

## *The Trinity from Schleiermacher to the end of the twentieth century*

### THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE DETRADITIONALISATION OF THE THEOLOGY OF THE TRINITY

Between the time of the Reformation and the beginning of the nineteenth century a number of intellectual developments took place which impacted on the theology of the Trinity. First, the separation of faith and reason, already begun in the late medieval period (Condemnation of 1277) became even more pronounced during the Reformation and its aftermath. In the light of the religious conflicts within Western Christendom, an appeal to mere reason without any reference to the tradition proved popular. Descartes' *Meditations* (1641) is a clear example of this approach. This modern understanding of reason as 'autonomous', separate from faith, led in our view to the impoverishment of both reason and faith, for it led to the decline of the contemplative disposition, which had been central to the approach to the mystery of the Trinity amongst medieval schoolmen. A merely rationalistic or a merely fideistic approach was alien to them. A second major development was the rise of empirical sciences which ultimately led to the concept of a mechanistic universe which was explicable in its own terms, without reference to God. In philosophical terms, British empiricism, by acknowledging only sense data as a source of true knowledge, led to the marginalisation of traditional religion, to deism, and even to scepticism. The titles of some of the main works of this time speak for themselves. John Locke (1632–1704), one of the fathers of empiricism, wrote a book entitled *The Reasonableness of Christianity* in which he attempted to show that the core of Christian beliefs – when interpreted properly – are not at odds with reason. His contemporary, the Irishman John Toland went even further in his work *Christianity Not Mysterious* by rejecting any kind of supernaturalism as superstitious or corrupt. But it is Matthew Tindal (1657–1733) who is considered to be the father of deism. In his book *Christianity as Old as the Creation* he states that revelation cannot go against

reason (if it does it is wrong); morality is grounded on reason (not on God); and the Bible should be read like any other book. These presuppositions result in a 'clockmaker God' who differs rather dramatically from the trinitarian God of Christianity.

However, it was soon realised that merely relying on sense data cannot provide us with secure knowledge of the world and how it operates. For instance, the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–76) argued that we cannot observe causality – it is a mere habit of the mind. In the area of religious thought he is remembered for his attack on traditional religion in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), the greatest of the Enlightenment thinkers, rejected Hume's epistemological scepticism by arguing that the human mind structures its environment by subjecting it to a priori conditions of knowledge (causality, time, space). Because one cannot use these categories outside the phenomenal world classical metaphysics is doomed to failure – including the proofs for the existence of God. However, since practical reason demands a necessary connection between virtue and happiness, Kant postulates the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. We cannot prove the existence of God, but if we recognise any moral obligation at all we are implicitly asserting a moral order which in turn implies the immortality of the soul and the existence of God. Kant was obviously a deist: he accepts the existence of God but he does not accept the claims of revelation. Kant was to reduce key religious beliefs in the existence of God or the immortality of the soul to mere postulates of practical reason. Given this reductionist orientation, that is, his understanding of religion in terms of morality, it is not surprising that Kant had no interest in a theology of the Trinity.<sup>1</sup>

Another important development in the intellectual scene of the eighteenth century, closely associated with the philosophical movements already discussed, was the emergence of the historical-critical approach as developed by Hermann Reimarus (1694–1768) and others. For Reimarus, the New Testament is a historical document to be interpreted against the background of first-century Judaism. He likewise argued that in our readings of the New Testament we should disregard all supernatural elements (resurrection, miracles, divinity of Christ). By denying the inspired nature of the New Testament and by pursuing a 'historical' reading deeply

<sup>1</sup> In *Der Streit der Fakultäten* Kant dismisses the doctrine in the following words: 'From the doctrine of the Trinity, taken literally, nothing whatsoever can be gained for practical purposes, even if one believed that one comprehended it – and less still if one is conscious that it surpasses all our concepts.' Quoted by Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM Press, 1991), 6 (henceforward abbreviated as *TKG*).

coloured by Enlightenment presuppositions, Reimarus drove a deep wedge between the tradition of faith (including the doctrine of the Trinity) and the New Testament as he interpreted it. Given this intellectual context Reimarus too can only find a moral purpose for religion: in his reading Jesus becomes a noble moral figure whose legacy, however, was distorted by his followers. The rise of the historical-critical method banished allegorical readings of the Scriptures to the margins of theological practice, and it is only in the second half of the twentieth century that scholars have begun to re-engage with allegorical readings, exposing merely historical-critical readings as one-sided at best.<sup>2</sup>

Authors who accepted the conclusions of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* but who were uncomfortable with his reductionist approach to the Christian faith had to find a different vantage point from which to develop their theological thought. One of the authors who attempted to do this was Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). It is in light of these two challenges – the Kantian and the historical-critical one – that we must situate the work of Schleiermacher, often called the father of modern Protestant theology.

In short, between the time of the Reformation and the beginning of the nineteenth century a number of intellectual developments originated which impacted on the theology of the Trinity. This is not to say that traditional approaches to the theology of the Trinity simply vanished (as is often alleged); but it is to acknowledge that very influential rivalling intellectual approaches originated in the Western tradition which proved hostile to these more traditional approaches. Having mentioned some of the key issues in the preceding pages, we will now continue to discuss two authors who should be considered as exponents of these rival discourses: Schleiermacher and Hegel.

FRIEDRICH SCHLEIERMACHER (1768–1834)  
AND THE TURN TO THE SUBJECT

Schleiermacher accepted that one could no longer read the Bible in a non-historical manner. Although the Old Testament has a limited value because of the historical links with Christianity, we should 'utterly discard Old Testament proofs for specifically Christian doctrines'.<sup>3</sup> He also accepted

<sup>2</sup> See the pioneering work of Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis* 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998ff.).

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), abbreviated as *CF*, followed by number of section and paragraph: *CF* 132.2.

that Kant had convincingly shown that a metaphysical approach to the God-question only led to antinomies. Schleiermacher therefore turned to the subjective experience of absolute dependence. Schleiermacher's key notion – *Abhängigkeitsgefühl* – is often translated as 'the feeling of absolute dependence', but this does not quite capture Schleiermacher's meaning. He is not interested in feelings but rather in the receptivity that characterises our self-consciousness, a consciousness of self as essentially dependent on infinite being. This 'absolute dependence which characterizes not only man but all temporal existence' (*CF* 4.4) does not need proofs for the existence of God. Such proofs are entirely redundant (*CF* 33.3).

Contrary to what some scholars (such as Karl Barth and Jürgen Moltmann) have claimed, the anthropological turn that Schleiermacher effected in theology does not necessarily exclude a theocentric focus. Some of Schleiermacher's expressions may at first appear problematic, such as his famous statement that 'doctrines are only expressions of inward experiences' (*CF* 100.3).<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the whole system of Schleiermacher hinges on the affirmation that God was present in Christ in a unique, because perfect, manner:

[T]o ascribe to Christ an absolutely powerful God-consciousness, and to attribute to him an existence of God in him, are exactly the same thing . . . He is the only 'other' in which there is an existence of God in the proper sense, so far, that is, as we posit the God-consciousness in his self-consciousness as continually and exclusively determining every moment, and consequently also this perfect indwelling of the Supreme Being as his peculiar being and his inmost self. (*CF* 94.2)

This theocentric stance does not, however, imply a trinitarian stance, and claims that Schleiermacher has to be seen as one of the major innovators in the theology of the Trinity, or responsible for its revival, are difficult to sustain. Given his methodological and hermeneutical presuppositions, Schleiermacher rejects the traditional doctrine of the Trinity, especially the doctrine of the immanent Trinity: 'the assumption of an eternal distinction in the Supreme Being is not an utterance concerning the religious consciousness, for there it could never emerge' (*CF* 170.2). And because it is not an utterance concerning religious consciousness, it ultimately has no doctrinal value for Schleiermacher. He is happy to concede that God was present in Christ and in the Church, but he rejects any

<sup>4</sup> This appears hermeneutically naïve, for it can be argued that doctrines shape experience rather than the other way around. See George Lindbeck's study *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984).

suggestion that there is therefore, from all eternity, a distinction between Father, Son, and Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

Another critique he levels at the traditional doctrine of the Trinity is that it never managed to successfully harmonise the belief in the oneness of God and the belief in the threeness of Persons. According to official doctrine, the three are co-equal and, in turn, equal with the divine essence. This, so Schleiermacher reasons, implies that each of the divine Persons is less than the divine essence.<sup>6</sup>

Again, he raises the charge of subordinationism against traditional doctrine: the fact that the Son is 'begotten' from the Father must imply, 'if the term means anything at all', a relationship of dependence; hence the power of the Father is greater than that of the Son. Pursuing the same line of critique: if we accept that the relationship between the three Persons and the divine nature should be conceived in terms of members of a species and the species itself, then one will end up with either subordinationism if one adopts a realistic stance (what is really real is the essence), or tritheism if one adopts a nominalist stance (only the three Persons – as instances of the divine – exist) (CF 171.3). If we refuse to conceive the relationship between the three and the oneness in terms of species and members, then 'we really are not in a position to form any definite ideas on the subject, and hence can have no interest in it' (CF 171.3). This last remark, and the criticisms Schleiermacher put forward, appear to reveal an impoverished theological imagination when dealing with the traditional doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>7</sup>

Most of the critique we have discussed so far was raised by Schleiermacher in the 'Conclusion' (not an 'Appendix', as is so often alleged) to his major work *The Christian Faith*.<sup>8</sup> Given his presuppositions,

<sup>5</sup> Appealing to the Prologue of St John's Gospel is futile, he informs us, for this text can be read with equal plausibility in an Arian manner; besides, the Spirit is not mentioned in the Prologue. All John hoped to make clear, Schleiermacher claims, is the presence of God in Christ (CF 170.2, 3).

