Son, consequently, he is said to generate a thought of himself, that is, his image, or a word of self-expression.[19] After all, God is the highest object of knowledge, such that his supreme knowledge as God can consist in the knowledge of none but himself. Since the Father's knowledge of the Son is therefore reflexive, it can be likened to self-knowledge. Thus, the Son can conversely be said to know and make known the Father in the very experience of being known by him.

On the grounds that a good withheld is not truly good, Aquinas argues that a good incapable of communicating itself along these lines could not be considered the highest good. Because the communication of goodness is an expression of love, Aquinas identifies love as the ultimate attribute of the Trinity in which the Father and the Son communicate God's goodness to one another.[20] This brings us to the role in the Godhead of the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son not by way of intellect but by way of the will—or love and desire—for that which is known, namely, the Son by the Father, and the Father, in turn, by the Son.[21]

In Aquinas' account, the Father's knowing of the Son and the Son's knowing of the Father ultimately reflect their mutual desire to know one another, that is, God's desire, consisting in the Holy Spirit, to know himself and make himself known as the highest good that he is. Since the Spirit is indicative of the Father's will to make himself known in the Son, and the Son's will to know and make known the Father, he is generally described as the 'Love' or the 'Gift' exchanged between the Father and Son.[22]

In this connection, the Spirit is said to be spirated or breathed out by the Father and the Son (*filioque*), thus binding them in unity.[23] Because this spiration enacts the knowledge that is shared by the knower and the known, the Spirit constitutes the very life or indeed the Spirit of the Trinity, which consists in honoring or loving God as the highest good or object of devotion and adoration, which he is known to be.

As the discussion above suggests, an appeal to the processions of the Son and Spirit from the Father generates an account of God who does not merely exist as God but also knows and names or communicates himself as God, wants to act and indeed acts like

God. Since it seems fitting and even essential to the nature of a truly divine or supreme being to operate in all these ways, the doctrine of the Trinity can be said to generate an account of one God who is truly worthy of the name 'God'. Thus, Aquinas affirms that God *is* his act of understanding, such that whatever is understood by God is the very living or life of God. The upshot of this claim is that God always completely is what he is, which is to be and to know and to say and to desire and to do all that is good, or consistent with love, on account of the perfect correspondence between who he is, what he knows, what he communicates, what he wants, and what he does.[24]

So much for the sharp division between accounts *de Deo uno* and *de Deo trino*—and the allegedly insufficient emphasis on the Trinity—in Aquinas' work. When the relationship between the two treatises is interpreted on its own terms, I have noted, the doctrine of the Trinity emerges as the condition for the possibility of affirming the reality of one God who is worthy of that name. That is not to say that the knowledge of the Trinity is attainable 'by reason alone', which is on some level possible in the case of knowledge of the one God, whose existence can be speculatively inferred on the basis of a need to posit a single source for all that is 'not God'. Nevertheless, it is to suggest that a fully delineated account of the one God calls for an account of the Triune God, at least in the hindsight of his self-revelation.

This brings us to the four different types of relation, which characterize each of the three Persons of the Trinity. These relations include: paternity, proper to the Father; procession, proper to both Son and Spirit; filiation, proper to the Son, who is generated by the Father; and spiration, proper to the Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.[25] According to Aquinas, each person of the Godhead is identified and distinguished by its mode of relating to the others. Thus, Aquinas speaks of the persons as subsisting in their relations or as 'subsistent relations'.[26] For instance, the Son is the individual person of the Godhead he is because he proceeds from the Father and is the second source of the procession of the Spirit.

By contrast to the divine relations, which are essential to the being of the divine persons, it is worth noting that human relations are accidental or contingent. In other words, they are not necessary to the identity of human beings, contrary to the contention of many so-called social Trinitarians. These theologians generally affirm that subsistent relations are common to human and divine persons, and are in fact the means through which human beings participate in the life of the Trinity.[27] In contrast, Aquinas' account suggests that while human beings depend on other human beings in many ways, are formed by their social situations, and require relationships to instigate the expression of their individual personalities and abilities, nevertheless they are "always more than the sum total of their relationships."[28]

That is to say, they are not defined or wholly constricted by their relations or social circumstances – as if a mother had no personal identity without her children, for instance, or those who had experienced abuse or oppression could never overcome it. Where the opposite claim is upheld, the ironic conclusion follows that certain classes of human beings are inescapably subject to the very inequalities, gender stereotypes, and oppressive social situations, which many social doctrines of the Trinity purport theoretically to transcend. As this suggests, projecting the definition of divine personhood onto human persons is just as problematic as assigning modern ideas about human personhood on to God. While human personhood can be described as analogous to or a

mode of participation in divine personhood, as I will elaborate below, the concepts of human and divine personhood are not univocal.