<sup>6</sup> Schleiermacher's rationalistic spirit transpires in the application of this 'impeccable' calculation: if  $a + b + c = D$ , then  $a$  and  $b$  and  $c$  are each less than  $D$ .

<sup>7</sup> There is no need to refute Schleiermacher's critique in detail: theologians have traditionally refrained from applying numerical terms to God (see *STL* 30.3); besides, when dealing with infinity it may very well be argued that the Three can be One without being any less than the perichoretic Oneness. They also warned against understanding it in terms of species and members of species. Schleiermacher's criticism seems to presuppose quaternity, a stance to be rejected on the basis of *perichoresis*.

<sup>8</sup> Another criticism, not often noted by scholars, is raised much earlier (CF 96.1). Criticising the language of Chalcedon, and wondering how it could possibly be squared with the language of trinitarian theology, Schleiermacher alleges that traditional doctrine effectively implies tritheism: in the Trinity we supposedly have 'three Persons in one Essence'; in Christ we supposedly have 'one Person out of two natures'. If the word 'Person' retains the same meaning as in Christology – that is, as an individuation of a nature – we end up with three divine individuals. We will come back to this critique when dealing with the trinitarian theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar.

it is clear that Schleiermacher cannot accommodate traditional understandings of the Trinity: 'We have only to do with the God-consciousness given in our self-consciousness along with our consciousness of the world; hence we have no formula for the being of God in himself as distinct from the being of God in the world' (CF 172.1). Schleiermacher sees his own work as a first, preliminary step towards a revision of the doctrine, a revision which the Protestant churches had failed to pursue (CF 172.3). He considers the traditional doctrine of the Trinity as nothing but an expression of the insight that God is present in both Christ and the Holy Spirit (CF 172.1). Pre-existence of both the Son and the Spirit is excluded.<sup>9</sup>

How then does Schleiermacher conceive of the Trinity? The following quotation captures his intentions well:

Unless the being of God in Christ is assumed, the idea of redemption could not be thus concentrated in his Person. And unless there were such a union also in the common Spirit of the Church the Church could not be the Bearer and Perpetuator of the redemption through Christ. Now these exactly are the essential elements in the doctrine of the Trinity. (CF 170.1)

Let us first deal with the presence of God in Christ. This is 'the innermost fundamental power within him, from which every activity proceeds and which holds every element together' (CF 96.3). As this quotation suggests, Schleiermacher attempts to move beyond static language of human and divine *natures* and instead prefers to speak of divine *activity* in Christ. Given this more dynamic understanding of the union between the divine and the human, Schleiermacher can also dispense with the *communicatio idiomatum*: since divine attributes are simply activities, there is no need to speak of a sharing of these with human activities (CF 97.5). Nothing but his essential sinlessness distinguishes Christ from other people. Schleiermacher's rejection of the *communicatio idiomatum* also implies that he refuses to attribute suffering to the divine nature – a view that is, in his opinion, both untraditional and based on misconceived ideas of redemption (CF 97.5). Schleiermacher understands our redemption in terms of receiving blessedness from Christ 'in the consciousness that Christ in us is the centre of our life' (CF 101.2). Here Schleiermacher's pictist background makes itself felt, and he is quite happy to call this element of his thought 'mystical' (CF 101.3).

<sup>9</sup> See CF 123.1: 'In Christ's promises of the Holy Spirit of truth there is nowhere the slightest whisper that this Something had been present earlier and had vanished only temporarily, or indeed that he is anything at all except as he is for the disciples of Christ.' The Holy Spirit is the union of the divine essence with the community of Christian believers. The pre-existence of the Son is also explicitly ruled out (CF 96.1): 'the New Testament knows nothing of this usage; even the expression "Son of God" it uses . . . only of the subject of this union, and not of the divine element in it before the union.'

This brings us to Schleiermacher's pneumatology. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring Christ into memory, and glorify him in us (CF 124.2). The Spirit is the unifying force derived from Christ, residing in the believers, which builds up the Christian community to constitute 'a moral personality' (CF 121.2). The Spirit is an effective spiritual power which animates the life of believers from within (CF 123.3).

To attribute the work of redemption to the Son and sanctification to the Spirit is fairly traditional doctrine. Commentators have noted, however, that Schleiermacher does not discuss the role of the person of the Father in *The Christian Faith*.<sup>10</sup> The most surprising element from a traditional point of view is his outright denial of the pre-existence of Son and Spirit. In this sense we can state that Schleiermacher undoubtedly develops an interesting soteriology and pneumatology; but he is not interested in trinitarian theology as such. However, his views (including his rejection of the pre-existence of Christ and Spirit) have an important implication: they introduce an element of historicity in God's being. God appears to become trinitarian in the course of history.<sup>11</sup> This train of thought is merely suggested in *The Christian Faith* and is not developed given Schleiermacher's methodological presuppositions. It was Hegel who would develop this line of thinking.

For Schleiermacher, the definitions of scholasticism had long since become a dead letter (CF 96.2) and he therefore attempted to reinvent the Christian faith for the modern period. We may not share his presuppositions, methodology or conclusions, but his status as a 'classic' author is beyond dispute. One author who did not share Schleiermacher's approach (and explicitly criticises it) is Hegel, the greatest idealist philosopher of the nineteenth century.

G. W. F. HEGEL (1770–1831): A PHILOSOPHICAL  
REINTERPRETATION OF THE TRINITY

Hegel offers one of the most sweeping and profound philosophical systems in the history of the West. He took issue with the Romantic reduction of religion to mere feelings of devotion, such as in pietism or even in Schleiermacher's emphasis upon 'feelings of dependence', stating rather sarcastically that if this were the correct approach 'a dog would be the best Christian'.<sup>12</sup> But he also disagrees with the Kantian Enlightenment

<sup>10</sup> See Samuel Powell, *The Trinity in German Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 101.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>12</sup> *Hegel's Berliner Schriften*, ed. J. Hoffmeister, 1944, p. 346, quoted by Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Hegel's Philosophy of Religion* (London: Macmillan Press, 1977), 85.

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approach, rejecting it as fundamentally sceptical. More specifically, he takes issue with the narrow emphasis upon *Verstand* (usually translated as 'understanding') as distinct from the more profound *Vernunft* (usually translated as 'reason' although 'intelligence' might be a better alternative). Whereas *Verstand* only detects contradictions, working with static concepts, *Vernunft* comes to a more profound understanding which grasps identity in difference. Hegel is therefore very much the philosopher of reconciliation, that is, his system of thought wants to bring competing views together in a higher synthesis, for instance, the Enlightenment concern with truth and reason, and the Romantic or pietist concerns with religion in terms of devotion and subjective feelings of the heart.

Methodologically the so-called dialectical approach is one of his key features. In textbooks this is usually presented in terms of thesis-antithesis-higher synthesis. Hegel however prefers to speak of reconciliation of opposites rather than synthesis. In reconciliation the opposition, division, or separation between two competing elements is overcome. As we will see, the incarnation is an important example of the way in which opposition between God and his estranged world is overcome, for it is in the unity of the divine and human natures of the God-man that reconciliation between God and world is achieved (PR II, 348).<sup>13</sup>

As Hegel's thought deals with almost every aspect of life and culture it defies summary. For our purposes we will focus mainly on his views on religion, philosophy, and the Trinity as expounded in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (PR). In it, Hegel describes the whole movement of 'God' and world from a trinitarian perspective. We put the word 'God' in quotation marks as Hegel's God is not to be identified with the God of traditional Christian theism. For Hegel, God as *Geist* (Spirit, or Mind) not only manifests himself in the world, but the world, its history, and its human institutions (including state, art, religion, morality) embody and actualise God. As Charles Taylor puts it:

Like finite subjects, the absolute subject [= 'God'] must go through a cycle, a drama, in which it suffers division in order to return to unity . . . And the drama is not another parallel story to the drama of opposition and reconciliation in man. It is the same one seen from a different and wider perspective.<sup>14</sup>

In other words, humanity and its cultural (religious, artistic, moral, legal) institutions and expressions are the vehicle of the spiritual life of *Geist*.

<sup>13</sup> We use the translation *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* from the second German edition (1840) in three volumes by Ebenezer B. Speirs (London: Routledge, 1974).

<sup>14</sup> Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 41.

The whole of reality is the self-unfolding of Spirit in its movement towards greater actualization. Nature is self-alienated Spirit, God in his otherness. Hegel also distinguishes between subjective Spirit (the emergence of subjectivity in the human being), objective Spirit (the social objectification of *Geist* in cultural and ethical institutions of society, including the State), and absolute Spirit (in which Spirit knows and actualises itself in art, religion, and philosophy). This is certainly a vision full of majesty – but whether it is compatible with the Christian worldview is debatable.

Religion is of particular interest to Hegel as it is ‘the self-consciousness of God’ (PR II, 327). Hegel discusses a number of different religions in which the absolute Spirit (‘God’) finds expression. Greek religion, for instance, expresses the divine in human form (e.g., statue of Apollo): the divine is not seen as something utterly other. However, Greek religion remains parochial, intrinsically linked with the city-state. Jewish religion, on the other hand, is more universalistic, but here God remains too distant, too transcendent, and this separation of divine and human leads to unhappy consciousness. It is in Christianity that we encounter true universality without having to espouse an utterly transcendent God. Here the universal, infinite Spirit and the particular, finite Spirit are inseparably connected (PR II, 330).

Thus, more than in other religions it is in Christianity that God reveals himself supremely. Indeed, it is in Christianity that the absolute Being (Hegel’s ‘God’) attains self-consciousness. Hegel understands God very much in terms of consciousness or mind, and it is characteristic of mind or Spirit (*Geist*) to differentiate itself, to manifest itself:

God posits or lays down the Other, and takes it up again into his eternal movement. Spirit just is what appears to itself or manifests itself; this constitutes its act, or form of action, and its life; this is its only act, and it is itself only its act. What does God reveal, in fact, but just that he is this revelation of himself? What he reveals is the infinite form. Absolute subjectivity is determination, and this is the positing or bringing into actual existence of distinctions or difference . . . It is his Being to make these distinctions eternally, to take them back and at the same time to remain within himself, not to go out of himself. What is revealed, is, that he is for an Other. (PR II, 335)

As this quotation suggests, an analysis of *Geist* (mind, spirit) makes clear that it necessarily implies self-differentiation. Self-consciousness implies that I can relate to myself as other. This self-differentiation at the heart of *Geist* explains why Hegel is drawn towards the doctrine of the Trinity, as we find this kind of self-differentiation in the trinitarian God. And it is a

self-differentiation which involves the whole universe. First, God is to be understood as he is in himself, as the absolute and eternal Idea, and Hegel calls this the realm of the Father. Here God is ‘outside of or before the creation of the world’ as eternal Idea, abstract and not yet posited in its reality (PR III, 7). The second movement considers how the Idea ‘passes out of its condition of universality and infinity into the determination or specific form of finitude’ (PR III, 33). It is in this context that Hegel discusses the realm of the Son, and also the created world. The third movement is the realm of the Holy Spirit. It belongs to God’s essential nature to reconcile to himself the otherness of the second realm, and to make it return to himself. This is associated with the Christian notion of the Holy Spirit.

Hegel thus adopts the language of trinitarian theology to describe how it belongs to God’s nature, as Spirit or mind, to differentiate itself (PR III, 10). In his description of this process of differentiation and self-manifestation in otherness, and subsequent reconciliation, two things are noteworthy: first, it introduces movement or process into God’s self; and, secondly, the created universe is an intrinsic part of this intradivine process. Both views are profoundly at odds with the traditional view, which does not allow for development or progression in God and which also refuses to make God independent on creation, or to allow creation to be swallowed up in the intradivine life of the Trinity.

When discussing the realm of the Son, Hegel pays particular attention to the created world, and its inherent evil. The created world itself is an estrangement from God, and in need of return to God, which is its reconciliation. What appears problematic from a more traditional point of view is that Hegel appears to associate evil with finitude itself, thereby effectively downplaying the traditional view that the created world is good. Evil is necessitated by the self-differentiation and self-determination of God. Evil is essentially connected with otherness, and otherness can only be seen in light of the self-differentiation of the divinity.<sup>15</sup> The reconciliation that overcomes the contradiction of evil rests on the conscious recognition of the unity of divine and human natures (PR III, 71). This unity of the divine and human natures occurs in Christ, the God-Man (PR III, 72–3; 76–7). Thus, in the Hegelian scheme Christ’s activity is interpreted as an instrument of the divine unfolding into otherness which will allow the fulfilment of a higher consciousness (PR III, 78). As a consequence Hegel pays fairly little attention to the historical life of Christ (PR III, 84). More

<sup>15</sup> See William Desmond, *Hegel’s God: A Counterfeit Double?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 152.

important is the death of Christ, in which 'the conversion of consciousness' begins (*PR III*, 84). The death of Christ is 'the central point round which all else turns' (*PR III*, 86). The significance of the Passion of Christ lies in the fact that it does away with the human side of Christ's nature (*PR III*, 87) and reveals that Christ was the God-Man, the God who had at the same time a human nature, even unto death (*PR III*, 89): the reconciliation of the infinite and the finite.

The natural will, the finite, the Other-Being or otherness is yielded up and transfigured in the death of Christ (*PR III*, 89), and we are called to accomplish this same transformation within ourselves, yielding up our natural will (*PR III*, 95). But Hegel does not see atonement of the spiritual and the world merely in terms of a moral example we should follow. Rather, he sees the cross as a trinitarian event: 'God has died, God is dead – this is the most frightful of all thoughts, that all that is eternal, all that is true is not, that negation itself is found in God . . .' Predictably, this death itself is only another moment in the divine unfolding, and the death of God is only 'the death of death. God comes to life again, and thus things are reversed' (*PR III*, 91).

In short, Hegel sees the life and death of the incarnate Son as a moment within a divine unfolding: from universality to particularity, which is done away with and absorbed in his death (*PR III*, 92). The death of Christ is 'the negation of the negation', meaning: the negation of the otherness that the finite, created world is. This finite world is, in turn, a negation of the universal nature of God the Father: 'This death is thus at once finitude in its most extreme form, and at the same time the abolition and absorption of natural finitude, of immediate existence and estrangement, the cancelling of limits' (*PR III*, 93). Hegel leaves us in no doubt that the death of Christ is 'a moment in the nature of God; it has taken place in God himself' (*PR III*, 95) – and this will prove an extremely influential idea throughout trinitarian theology in the twentieth century. It is revealing that Hegel quotes a Lutheran hymn in this context, which states that 'God himself is dead.' He comments: 'the consciousness of this fact expresses the truth that the human, the finite, frailty, weakness, the negative, is itself a divine moment, is in God himself' (*PR III*, 98). Finitude as divine self-differentiation is 'a moment in God himself, though, to be sure, it is a vanishing moment' (*PR III*, 99). As suggested earlier, it is debatable whether this view can be reconciled with the Scriptures in which we encounter a God who is not dependent on the world and its history.

The negation that is the death of Christ is overcome in the resurrection, which makes space for the outpouring of the Spirit and the establishment of

the spiritual community, which is the Church. It is only after the immediateness and the sensuousness of the incarnate Son had disappeared that the Spirit is poured out (*PR III*, 110). This is the third moment within the Hegelian Trinity.

To recapitulate, in the first moment, 'God' is conceived as the undifferentiated universal, an infinite and abstract reality. In the second moment, God becomes particular in the incarnate Son. The third moment is that of individuality, of the return of the finite to the infinite, in which separation and alienation are transcended. Hegel speaks of 'universal individuality' (*PR III*, 100). To make clear what he means Hegel draws a comparison with ordinary love. In ordinary love we abstract from all worldly things, and the loving person centres all his satisfaction on one particular individual. But this is still the realm of particularity. In the realm of the Spirit, individuality becomes universal; the sensuous passes over into the spiritual without abolishing the sensuous (*PR III*, 102–3). It is here that the Church or the spiritual community is established: it represents 'the transition from what is outward, from outward manifestation to what is inward. It occupies itself with the certainty felt by the subject of its own infinite non-sensuous substantiality, and of the fact that it knows itself to be infinite and eternal, knows itself to be immortal' (*PR III*, 104). To pursue the analogy with love: distinction of authority, power, position, or race does not matter any more in Christian love ('Before God all are equal'). The love that reigns in the spiritual community is universal and non-preferential (*PR III*, 105–6).

It is by appropriating the divine drama, by passing through this divine history and process in our own selves that we become members of the spiritual community (*PR III*, 109). This presupposes faith, the belief that reconciliation has been accomplished (*PR III*, 109–10). Through faith we acquire a totally different perspective on the outward history of the life of Christ. From being a material, empirically existing element, it has become a divine moment, an essentially supreme moment in God himself. This is the reason why it cannot be verified in a purely positivistic, historicist manner (*PR III*, 116). It is the Church or the spiritual community which produces this faith, not the words of the Bible, nor a historical reconstruction of the life of Jesus (*PR III*, 121–2). It is through the spiritual community, or the Church, that people can reach the truth (preserved in the creeds) and appropriate it for themselves (*PR III*, 124–6). We are born in the Church, destined to become partakers of the truth, and this is expressed in the sacrament of baptism (*PR III*, 127). In the Eucharist we attain unity with God, the abiding and dwelling of the Spirit within us (*PR III*, 132).

Although Hegel values the Church and its doctrines ('dogma') he claims that it is only the philosopher who grasps religious truths in their full clarity and meaning (PR II, 345). For Hegel, art and religion contain truths which can only be properly conceptualised by the (Hegelian) philosopher. Art presents us with truth in a sensuous form, embodying it, so to speak (*Darstellung*). Religion is the domain of *Vorstellung* or pictorial representation, which relies on images and metaphors (e.g., the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden). This also applies to the doctrine of the Trinity: speech about Father, Son, and Spirit is a somewhat 'childlike' presentation of a truth which the religious imagination fails to fully grasp (PR III, 25). It is only philosophy, which relies on thought (*Denken*), that succeeds in disclosing and capturing the truth. The philosopher is thus the new priest whose task it is to protect the possession of truth (PR III, 151).

Hegel has exerted a very considerable influence on what we called rivalling or competing trinitarian discourses which came to full fruition in the twentieth century, as we shall see. In particular, his view that God is subject to history and process has proved extremely influential, from process thinkers to Jürgen Moltmann. Given this influence it may be useful to voice a number of concerns.<sup>16</sup>

First, there is a strong monist tendency in Hegel. Hegel does not allow for the real otherness of either God or the world. He does not develop a theory of analogy which would allow him to remain sensitive to the distinction between God and creation. Divine consciousness and human consciousness converge: God's self-knowledge is his self-consciousness in us: 'God is God only so far as he knows himself: this self-knowledge is, further, a self-consciousness in man and man's knowledge of God, which proceeds to man's self-knowledge in God'.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, what we could call, in traditional language, the distinction between the generation of the Son from the Father on the one hand and the creative act on the other is not always clearly maintained. This illustrates a wider problem: Hegel failed to maintain a proper distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity – an issue which will recur throughout twentieth-century trinitarian debates too.