The reason human beings cannot be reduced or limited to their relations in the way of the divine persons concerns the fact that human personalities—which predispose human beings to relate to others—are ineluctably limited. Although the human inability to relate fully to others renders it largely impossible for human beings to find complete fulfillment in any given relationship, or in relationships overall, it has the advantage of rendering illegitimate any attempt inappropriately to constrict human beings in accordance with their relationships or communities of upbringing in some of the problematic ways mentioned above.

As God is an unlimited being, by contrast, the three personalities that constitute his being are not subject to limitations, although they are distinct in their modes of relation. On account of this unlimited-ness-in-difference, the three Persons enjoy a capacity to relate to one another completely.[29] Thus, there is nothing about the Father that is not known by the Son in the Spirit, and nothing that is not known by the Son about the Father in the Spirit. For precisely this reason, Aquinas describes the Father, Son, and Spirit as 'persons' in the fullest sense of the term.

While the Boethian definition of personhood he has in mind here applies to both human beings and to God, since both are rational—or operate in accordance with intellect and will—the limitations of human persons and thus of the human capacity for relationship entail that they possess personhood in a qualified or circumscribed sense which is not applicable to God.[30] As such, they are persons only by analogy to or participation in God, who is the one and only being that is strictly speaking 'personal' because the divine persons stand in the one and only relationship that exists without remainder.[31]

Although Aquinas' doctrine of the Trinity affirms the personal nature of God along these lines, it is important to stress that it does not go any further than the doctrine of the one or 'simple' God when it comes to giving access to knowledge of the essence of the divine being. Rather, it offers a more, indeed, the most, elaborate 'formal' explanation of the *kind* of being God is.[32] Whereas the doctrine of divine simplicity teaches us that God is a kind of being who is infinite, eternal, immutable, and omnipresent—and thus wholly incommensurable with the objects of our knowledge, which are complex, finite, temporal, changeable, and local—the doctrine of the Trinity adds nothing to this account but an explanation of God's ability to make himself known as such a 'known unknown', in virtue of his personal and relational nature.

Though the doctrine of the Trinity therefore affirms to the fullest possible extent God's ability to communicate himself as the simple God monotheists believe him to be, it is worth re-iterating that the profound coherence the doctrine consequently exhibits can only be perceived in retrospect of Christian revelation.[33] Thus, it remains to show briefly how the God who lies beyond the reach of human knowledge made himself known to humankind in a personal form with which human beings are capable of identifying, namely, by assuming the form of a human person.

At the Incarnation, Christ imparted the knowledge of the Triune God by doing what he always does within the Godhead: he operated in the knowledge of and with a view to accomplishing the Father's good purposes.[34] In the context of his human life, he did this by bringing his eternal knowledge of God to bear in evaluating how to engage in

ordinary human activities or deal with human circumstances.[35] By these means, he expressed his Spirit (life, mind, personality, etc.) of love for the Father, that is, his desire to please and honour the Father in all things. Thus, Christ revealed the Trinity to humankind by deliberating and finding the best way to bring glory to God in every human situation he faced.

In thus revealing God, however, the Incarnation did not go any further than the doctrines of divine simplicity or Trinity in terms of offering substantial knowledge of who God is. It only confirmed in practice what these doctrines establish in theory, namely, that God is unknowable but is capable of making himself known as such on account of his personal and relational nature. Indeed, the knowledge of God delivered by his Son in this event was mediated by the human life and work of Christ, informed by his direct knowledge of God the Father. In that sense, the Son's revelation of the Father through efforts to express the Spirit that seeks to glorify God at all times entails nothing but the revelation of the Person of Christ himself. In sum, Christ at once imparts and *is* the revelation of God.

An Underdeveloped Theology of the Holy Spirit?

With the foregoing discussion in view, we may now return to re-consider the criticisms that have been levelled against the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, as it has traditionally been construed in Latin Christian thought. The first of these criticisms pertained to the 'immanent Trinity', in which the Spirit's work supposedly cannot be distinguished very readily from that of the other two persons. Rather, he simply represents the bond or shared interest that motivates the other persons in their operations.

The second criticism concerns the 'economic Trinity', in which the Spirit is allegedly absorbed into the Second Person of the Trinity, through whom the revelation of the Father is accomplished. In Christ's profession, 'I and the Father are one'[36] for example, there is no explicit reference to the third person of the Trinity. His relevance is only implied in the Son's profession of unity with the Father, which is fostered by their bond in the Spirit.

Although the aforementioned criticisms carry weight when the divine persons are understood as distinct and autonomous subjects or centres of consciousness, the attempt I undertook above to interpret Aquinas' understanding of divine personhood on its own terms calls the legitimacy of those criticisms into question. As I have demonstrated, divine personhood in the thought of Aquinas entails a distinct but unlimited ability to relate to other persons in the communion—for the Spirit, consequently, the Father and the Son.

However, this is an ability that the Holy Spirit possesses in full. In the case of the Father, for instance, the Spirit's distinct but unlimited ability to relate manifests in the way he serves as breath to the Father's word, as it were, in every act whereby the Father expresses his desire to make himself known through the Son. Moreover, it becomes evident as he performs a similar function on behalf of the Son, whose every effort to know the Father and make him known is the product of the Spirit's enlivening power.

Nonetheless, critics might retort that the theology of the Holy Spirit remains underdeveloped in this instance, because the Spirit's work is unintelligible without reference to the Father and the Son. What such critics overlook, however, is that same

holds true of the Father and the Son, whose work is defined in terms of their respective relations to the Spirit. It is only slightly more obvious in the case of the Spirit that the persons are highly dependent upon one another. Yet it is this very inter-dependence—or capacity for relation without remainder—that establishes rather than undermines the personhood of the Spirit, to say nothing of the other two persons, in the thought of Aquinas.

In that sense, the Western doctrine provides a fully developed account of the Spirit's operations precisely because it treats him as the bond, shared interest, motivator, or life force, behind the work of the Father and Son – not in spite of that fact. As this suggests, the objections to the traditional doctrine of the Holy Spirit can be refuted not so much by searching for new ways to address them on the assumption they are legitimate, but simply by explaining the terms of the doctrine itself, which render the objections obsolete.

When this explanation is offered, the Spirit emerges not only as a fully endowed divine person but even as a divine person in the supreme sense of the term. For his involvement everywhere the Son acts out of a desire to glorify the Father, and the Father out of a desire to glorify himself in the Son, confirms that he is the means of the other two persons' inter-relations. As such, he is relational in the greatest number of respects, and thus, supremely personal. For this reason, the Western conception of the Spirit, far from underdeveloped, recognizes the Spirit's personhood in the most profound way.

Social Trinitarianism: A Critique of the Critics

While providing a basis for resolving complaints about the Western doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the discussion of the Trinity above also lays a foundation for addressing other common problems that have been associated with the Latin doctrine of the Trinity more generally. In this final section, my purpose is to demonstrate that these further problems do not arise for that doctrine when it is interpreted on its own terms. Rather ironically, they can be linked instead to the alternative model of the Trinity that has been formulated by those seeking to avoid precisely those problems.

Although this model is subject to variation in the work of different thinkers, it has nonetheless come to be known under the general heading of 'social Trinitarianism'. Typically, social Trinitarians such as Jürgen Moltmann trace their thinking to the tradition of Trinitarian thought that emerged in the Greek East, although recent research which highlights the affinities between Latin and Greek Patristic thought on the Trinity seems to query the accuracy of this lineage.[37] With a view to offering a more developed doctrine of the Holy Spirit than can supposedly be found in the traditional Western doctrine, social Trinitarians generally reject the *filioque,* or the idea that the Spirit is the bond between the Father and Son, and present him instead as one who proceeds like the Son directly from the Father, as one of the 'two hands' of the Father.[38]

While social Trinitarians thereby lay clear emphasis on the distinctness of the three persons, they simultaneously expose themselves to charges of tri-theism and incur the burden of demonstrating the unity of God's being, knowledge, will, and actions, which the traditional account guarantees.[39] In that sense, it is the social Trinitarian rather than the Western account which might be said to divorce *deus trinus* from *deus unus.* Yet social Trinitarians may face even more serious challenges—as I have noted, the very

challenges they mounted against the traditional doctrine of the Trinity, albeit on the basis of a caricatured conception of it.