As suggested earlier, Hegel's view of creation and evil is problematic. He seems to identify finite creation (as the external manifestation or even alienation of the divine) and evil. Again, creation is seen as nothing but a necessary stage in the evolving life of the Spirit. The view that sin

<sup>16</sup> For a challenging critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Religion*, see Desmond, *Hegel's God*.

<sup>17</sup> See *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830), no. 564, trans. William Wallace as *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 298.

is a necessary stage in our spiritual emancipation raises the question: if the transgression is necessary, does this not alter its character *qua* transgression?<sup>18</sup>

Again, some have argued that Hegel's philosophical reinterpretation of the dogma of the Trinity in terms of subjectivity and self-consciousness results in a mono-personal account of the Trinity, which is deeply alien to the triune nature of the Christian God. In Jürgen Moltmann's opinion this Hegelian understanding of God in mono-personal terms has infected the trinitarian doctrine of both Karl Barth and Karl Rahner.

Finally, there is the reductionism present in Hegel's account. It is clear that for Hegel only philosophy really captures the truth that lies embedded in religious *Vorstellung* (pictorial representation). Hegel seems unaware that there is a surplus in meaning in religious discourse which is lost in his philosophical account. His philosophical reinterpretation of Christian doctrines is like a prosaic rephrasing of a beautiful poem – so much suggestive meaning is lost in translation. Charles Taylor quite rightly claimed that 'Hegel's philosophy is an extraordinary transposition which "saves the phenomena" (that is, the dogmas) of Christianity, while abandoning its essence'.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, rather than portraying Hegel as the major nineteenth-century hero of the renewal of trinitarian theology,<sup>20</sup> we should interpret Hegel (and Schleiermacher) in terms of inaugurating an *alternative* discourse on the theology of the Trinity – one which came to full fruition in the twentieth century.

#### KARL BARTH (1886–1968): REVELATION AND THEOLOGY OF THE TRINITY

##### a. *Barth and the nature of theology*

The work of Karl Barth, the greatest theologian of the twentieth century, offers a sustained critique of some of the key presuppositions of modern theology (which find their roots in Schleiermacher) and the historical-critical method. Barth very much emphasises the otherness of God, his utter transcendence, thereby questioning those theological approaches that elevate historical research above revelation; or that prefer to 'turn to the

<sup>18</sup> Desmond makes this point. He continues (*Hegel's God*, 153): 'If the transgression *had to be* if humanity were to become the spirit it implicitly is, is this not a rational justification of evil's necessity?'

<sup>19</sup> Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 494.

<sup>20</sup> This is the line taken by Stanley Grenz and others. See Stanley Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 24ff.

subject' rather than to be receptive to God's Word. In his early commentary on *The Epistle to the Romans*, Barth rejected historical-critical ways of reading the Scriptures as reductionist. These so-called scientific methods treat the Scriptures as mere text – without being sensitive to revelation as an act or event in which *God* makes himself known and addresses and challenges us (CD I/1, 305).<sup>21</sup> Similarly, when lecturing on Schleiermacher, Barth expressed reservations about the subjectivism that characterises Schleiermacher's theology. Rather than allowing God in his objectivity and sovereignty to address us, Schleiermacher appears more interested in the human subject and his or her receptivity towards this divine address. In short, Schleiermacher's approach is anthropological, and in this regard he is a typical exponent of modern approaches, effectively negating the Word of God (CD I/1, 193).

Barth's theology stands squarely in the Reformed tradition. It attempts to be a faithful interpretation of the act of God's self-revelation in the Scriptures. While it also draws on a number of traditional theologians (mainly Luther, Calvin, other Protestant theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but also Augustine and Aquinas), it refrains from appealing to extra-theological sources, such as historical-critical or philosophical ones. It is no coincidence that Barth's major work (extending to over 8,000 pages) is called *Church Dogmatics*. For theology is the self-examination of the Church in light of the self-disclosure of God. Insofar as dogmatics conforms to Jesus Christ, it has true content. This implies that 'it does not have to begin by finding or inventing the standard by which it measures. It sees and recognizes that this is given with the Church' (CD I/1, 12). Any attempt to occupy a non-theological starting point when beginning to engage in theology is therefore misguided and effectively masks a modernist (i.e., non-Christian) bias (CD I/1, 38). Anyone who wants to engage in dogmatics needs to have faith, and without obedience to Christ dogmatics is 'quite impossible' (CD I/1, 17, 189). Barth thus pleads for a prayerful way of doing theology, displaying a distinct impatience with non-theological approaches which bracket out the key presuppositions of the Christian faith in order to kick-start a dialogue with a secular world. Instead of denying their own presuppositions for the sake of 'dialogue' or 'openness' towards the secular world, Christian theologians should simply put forward 'the witness of faith against unbelief' (CD I/1, 30).

This is not to say that Barth reduces theology to proclamation of the faith (in preaching and sacraments), although it is true to say that theology and

<sup>21</sup> CD refers to Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956–75).

proclamation are closely linked. Theology critically reflects upon proclamation (CD I/1, 51, 84) and serves it by examining it in terms of its orthodoxy (CD I/1, 82). The orthodoxy of proclamation depends on whether or not it remains faithful to the Scriptures, which should not be regarded as a 'historical monument' but rather as a Church document which bears witness to God's revelation (CD I/1, 102). For Barth the Bible is the supreme authority which, when being interpreted, should not be subjected to dogmatic or historical criteria lest we undermine its supremacy (CD I/1, 259). On the other hand, by pointing out that the Bible 'bears witness' to revelation, Barth avoids falling into the trap of fundamentalist readings of the Scriptures: the Bible is not revelation itself (CD I/1, 112) but provides an account of it (just like an account of an event is not the same as the event itself).

What is of crucial importance to Barth is his claim that we are not in a position to understand the Bible ourselves. The Bible gives itself to be understood by us, so that we can come to hear the Bible as God's Word. We have already mentioned the need for faith, which allows us to hear the human words of the Bible as bearers of the eternal Word. Ultimately it is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is God's revelation (CD I/1, 137). The Bible and proclamation are God's Word only indirectly (CD I/1, 116–17).

There are thus three distinct forms in which the Word of God is given to us: as revelation (the event of God's unveiling himself), in the Bible, and in proclamation. Revelation underlies and finds expression in the other two. We never meet revelation directly, in abstract form – we know it only indirectly, through Scripture and proclamation.

#### b. Trinity and revelation

Barth's radical theological stance, rejecting all non-theological approaches, had a massive impact on the theological scene of the twentieth century. But this is not why we have outlined his views so far. Barth is also an important and original trinitarian thinker. And what is original about his theology of the Trinity is precisely its link with how he understands revelation.

Theologians have traditionally emphasised the link between the dogma of the Trinity and revelation, insofar as the dogma of the Trinity had always been considered the revealed doctrine par excellence (CD I/1, 303). But Barth proposes something much more radical and original: for him the biblical concept of revelation itself is the root of the doctrine of the Trinity (CD I/1, 334). For Barth argues that just as we never encounter revelation as



such but only insofar as it is expressed in Scriptures and proclamation, so too we do not encounter God the Father directly but only through the Son and the Holy Spirit (CD I/1, 121). The reason that Barth can draw such a close parallel between the doctrine of revelation and the doctrine of the Trinity is that God, the Revealer, is identical with his act in revelation, and with its effect (CD I/1, 296). More simply, the question: 'Who is God?' also implies the questions 'What is he doing?' and 'What does he effect (in us)?' (CD I/1, 297). Barth usually puts this in terms of the Revealer (who), revelation (what is he doing), and revealedness (effect). Just as there is a source of revelation, which is distinct from his revelation, so too is there an inner differentiation within God, as Father and as Son. The Holy Spirit then is the self-impartation of God, just as revealedness refers to the effect of the act of revelation upon us. This is the manner in which Barth links his analysis of revelation with the traditional biblical names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father is, as it were, the Speaker, the Son is the Word of the Speaker, and the Holy Spirit is the meaning (CD I/1, 363–4).

That Barth construes his doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of his analysis of the concept of revelation should not be taken to imply that he is reducing the Trinity to revelation (as if God were the triune God only in his revelation). Although it is certainly the case that we 'arrive at the doctrine of the Trinity by no other way than by an analysis of the concept of revelation' (CD I/1, 312), this does not mean that the triune God is only found in his act of revelation (the 'economic Trinity'). Barth affirms that God is also triune in his inner nature (the 'immanent Trinity') (CD I/1, 333). Nor is he implying that in unveiling himself God loses anything of his mysteriousness or freedom (CD I/1, 324).

### c. The divine 'Persons'

Before he discusses Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Barth deals with the unity of God. He is at pains to emphasise that the so-called 'Persons' in God are in no sense three gods (CD I/1, 349, 205). The problem is that the word 'Person' as used in the Church doctrine of the Trinity has nothing to do with our modern-day understandings of person as self-conscious personality (CD I/1, 351, 357). If we speak of a divine Person (in the modern sense of the word) we should reserve this concept for the triune God as such (CD I/1, 351). Although Barth appears to be sympathetic towards Aquinas' strong relational understanding of the trinitarian Persons (CD I/1, 357, 365), he prefers to drop the notion of 'Person' altogether and instead chooses to speak of divine 'modes of being' (*Seinsweisen*) (CD I/1, 359). This has led,

almost predictably, to accusations of modalism, despite Barth's explicit refutation of these claims (CD I/1, 382). That Barth adopts the notion of *perichoresis* or mutual indwelling of the three Persons ('modes of being' in Barthian parlance) in one another without dissolution of their distinctiveness should take the sting out of these charges (CD I/1, 396).

We saw earlier that Barth developed a trinitarian doctrine on the basis of an analysis of revelation, that is, in terms of a revealer (the Father), revelation (his Son, the Word), and revealedness (the Holy Spirit). This effectively means that Barth distinguishes the three 'Persons' in terms of their distinctive relations of origin – a theme which we encountered already in Richard of St Victor (CD I/1, 363): there is a source, the revelation from this source (i.e., the Son), and the Holy Spirit who proceeds as meaning from the revealer and his revelation. In this light it will come as no surprise that Barth defends the traditional Western doctrine of the *filioque*, the notion that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Barth backs up this argument by pointing to the 'economy' of revelation: throughout the Scriptures we find the Spirit characterised as 'the Spirit of Christ' (CD I/1, 479ff.).

Other traditional doctrines Barth adopts are the Augustinian view that the external operations of the triune God are one (*opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*) or the theory of appropriations as we find it in Aquinas (CD I/1, 373).

Barth then discusses the three 'Persons'. He first discusses God the Father, the Lord of our existence, or our Creator. It is perhaps somewhat odd that Barth expounds the nature of the first Person first as 'Creator' which is, by his own admission (CD I/1, 373, 394), an appropriation. In a second section Barth does refer to the relation of Fatherhood to describe the first Person: because he manifests himself as a Father in his relation to the One through whom he is manifested (i.e., his Son), we may deduce that he is Father in himself (CD I/1, 391–2).

God the Son is discussed as the Reconciler, the Word that has been spoken to us, the revelation of the Father (CD I/1, 412). In this section Barth makes the case for the divinity of the Son. He acknowledges that the affirmation of the divinity of the Son is dogma, that is, an interpretation, and is not to be found as such in the biblical texts – but it is 'a good and relevant interpretation of these texts' (CD I/1, 415).

The Holy Spirit is discussed under the heading of the Redeemer. How can we acknowledge Jesus as Lord? In order for the revelation of the Father in the Son to become manifest, a 'subjective side in the event of revelation' is necessary, and this presence of God in the human subject is the Holy Spirit

(*CD I/1*, 448–50). When revelation becomes an event in us, the Holy Spirit is at work in us. Through the Holy Spirit we become receptive to the revelation of God in Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who creates the Christian community, and in it the faith, hope, and love of Christians (*CD IV/2*, 126).

Thus far we have mainly focussed on the first part of the *Church Dogmatics*, entitled *The Doctrine of the Word of God*. But it can be argued that the rest of the *Church Dogmatics* is structured in a trinitarian way, with the doctrine of creation being dealt with in Part III, and the doctrine of reconciliation in Part IV (dealing with the saving activity of the Son), while Part V would have consisted of the work of the Holy Spirit (as the Redeemer). However, Barth did not live to finish the fourth part, and never started working on the fifth, and the *Church Dogmatics* is therefore unfinished. Given the inexhaustibility of the divine mystery this is perhaps as it should be.<sup>22</sup>

In what follows we will take a brief look at the connection between the soteriology as developed in Part IV of the *Church Dogmatics* (the doctrine of reconciliation) and the theology of the Trinity. Within the limits of this chapter, however, we cannot provide a comprehensive outline of Barth's views on the saving activity of Christ.

#### d. The cross and the Trinity

In a valuable monograph Anne Hunt celebrates the connection she discerns in recent Catholic theology between the paschal mystery and the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>23</sup> We have argued in the previous chapter (where we examined Luther's interpretation of the *communicatio idiomatum*, and its implications for the theology of the Trinity) that this theme finds its roots in Lutheran theology.

There is, however, another element to the connection between Christology (and soteriology) and the theology of the Trinity in Luther's thought. The implicit connection between Luther's emphasis upon Jesus' radical solidarity with sinners and his theology of the Trinity was brought into the open in twentieth-century theology. Luther's emphasis upon Jesus as the universal sinner differs radically from pre-Reformation theology.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Barth remarks in *CD I/2*, 878 that the doctrine of the Trinity is not the primary structuring principle of his *Church Dogmatics* but rather revelation to which the doctrine of the Trinity attests. This should not be taken as a denial of the way the doctrine of the Trinity functions indirectly as the structuring motif in his *Church Dogmatics*. For a different view, see Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, 54.

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter 4, n. 73.

<sup>24</sup> For relevant texts from Luther and others, see Rik Van Nieuwenhove, 'St Anselm and St Thomas Aquinas on "Satisfaction" – or How Catholic and Protestant Understandings of the Cross Differ', *Angelicum* 80 (2003): 159–76. A key text is Luther's Commentary on Gal. 3:13, duly quoted by Barth in *CD IV/1*, 238; see also *CD IV/1*, 215–16.

Whereas Anselm of Canterbury's theory of satisfaction, adopted by Aquinas and other scholastic theologians, emphasizes the sinlessness of the man Jesus Christ, the representative of humanity, who restores the broken relationship with God, Luther saw Jesus in radical solidarity with *sinful* humanity, thereby shifting Protestant soteriology in a direction which understands salvation through Christ in more penal terms. Thus, whereas medieval Catholic theology interpreted Christ's cross as an act of penance, Calvin, following Luther's view that Christ is the universal sinner, was to understand it in terms of punishment.

Barth too understands Christ's cross in terms of punishment rather than in terms of penance (*CD IV/1*, 253). In order to avoid the offensive view that a wrathful God punishes an innocent man, it then becomes necessary to say that, in a sense, God himself suffers and atones for us. Now that is a traditional enough position – but it is expressed with an emphasis that is rather more radical than patristic or medieval theologians would have allowed. The penal understanding of soteriology leads to a position which attributes genuine suffering to the Trinity (and not just simply through the human nature of the incarnate Son). As Barth puts it, Jesus' 'human action and suffering has to be represented and understood as the action and, therefore, the passion of God himself' (*CD IV/1*, 245, 250, 254).

Barth has certainly not given the most radical expression to these views, but he is undoubtedly one of the earliest exponents of this position in German theology in the twentieth century. Talking about the self-humiliation of God in his Son, Barth, referring to Jesus' cry of dereliction (Mark 15:34), writes that God's solidarity with us means that he has not abandoned the world but that he willed 'to bear this need as his own, that he took it upon himself, that he cries with man in this need' (*CD IV/1*, 215). Or again, God humiliates himself in his Son, and this humiliation is not contrary to his divinity but reveals the true divinity of the Christian God as distinct from all other gods. In Christ God becomes a servant of us all, thereby challenging any preconceived notions we might have had about divine sovereignty and power (*CD IV/1*, 134).

The traditional theory of *communicatio idiomatum* would have allowed patristic and medieval theologians to make similar statements. But they would not have said that the Trinity itself suffers for us as this would have been at odds with the divine bliss God is said to enjoy. Now Barth attempts to do justice to this traditional view while at the same time allowing for a certain theopaschite theology.

A passage which illustrates this tension in his views is *CD IV/1*, 185ff. It shows Barth's dialectical way of thinking, attempting to harmonise the

notion that God enjoys blissful perfection with the view that God gets radically involved (through the life and death of his Son) with our sinful, suffering world. How can we say, on the one hand, that God is impassible and genuinely transcendent, and yet in radical solidarity with sinful, struggling humanity?

Barth's Lutheran debt comes to the fore when he states that the incarnation is more than God becoming human: it also means

his giving himself up to the contradiction of man against him, his placing himself under the judgment under which man has fallen in this contradiction, under the curse of death which rests upon him. The meaning of the incarnation is plainly revealed in the question of Jesus on the cross: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Mark 15:34). The more seriously we take this, the stronger becomes the temptation to approximate to the view of a contradiction and conflict in himself. (*CD IV/1*, 185)

The reasoning is clear: the emphasis upon God's radical solidarity with sinful humanity seems to lead to the Hegelian view that there is conflict and contradiction within God himself. But then, having wondered whether this is indeed the view that we must adopt in order to do justice to the depth and mercy of God, Barth recoils: 'But at this point what is meant to be supreme praise of God can in fact become supreme blasphemy. God gives himself, but he does not give himself away . . . He does not cease to be God. He does not come into conflict with himself.' He then goes on to argue that if in reconciling the world God set himself in contradiction with himself, God could not possibly reconcile the world with himself. Instead, God himself would be in need of salvation. He asks: 'Of what value would his deity be to us if – instead of crossing in that deity the very real gulf between himself and us – he left that deity behind him in his coming to us, if it came to be outside of him as he became ours?' So he concludes with a warning that is as relevant today as it was when written in 1953: 'A God who found himself in this contradiction can obviously only be the image of our own unreconciled humanity projected into deity' (*CD IV/1*, 186). The view that God is somehow in conflict with himself therefore needs to be flatly rejected. But how then does Barth avoid the accusation of portraying God as an indifferent God?

Barth first states that God's immutability does not stand in the way of a radical solidarity with his creation. On the contrary, God's solidarity and compassion is grounded in his divine nature of gratuitous love. God is not his own prisoner (*CD IV/1*, 187). Only an abstract, non-Christian understanding of power sees omnipotence and compassionate involvement in

opposition to one another (*CD IV/1*, 187). Ultimately, however, Barth refers to a trinitarian solution to harmonise divine transcendence and radical solidarity. He argues that there is not just humility in God's nature (*CD IV/1*, 193), but there is obedience within God himself, namely in the relationship between the Son and his Father. The prayer of Christ in Gethsemane is merely a reflection of this inner-trinitarian obedience (*CD IV/1*, 193–5, 201).