As mentioned above, social doctrines of the Trinity by and large presuppose that human, like divine, persons do not subsist prior to but in their relations.[40] At first glance, this assumption may seem plausible and indeed commendable, since social Trinitarians invoke it in order to support equality and diversity, reciprocity, and human collaboration and community, and thus to combat the individualism that supposedly plagues the traditional doctrine, not to mention modern thought. On closer examination, however, I have demonstrated that positing human persons as 'subsistent relations' gives way to the 'communitarian' notion that individuals are defined by their social relations.

In turn, this implies that human beings are a function of their social circumstances and the stereotypes that prevail therein, however oppressive or inappropriately restrictive they may be.[41] Although social doctrines of the Trinity are marketed as a condition for social justice, consequently, they ultimately seem to defeat their own purposes of fostering healthy ecclesial communities and challenging the patriarchy and oppression that are all too common in society as well as in the church.[42] On the theoretical level, they may even contribute to the problems they purport to solve. By contrast, the traditional doctrine possesses resources that have not been sufficiently appreciated for achieving the ends of social justice, in virtue of the appropriate distinction it draws between the nature of human and divine relations.

Whereas social Trinitarians generally contend that human beings participate in the life of the Trinity by relating to other humans as the persons of the Trinity relate to one another, this doctrine suggests that they do so by learning to exercise intellect and will, or their abilities and interests to pursue knowledge and to act, just as the Father knows and wills to act through the Son and in the Spirit, respectively. In short, they participate by embracing and realizing personal potential.[43] On this showing, consequently, human beings reflect the image of the Trinity, perfectly instanced in Christ, by expressing the human spirit (life, mind, personality), given to them through the creative work of the Son, out of a desire to honor God the Father as the sole object of absolute significance. This desire checks the human tendency to over-estimate the significance of finite objects and circumstances in ways that thwart human thriving, and thereby actualizes the God-given potential of human beings.

Since *all* human persons are made in God's image to flourish through the realization of their potentialities, the traditional doctrine implicitly contests any inappropriate power structures or modes of oppression that might prevent this. Contrary to popular social Trinitarian belief, consequently, the emphasis on divine unity does not "legitimize authoritarian rule by a single holder of exclusive power."[44] This is true notwithstanding the use of 'Father' and 'Son' terminology—and the abuses of this terminology to justify patriarchy and oppression, to which many feminist authors have objected.[45] After all, the activity of 'generation' proper to the Father in reality "seems much more in keeping with what only women can do: give birth."[46] Regardless, the gendered terms can be construed metaphorically and are as such replaceable, even in Aquinas' account, with terms like 'intellect' and 'will' which refer to powers that all persons possess.[47] For this reason, they do not denote an intrinsic patriarchy.

Although the traditional doctrine contests authoritarian and oppressive rule, it does not by the same token promote individualism, or an excessive sense of personal

autonomy from social relations, which its emphasis on divine unity is frequently accused of fostering. For it can be inferred from the traditional doctrine that human individuality, like the individuality of the divine persons, is best nurtured in the context of a community. That is not to imply that a human community, like that of the divine, can or ought to determine the shape of individual personalities, per communitarianism.

Since human persons do not subsist in their relations, this account merely recognizes that communities create a necessary context for employing personal capacities, and even a responsibility to do so for the well-being of others; that societies serve at their best as a site for encouraging individuals to realize their potential, however this may challenge existing stereotypes, structures, and social norms; and that they require to be overhauled if they do anything less than operate on precisely these terms of reciprocity and equality. In these respects, the traditional doctrine appears to provide a more effective theoretical basis for accomplishing the ends of social Trinitarianism than social Trinitariansm itself is able to offer.

As part of the larger project of compensating for the alleged deficiencies of Western theology, many social Trinitarians have been concerned not only to correct the mistakes of Western Trinitarian thought but also to provide a substitute for the doctrine of the one God that precedes' Aquinas' account of the Trinity and allegedly renders that account superfluous. On the understanding of most social Trinitarians, Aquinas' decision to situate his treatise on the one God just prior to his treatise on the Trinity is not only indicative of a practical monotheism. It also confirms that Aquinas adheres to a philosophical, some would say 'onto-theological' or idolatrous, concept of God. This concept is one Aquinas is supposed to have derived from Greek philosophy, in which God is conceived as totally impersonal—detached from and unmoved by his creatures.

Since such a concept of the divine is obviously incompatible with any doctrine of the Trinity that acknowledges the personal and loving character of God, many social Trinitarians have naturally turned to one or another version of process theology in order to affirm God's nature in these respects. According to process theology, also known in some guises as 'panentheism' or 'dialectical theism'[48], the one God takes on human characteristics like temporality, change, evil, and suffering, even while 'prehending' or subsuming them all in himself. In this way, he preserves his transcendence, albeit in a highly attenuated or qualified way.

So construed, God is clearly capable of empathizing with the exigencies and even the horrors of the human condition. In short, he is fit for personal relationship, in much the same way a human person would be capable of relationship. At the same time, however, he seems to forfeit the divine qualities on account of which he is able to relate to—and help—human beings in ways only God can, indeed, in ways that are highly desirable from the human standpoint. For example, the panentheist affirmation of God's mutability seems, if inadvertently, to imply that God can be fickle or fallible with regard to his own intents, which would certainly inhibit his ability consistently to work in the best interests of his creatures.

By contrast, the doctrine of divine immutability, which panentheists regard as an indicator of utter divine detachment, is in fact a way of asserting God's unflagging faithfulness to his own nature and will to show compassion for his creatures. Likewise, the doctrine of divine impassibility, which supposedly renders God 'unfeeling', ensures that he is never weighed down by sufferings in a way that would prevent him from

fulfilling a plan to relieve humanity of theirs, as he would be if he were subject to suffering.[49] In that sense, the varieties of panentheism that affirm divine suffering seem to prove as self-defeating in this respect as the social doctrines of the Trinity to which they are often, and quite naturally, allied.[50]

For all these reasons, it seems reasonable not only to question the wisdom of the recent and wide-scale repudiation of Western theology, but also to query the equally widespread tendency of theologians to adopt a combined panentheist-social Trinitarian model in its place. When Western theology is interpreted on its own terms, it not only avoids the problems panentheist and social Trinitarian theologians have associated with it but also proves optimally suited to resolving the very problems and accomplishing the ends on account of which such untraditional theological positions have been developed. Yet it does so without falling into the pitfalls of these positions, which seemingly "speak of God simply by speaking of man in a loud voice."[51]

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[1] See John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 6 ('The Holy Spirit'), citing pp. 27, 31 of *The Forgotten Trinity: The Report of the BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today* (London: British Council of Churches, 1989), vol. 1.

[2] John Webster offers his own account of these observations in his article, "The Identity of the Holy Spirit: A Problem in Trinitarian Theology," *Themelios* 9.1 (September 1983): pp. 4-7. See p. 4 particularly. From a less sympathetic point of view, Paul Fiddes does the same in *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2000), 252-4.

[3] See Karl Rahner, *The Trinity,* trans. Joseph Donceel (London: Burns and Oates, 1970), p. 43. For a history of the concept of 'person' and its use in Trinitarian theology, see Angel Cordovilla Perez, 'The Trinitarian Concept of Person', in *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology,* ed. Robert J. Wozniak and Giulio Maspero (London: T & T Clark, 2012), esp. pp. 123-4 on 'The Psychological Turn of Modern Philosophy'.

[4] Boethius, *Contra Eutychen*, in *Theological Tractates. The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. H.F. Stewart, E.K. Rand, S.J. Tester, in Loeb Classical Library 74 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), c. 2.

[5] Richard of St Victor, *De Trinitate* IV, 23 (PL, 196, 946c): *sola individua vel incommunicabilis dicatur persona.* See also Nico den Bok, *Communicating the Most High: A Systematic Study of Person and Trinity in the Theology of Richard of St Victor* (Paris: Brepols, 1996).

[6] See Charles Taylor, *The Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

[7] Karl Rahner, *The Trinity,* p. 43.

[8] Karl Rahner, *The Trinity,* p. 44.

[9] Karl Barth, 'God in His Revelation', in *Church Dogmatics* I,1 *(§§ 1-12)* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2004).

[10] See Jürgen Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM Press, 2000).

[11] Karl Rahner, *The Trinity,* pp. 109-10.

[12] For a rebuttal of this critique, see Karen Kilby, 'Aquinas, the Trinity and the Limits of Understanding', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7:4 (October, 2005).

[13] Karl Rahner, *The Trinity,* pp. 16-17.

[14] Karl Rahner, *The Trinity,* p. 10.