This solution raises, of course, the issue of subordination, as Barth acknowledges (*CD IV/1*, 200–1). One way in which Barth tackles this accusation is by arguing in *CD IV/2* that the Father himself is subject to a kind of kenosis. Here Barth maintains that the Father assumes suffering in the humiliation of his Son, by giving and sending his Son for our salvation, and this 'fatherly fellow-suffering of God is the mystery, the basis, of the humiliation of his Son' (*CD IV/2*, 357).

In summary, Barth tries to avoid the view that there is conflict or contradiction in God, not by arguing that God ceases to be divine or immutable (see *CD IV/1*, 187), but rather by claiming that God has, in fact, abased himself. This we must say if we want to remain faithful to the New Testament witness, which reveals that God is 'more great and rich and sovereign than we had ever imagined' (*CD IV/1*, 186). We should not be guided by our own notions of omnipotence and immutability but rather by those of God. As the cross reveals, in God the deepest mercy and the loftiest majesty coincide (*CD IV/2*, 358). It is in light of the cross that we can say that there has to be an obedience at the heart of the Trinity, in the relationship between the Father and the Son. It is in the work of Moltmann and von Balthasar that we find this theme developed in greater detail.

#### *e. Critique of Barth*

Barth's theology of the Trinity is based on an analysis of revelation itself. The organic and intrinsic connection between the doctrine of the Trinity and the Scriptures which is thereby established in his theology allows him to circumvent one of the key difficulties of modern theologies of the Trinity: how to legitimate the doctrine of the Trinity in light of historical-critical approaches to the Bible. For Barth, the doctrine of the Trinity is in fact exegesis of the biblical text:

It is not [. . .] an arbitrarily contrived speculation whose object lies elsewhere than in the Bible [. . .]. On the contrary, its statements may be regarded as indirectly,

though not directly, identical with those of the biblical witness to revelation. It is Church exegesis . . . (CD I/1, 333)

As Church exegesis it can only be approached by those who have faith. Historical-critical methods are Promethean ways of attempting to domesticate and subject the primacy of God's address to us in the revelation of his Word. For Barth, on the other hand, revelation is a trinitarian event: God speaks his creative Word, which is heard and returns to him in the achievement among humans of faith and obedience in the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>25</sup> Some have argued that this sweeping trinitarian movement of revelation from the Father, in the Son, to the Holy Spirit in us uncannily echoes the Hegelian dynamic of Absolute Spirit in its differentiations as universal (Father), particular (Son), and individuality (the Spirit).<sup>26</sup> However, these resemblances are merely superficial: the monism that characterizes Hegel's thought is utterly alien to Barth.

In recent years scholars have debated the status of Barth's work. Should it be considered a pre-modern project? After all, Barth rejects 'the turn to the subject'; he adopts a radical theocentric theological stance; and he discards historical-critical readings of the Scriptures as an inadequate approach to revelation because they put too much weight on method, thereby ignoring the normative subject-matter of theology. And if it is pre-modern in outlook, could Barth's work be fruitfully brought into dialogue with today's postmodern concerns? Or does Barth remain a modern thinker insofar as he, as a reformed theologian, effectively agrees with Kant's view that faith and reason, philosophy and theology are separate?<sup>27</sup>

The discussion is ongoing and in this context some brief remarks must suffice. It is true that Barth agrees with Kant that philosophical approaches to God are illegitimate. On the other hand, Christoph Schwöbel has persuasively argued that Barth relocates issues of epistemology – the typical primary concern of modern philosophy – to a secondary place.<sup>28</sup> For Barth, how we know God is effectively determined by the being of God as revealed in his Word. In other words, whereas Kant exemplifies and furthers the modern preoccupation with the subject (and how we know), Barth's

<sup>25</sup> Trevor Hart, 'Revelation', in John Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 49.

<sup>26</sup> See the classic article by Rowan Williams, 'Barth on the Triune God', in Stephen Sykes, ed., *Karl Barth: Studies of his Theological Methods* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 147–93.

<sup>27</sup> For a more in-depth discussion, see Graham Ward, 'Barth, Modernity and Postmodernity', in Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, 274–95.

<sup>28</sup> Christoph Schwöbel, 'Theology', in Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, 29ff.

theology is 'a theological turn from the subject'.<sup>29</sup> Barth deals with questions of epistemology in the light of his doctrine of God, rather than the other way around. And he does so by arguing that it is effectively the triune God as revealed in the Word who is the condition of possibility of us knowing God.<sup>30</sup> Revelation is God's doing; it breaks into our world and challenges it. We can only relate to it through faith, which is not a human capacity or an anthropological given (as in Schleiermacher and his modern followers) but rather a gift from God, a 'loan' (CD I/1, 238), and part of the dynamic of revelation (the acting of the Holy Spirit in us as 'revealedness'). Undoubtedly, in this regard Barth recaptures something of that aesthetic receptivity within theology which we encountered in patristic and medieval theologians.

We now turn to a Catholic theologian who has been credited, like Barth, for assisting in the re-engagement of theologians with the doctrine of the Trinity.

#### KARL RAHNER (1904–84): THE SELF-COMMUNICATION OF THE TRINITARIAN GOD IN US

Scholars have rightly argued that Karl Rahner, although he never wrote an extensive treatise on the subject, has exercised a major influence on the field of trinitarian theology.<sup>31</sup> This Jesuit theologian did, however, write a small treatise, translated in English as *The Trinity*, as well as a number of shorter articles.<sup>32</sup> Particularly influential is his so-called axiom or rule, while his own specific contribution to the theology of the Trinity from a transcendental perspective remains largely undiscussed in the literature.

Rahner begins his classic treatise *The Trinity (Trin.)* with a strong criticism of the textbooks of his day, which, he argues, treat the theology of the Trinity as unrelated to the rest of theology, and severed from all existential knowledge about ourselves (*Trin.*, 15). Indeed, as he famously wrote, 'should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged' (*Trin.*, 11). Rahner, like Barth before him, expresses his reservations about

<sup>29</sup> Hart, 'Revelation', 38. <sup>30</sup> Schwöbel, 'Theology', 32.

<sup>31</sup> David Coffey, 'Trinity', in Declan Marmion and Mary Hines, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 98.

<sup>32</sup> Other articles available in English include his entry 'Trinity, Divine', in Karl Rahner, ed., *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (London: Burns & Oates, 2004); and 'Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise "De Trinitate"', in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1v (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966), 77–102.

the concept 'Person', arguing that it evokes incorrect associations in today's parlance, suggesting 'several spiritual centres of activity of several subjectivities and liberties'. Instead, he proposes (again not unlike Barth) 'three distinct manners of subsisting' (*Trin.*, 109).

Rahner singles out Thomas Aquinas as the author who first took the momentous step to treat first of the divine essence, and only subsequently of the three divine Persons. This led, so he argues, in the Latin West (in contrast to the Greek approach) to a philosophical and abstract approach, which separates the theology of the Trinity from the salvation history as witnessed in the Scriptures (*Trin.*, 16–18). From our previous chapter we know that this often-repeated critique does not stand up to critical scrutiny: medieval Western theologians, including Aquinas, were profoundly trinitarian thinkers; some of the authors that Rahner singles out as genuinely trinitarian thinkers (including Richard of St Victor and Bonaventure in *Myst. Trin.*) began their theology of the Trinity like Aquinas with a discussion of the divine oneness. If recent scholarly work on the Latin tradition has allowed us to better appreciate the continuing vibrancy of the theology of the Trinity in the West, despite competing constructions (such as the Hegelian one), the facile contrast (with which Rahner concurs) between the Latin West and the supposedly more trinitarian East must also be discarded.<sup>33</sup> Rahner also expresses reservations about the psychological analogy, arguing that it led to a theology of God in which the Trinity is 'absolutely locked within itself, severed from salvation history. As he puts it elsewhere: 'The psychological theory of the Trinity neglects the experience of the Trinity in the economy of salvation in favour of a seemingly almost Gnostic speculation about what goes on in the inner life of God'.<sup>34</sup> We have questioned the validity of this criticism in the previous chapter.

The distinction between 'the inner life of God' and 'the experience of the Trinity in the economy of salvation' brings us to one of Rahner's most celebrated contributions to trinitarian scholarship. In order to make clear the connection between the doctrine of the Trinity and salvation history (as expressed in the biblical witness), Rahner puts forward his famous axiom that 'the "economic" Trinity is the "immanent" Trinity and the "immanent" Trinity is the "economic" Trinity' (*Trin.*, 22). As was mentioned in the first chapter, the "immanent" Trinity refers to the way God is in his

<sup>33</sup> See for instance *Trin.*, 83–4. Rahner appears indebted to Theodore de Regnon's narrative, which has come in for recent severe criticism by Lewis Ayres and Michel Barnes (see our conclusion in Chapter 3).

<sup>34</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 135 (henceforward abbreviated as *FCF*).

inner nature, from all eternity; the "economic" Trinity refers to the way this God reveals himself in the world and in salvation history (from the Greek word *oikonomia*). There are different ways of interpreting Rahner's rule or axiom. We can take it to mean (in a minimalist but correct sense) that everything we know or say about the inner nature of God ('immanent' Trinity) must be based on the way God reveals himself in salvation history as witnessed in the Scriptures, and on our experience of this. This is a traditional enough approach, and one Augustine also used: the missions reveal something of the intradivine processions. In this case the axiom is interpreted primarily as a hermeneutical principle which assists us in constructing a theology of the Trinity that remains faithful to revelation. Thus, Rahner is simply stating that there is an intrinsic connection between the missions of the divine Persons in salvation history (incarnation, Pentecost) and the intradivine life (*Trin.*, 30). However, a broader interpretation is also possible, and in this case the axiom can be interpreted as saying something about the nature of God, namely that the way God is in himself – the 'immanent' Trinity – is nothing else but the way God is present in world and history. In this interpretation the axiom becomes disturbingly Hegelian, reducing the ever-transcendent mystery of God to how it can be known by us in our world. In our view the very emphasis Rahner puts upon the mysteriousness of God precludes this broader interpretation (see *Trin.*, 50–1 and 88, note 10). Nor can we see how any theologian could make this kind of claim, as it would presuppose a point of view external to God and world (i.e., a kind of bird's-eye point of view from which one could scan the relation between God and world).