[15] Karl Rahner, *The Trinity,* pp. 22, 55: on 'Rahner's rule'.

[16] Catherine LaCugna (in *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993).

[17] For a much more elaborate account of Aquinas' doctrine of the Trinity, see Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[18] *ST* 1.33.

[19] *ST* Ia.27.2; *ST* Ia.34-5: on the Son as Word and Image.

[20] *ST* Ia.37.

[21] *ST* Ia.36.

[22] *ST* Ia.37-8

[23] *ST* Ia.27.3-4.

[24] *ST* Ia.18.4.

[25] *ST* Ia.28.

[26] *ST* Ia.29; cf. Ia.40.

[27] See John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd 2004); and Catherine La Cugna, *God for Us.* See Kathryn Tanner's article on this topic, 'Social Trinitarianism and its Critics', in *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology*, ed. Robert J. Wozniak and Giulio Maspero (London: T & T Clark, 2012).

[28] Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 116; *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995). See also a superb article by Harriet A. Harris, which responds to a number of accounts in which personhood is defined in terms of relations: 'Should We Say that Personhood is Relational?' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51:2 (May, 1998), pp. 214-34.

[29] *ST* 1.28.

[30] *ST* Ia.29.3.

[31] *ST* 1.39.6: The divine essence is not only really the same as one person, but it is really the same as the three persons. Subsequent to his discussion of the persons as relations, Aquinas also treats the five notions of origin in the Trinity, which are given primacy over the relations in many contemporary Orthodox accounts of the Trinity. According to Aquinas, relation rather than origin should be regarded as the primary principle of distinction amongst the persons, because distinctions ought to be based on intrinsic properties of persons, and relations represent the intrinsic causes of the persons' varying origins.

[32] As Karen Kilby argues in her article, 'Is an Apophatic Trinitarianism Possible?', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12:1 (January 2010), the doctrine of the Trinity confirms the unknowable nature of God even more than that of God as simple.

[33] *ST* Ia.32.1.

[34] *ST* IIIa.10.

[35] *ST* IIIa.12.

[36] John 10:30.

[37] Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). See also Sarah Coakley's effort to

distinguish social Trinitarianism from the Trinitarian theology of Gregory of Nyssa in 'Persons in the Social Doctrine of the Trinity: A Critique of Current Analytic Discussion', in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Sympoisum on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 124-44.

[38] See Vladimir Lossky's discussion in 'The Procession of the Holy Spirit in Orthodox Trinitarian Doctrine', in *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood: SVS Press), ch. 4, pp. 71-96.

[39] See Emmanuel Durand, 'Perichoresis: A Key Concept for Balancing Trinitarian Theology', in *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology,* pp. 177-192. The author argues that the notion of perichoresis provides a counterpart to the *filioque.* See also Jürgen Moltman's account in, 'Perichoresis, An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology', in M. Douglas Meeks (ed.), *Trinity, Community, Power: Mapping Trajectories in Wesleyan Theology* (Nashwood: Kingsood Books, 2000), pp. 69-83. Karen Kilby offers a relevant critique in, 'Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity', *New Blackfriars* 81:957 (November 2000), 432-45.

[40] See John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion;* and Catherine La Cugna, *God For Us.*

[41] Kathryn Tanner makes a similar point in 'Social Trinitarianism and its Critics', p. 372.

[42] Jürgen Moltmann, 'I Believe in God the Father: Patriarchal and Non-patriarchal Talk of God', in Jürgen Moltmann (ed.) *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), pp. 1-18. See also Moltmann's, *Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1993).

[43] Lydia Schumacher, 'The Trinity and Christian Life: A Broadly Thomistic Account of Participation', *New Blackfriars*, published online 2015.

[44] Kathryn Tanner, 'Social Trinitarianism and its Critics, p. 370.

[45] Sally McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982). Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1999).

[46] Kathryn Tanner, 'Social Trinitarianism and its Critics, p. 374.

[47] Janet Martin Soskice, 'Can a Feminist Call God Father?' In Alvin F. Kimel (ed.), *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's, 1992), pp. 81-94.

[48] John MacQuarrie, *In Search of Deity: An Essay on Dialectical Theism* (London: SCM, 2012).

[49] See Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Suffer* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000).

[50] A good example of this alliance can be found in works by Jürgen Moltmann and Paul Fiddes, for example, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2000); *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).

[51] Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (London: Harper and Row, 1957), pp. 195-6.