But how do we know how God reveals himself? After all, theologians had traditionally argued that the operations of the Trinity *ad extra* (outside the Trinity) are indivisible, so as to keep the charge of tritheism at bay. If any one of the three Persons does 'his own thing' so to speak, we end up with three gods, not the Christian Trinity. Rahner accepts that the triune God acts as one (*opera ad extra sunt indivisa*), but he argues that the one God acts in a threefold way. The incarnation illustrates this. Here we have an instance of a mission that is proper to the Son and which cannot be merely appropriated to him. Each of the three Persons contributes to this one relation to the world (*Trin.*, 28, 76). When discussing the incarnation Rahner makes the point that the humanity of Christ is not something extraneous but it is 'the constitutive, real symbol of the Logos himself' (*Trin.*, 33). This implies that human nature is already predisposed towards the incarnation, and is not alien to it. We will come back to the significance of Rahner's theological anthropology for his theology of the Trinity. For

now we observe that this anthropological stance – so different from Karl Barth's approach – will also allow Rahner to take seriously the patristic claim that even before Christ there were anticipations of belief in the Trinity (*Trin.*, 20, 40–1).

How does the triune God relate to us in a threefold manner? Rahner, like Barth, argues that God's self-communication is truly a *self*-communication, genuinely bestowing himself (*Trin.*, 36). But whereas Barth mainly examined the self-communication of God in revelation, Rahner considers the self-communication of God in us (the indwelling of the trinitarian God through grace). While Barth's approach is more historical-salvific, Rahner examines more the way the triune God is 'the transcendental ground' of our salvation. This is how Rahner describes in general terms the threefold self-communication of God to us:

This self-communication of God has a three-fold aspect. It is the self-communication in which that which is given remains sovereign, incomprehensible, continuing, ever as received, to dwell in its uncontrollable, incomprehensible originality. [This is the self-communication of God as Father.] It is a self-communication in which the God who manifests himself 'is there' as self-uttered truth and as freely, historically disposing sovereignty. [This is the self-communication of God as Son.] It is a self-communication, in which the God who communicates himself causes in the one who receives him the act of loving welcome . . . [This is the self-communication of God as Holy Spirit]. (*Trin.*, 37)

The revelation of God in this threefold manner occurs historically (both in Jesus Christ, and in the bestowal of the Holy Spirit) but it also occurs at a transcendental level. According to Rahner, our everyday engagements with the world (our knowing and willing) are always accompanied by an unthematic horizon, which is God. Just as we can only see objects of this world in light but not light as such, so too we have a transcendental experience of God in the midst of the world. 'Transcendental' is a Kantian term which refers to 'the conditions of possibility' of our knowledge and will (or love). The divine mystery can never be grasped but it grounds our existence, and it is its necessary condition:

This transcendental experience of human transcendence is not the experience of some definite, particular objective thing which is experienced alongside of other objects. It is rather a basic mode of being which is prior to and permeates every objective experience . . . It is . . . the a priori openness of the subject to being as such, which is present precisely when a person experiences himself as involved in the multiplicity of cares and concerns and fears and hopes of his everyday world. (*FCF*, 34–5)

Now Rahner argues that God's self-communication at the heart of our being can be understood in two different modalities: as an offer or call to our freedom on the one hand, and as response to this offer (be it acceptance or rejection) on the other (*FCF*, 118). Our acceptance of God's self-communication is only possible because of this very self-communication at the heart of our existence.

In light of this brief account of Rahner's rich theological anthropology we can now flesh out in some more detail how God communicates himself to us in the Son and the Holy Spirit, both historically and transcendently. According to Rahner this self-communication contains four basic aspects, namely (a) Origin-future, (b) History-transcendence, (c) Invitation-acceptance, and (d) Knowledge-love. The first aspect of each of these four pairs refers to God's self-communication in the Son, the second to the Holy Spirit. As addressee of God's self-communication, the human person has an origin and a future; we are embedded in history but our history is situated in a wider horizon which always transcends us. Constituted as beings who are history in transcendence, and a duality of origin and future, we are essentially free beings, free to accept the invitation of God's self-communication. Finally, we are knowing and loving beings. A self-communication of God to us must present itself as a self-communication of absolute truth and absolute love (*Trin.*, 93–4).

Rahner then attempts to show the unity of the first element of each of the four pairs. The unity of *origin-history-offer* becomes clear in light of the offer of God's self in our history through the incarnation of his Son. To see the connection with *truth* we need to remember that in its most profound sense truth refers not primarily to a correspondence between idea and reality but must rather be understood in terms of revelation (or unveiling) of a person's true nature. Truth is 'the deed in which we firmly posit ourself for ourself and for others, the deed which waits to see how it will be received' (*Trin.*, 96). Or again, truth in the full sense is the lived truth in which someone freely deploys his being for himself and others, manifesting himself as faithful and reliable.<sup>35</sup> Understood in such existential terms, we can begin to see how the offer of divine self-communication in the Son can be truth for us.

The unity of the other four moments (future-transcendence-acceptance-love) can best be understood by starting with the last one, love. God's love creates its own acceptance. In it we encounter the transcendence of God, who gives himself as the future (*Trin.*, 96–8). Rahner then summarises: 'the

<sup>35</sup> Rahner, 'Trinity, Divine', 176r.

divine self-communication possesses two basic modalities: self-communication as truth and as love' (*Trin.*, 98). The first modality refers to God's self-communication in his Son, the truth in history, a divine invitation; the second refers to God's self-communication in the Holy Spirit, which assumes the form 'of love in transcendence towards the freely accepted absolute future' (*Trin.*, 98).

We have indicated that Rahner's account must be understood at both the historical and transcendental-anthropological levels. Thus, the Word of God, as Truth embodied, has entered history, inviting us to share in his life. The Holy Spirit transforms the Christian community (at Pentecost and through the ensuing life of grace in the Church) and, bestowing charity upon us, assists us in accepting the invitation of the Son, making us receptive to the future of the transcendent God. But at the core of our being (at the transcendental level) we are also receptive to the truth and love of God, even if only in an implicit manner. A critical reader may well ask: What is the connection between history and anthropology? In reply it must be remembered that the creation of human nature took place for the sake of the divine self-communication. Human nature is already attuned towards receiving the divine self-communication (*Trin.*, 89–90). All human experience therefore offers the possibility of an encounter with God – but it is in its encounter with the Word who became incarnate in the midst of our history that the riddle at the heart of our existence finds its ultimate answer.

This original but somewhat elusive parallel between historical missions of Son and Spirit, on the one hand, and theological anthropology, on the other hand, is one of the most fascinating (and least noticed) aspects of Rahner's theology.<sup>36</sup> It allows him to show how 'the doctrine of the Trinity is not a subtle theological and speculative game' but rather:

It is only through this doctrine that we can take with radical seriousness and maintain without qualifications the simple statement which is at once so very incomprehensible and so very self-evident, namely, that God himself as the abiding and holy mystery, as the incomprehensible ground of man's transcendent existence is not only the God of infinite distance, but also wants to be the God of absolute closeness in a true self-communication, and he is present in this way in the spiritual depths of our existence as well as in the concreteness of our corporeal history. Here lies the real meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity. (*FCF*, 137)

Although Rahner encourages theologians to focus on salvation history when constructing a theology of the Trinity, his primary concern is with the

<sup>36</sup> It is this parallel which explains why Rahner, after having dealt with his transcendental anthropology in *FCF* then goes on to deal with the doctrine of the Trinity (see *FCF*, 133–7).

trinitarian missions (incarnation, and grace of the Holy Spirit) rather than with the paschal mystery.

The trinitarian theology of both Karl Rahner and Karl Barth has been criticised by Jürgen Moltmann. In his view, Barth and Rahner operate with a Hegelian understanding of the subject, which sees the triune God as one subject and three modes of being. There is one, identical divine subject that relates to itself: the Father is assigned to the 'I', the Son to the 'self', and the Spirit to the identity of the divine 'I-self'.<sup>37</sup> In Moltmann's view, the unity of the absolute subject is stressed to such a degree that the trinitarian Persons disintegrate and become mere aspects of the one subject or substance.<sup>38</sup> Rahner and Barth, by effectively adopting the secular meaning of the word 'person' (only to discard it as inadequate) are effectively fighting a straw man. For this secular meaning of the word 'person' implies extreme individualism, in which each individual is seen as 'a self-possessing, self-disposing centre of action which sets itself apart from other persons'. By refusing to apply this (distorted) understanding of person to Father, Son, and Spirit, and by adopting instead the concept of 'three distinct modes of subsistence', reserving the concept of personhood for God as such, Rahner and Barth have, in Moltmann's view, transformed the classical doctrine of the Trinity into a reflection of the absolute subject.<sup>39</sup> It is to Moltmann's trinitarian theology that we now turn.

#### JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN (1926–): A TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY OF A SUFFERING GOD

Rahner and Barth put a strong emphasis upon the mono-personal nature of God: only God as such is 'person' in the modern sense of the word; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three 'persons' in the modern meaning of the term.<sup>40</sup> Rahner even goes as far as saying that there is no *mutual* love between Father and Son (*Trin.*, 106). As we noted above, his views (and those of Barth) have been criticised by Jürgen Moltmann, who has become in recent years an influential spokesperson for the so-called 'social doctrine of the Trinity', conceiving of God as three divine subjects in a fellowship of love, a communion open to the world and humanity.<sup>41</sup> This aspect will be discussed in the following chapter. Here we will examine his influential theology of the suffering God.

<sup>37</sup> See *TKG*, 139–48. <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 18. <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 144–8.

<sup>40</sup> For Augustine (and medieval theology after him), it was the inverse: only the three are Persons, but God should not be called a Person.

<sup>41</sup> *TKG*, 19.

Moltmann's theology is very much written in the shadow of Auschwitz, and boldly addresses the issue of theodicy. (Theodicy explores how we can speak of a good God in the face of so much suffering in the world.) According to Moltmann, it is only by developing a trinitarian theology of the cross that we can begin to construct a credible theodicy (CG, 227).

Moltmann's first major work was *Theology of Hope* (1964). In this work he emphasised the importance of eschatology for Christian theology. More specifically, the resurrection of Christ, as the radical contradiction of the cross, generates the Christian hope that a transformed world, no longer subject to suffering and sin, is possible, and challenges us to pursue it here and now. A second work, *The Crucified God* (1972), focussed on the cross of Christ, and will be discussed in some detail here. The final part of this trilogy, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (1975) developed Moltmann's pneumatological and ecclesiological thought. In the 1980s and 1990s Moltmann published a number of other works, starting with *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (1981), a work that reiterates much of the material of *The Crucified God*. *God in Creation* (1985), *The Way of Jesus Christ* (1989), and *The Spirit of Life* (1991) followed in quick succession.

As suggested, Moltmann's theology of a suffering God is deliberately developed as a theodicy (TKG, 47–50; CG, 207–27). He argues, echoing Dostoyevsky, that 'the suffering of a single innocent child is an irrefutable rebuttal of the notion of the almighty and kindly God in heaven. For a God who lets the innocent suffer and who permits senseless death is not worthy to be called God at all' (TKG, 47; also CG, 220).

What Moltmann suggests is that the traditional God of classical theism (omnipotent and all-good) who enjoys heavenly bliss in his impassibility and immutability – 'the Unmoved Mover' of Aristotle – is utterly alien to the God revealed in the cross of Christ (CG, 222). One of the key passages in CG is a quotation from Elie Wiesel's book *Night*, in which Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor, describes how the prisoners were forced to witness the hanging of some fellow-prisoners:

The SS hanged two Jewish men and a youth in front of the whole camp. The men died quickly, but the death throes of the youth lasted for half an hour. 'Where is God? Where is he?' someone asked behind me . . . And I heard a voice in myself answer: 'Where is he? He is there. He is hanging there on the gallows . . .'<sup>42</sup>

As Richard Bauckham has made clear in an excellent contribution, this story can be interpreted in at least two very different ways. One way is to interpret

<sup>42</sup> Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Avon Books, 1969), 75 as quoted in CG, 273–4.

it in terms of loss of faith: confronted with bottomless evil Wiesel loses his faith in God.<sup>43</sup> But that is not how Moltmann interprets the story. He tries to understand it in light of the cross, in which God has revealed himself in his self-emptying in the crucified Christ (CG, 275). The only convincing answer Christians have against the atheist critique is to point to the radical solidarity of the Christian God who suffers with us: 'The only way past protest atheism is through a theology of the cross which understands God as the suffering God in the suffering of Christ and which cries out with the godforsaken God, "My God, why have you forsaken me?"' (CG, 227). Contemplating the cross, we come to realise that 'God and suffering are no longer contradictions as in theism and atheism, but God's being is in suffering and the suffering is in God's being itself, because God is love' (CG, 227).

Love, for Moltmann, implies vulnerability and involvement: 'one who cannot suffer cannot love either' (CG, 222, 230). If the cross is a genuine revelation of God, it follows that we must speak of a suffering God (TKG, 21). Christian theology that refuses to attribute suffering to God has failed to develop an authentically Christian understanding of God, and remains indebted to Greek ways of thinking, in which divine perfection and blessedness imply impassibility (immunity to suffering) (TKG, 22; CG, 227). For this reason Moltmann rejects the Chalcedonian teaching of the two natures in the one person of Christ, as it allowed traditional Christology to state that only the man Jesus suffered (in his human nature) and not the divinity (CG, 227–35). We will return to the question whether Moltmann gives a fair interpretation of the traditional doctrine. For now, we examine how Moltmann portrays this intradivine suffering as a trinitarian event.

Taking his lead from the cry of dereliction (Mark 15:34; see CG, 225–7; TKG, 77–83), Moltmann writes:

To understand what happened between Jesus and his God and Father in the cross, it is necessary to talk in trinitarian terms. The Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son. The grief of the Father here is just as important as the death of the Son. The Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father, and if God has constituted himself as the Father of Jesus Christ, then he also suffers the death of his Fatherhood in the death of his Son. (CG, 243)

But the cross is not just the moment in which Father and Son are most deeply separated from one another in their forsakenness. At that very moment they are also 'most inwardly one in their surrender' and shared

<sup>43</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 77–80.



love for the world (CG, 244). This union of 'boundless love which proceeds from the grief of the Father and the dying of the Son' (CG, 245) is the Holy Spirit, as the bond of love of Father and Son. In short, according to Moltmann, God so radically identifies himself with 'the godless and the godforsaken' (CG, 276) that his own Son shares in this abandonment, having been given up by his own Father and freely accepting this offer. The Holy Spirit represents the bond of love of Father and Son (a distinct Augustinian echo) in their utmost separation (TKG, 82-3). In contrast to apathetic conceptions of God, the cross reveals that self-sacrifice is at the heart of God's being. The suffering of Christ is the suffering of the passionate God, the suffering of passionate love.

Following Luther, Moltmann wants to show 'that the historical passion of Christ reveals the eternal passion of God' (TKG, 32) since 'a God who cannot suffer cannot love either' (TKG, 38). Questions about God and suffering go hand in hand, so theology must go further than its traditional association of suffering with sin. Moltmann speaks of a 'patricompassionism'.<sup>44</sup> The Father is 'the one who suffers with', the one who is in solidarity with the victims of injustice and violence. Describing how God is affected by human actions and history constitutes a 'pathetic' theology: 'God is interested in the world to the point of suffering' (CG, 270-1).<sup>45</sup> The Father is drawn into the destiny of his Son; they are distinct yet one in the 'bond of love', to use Augustine's phrase. The Spirit completes the work of Father and Son by taking believers into the trinitarian history of the Father, Son, and Spirit, a history of relationships in community.

By placing suffering at the heart of God, Moltmann has, in turn, been accused by Rahner and others of ending up with a 'pauper' God who is as helpless as we are in the face of suffering and evil. God in a sense becomes tied to the world and incapable of providing consolation. God's freedom and transcendence are compromised.<sup>46</sup> Critics have further noted how Moltmann 'weakens the ontological unity of the Trinity by seeking a

<sup>44</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, 'Cross, Theology of the', in Alan Richardson, ed., *Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 136.

<sup>45</sup> Moltmann notes how some medieval depictions of 'mercy seats' (*Gnadenstuhl*) illustrate this point in that the pain of the Son's death is reflected on the Father's face. At times though, Moltmann's trinitarian theology of the cross is more binitarian than trinitarian, and it was only later that he developed an explicit pneumatology. See his *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1991), 174.

<sup>46</sup> This is not too dissimilar to Barth's 'anthropomorphic' critique: 'A God who found himself in this contradiction can obviously only be the image of our own unreconciled humanity projected into deity' (CD IV/1, p. 186).

solution in terms of history'.<sup>47</sup> Though his emphasis is on the history of Jesus and on how the New Testament narrates this history in a trinitarian way, the question remains – in positing the world as the arena of God's self-realisation – whether he has compromised God's independence and ontological distinction from the world. In other words, Moltmann's theology is in danger of dissolving the Trinity in history and presenting a Hegelian God dependent on the world for self-actualisation. Moltmann accepts the Hegelian claim (and explicitly acknowledges his indebtedness to him) that the trinitarian God is affected by history, and incorporates this history within his own life, including its alien and sinful aspects: 'If one describes the life of God within the Trinity as the "history of God" (Hegel), this history of God contains within itself the whole abyss of godforsakenness, absolute death and the non-God' (CG, 246). Moreover, this intra-trinitarian life is itself shaped by the Hegelian dialectic of opposition (between Father and Son), and reconciliation (through the Spirit) in the bridging of this separation. Moltmann's debt to Hegel is evident.<sup>48</sup>

Moltmann's assertion that traditional theology did not allow for the notion that 'one of the Trinity suffered in the flesh', is incorrect (CG, 228). As Bauckham states, this was endorsed by the Council of Constantinople of AD 553, although it is true to say that traditionally theology was reluctant to attribute suffering to the divine nature. According to the Chalcedonian view, the Son suffered in his human nature by undergoing the human experience of Jesus as his own.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, traditional theology allows one to say that in the incarnation God suffers as man. But it emphasised the need to distinguish between what can be said of Christ as a human and as divine, because failing to do so would jeopardise the genuineness of the human nature of Christ. As Bauckham puts it, 'Precisely in order to preserve the reality of the incarnation, we must not abolish the difference between what is possible for God in incarnation and what is otherwise possible for God.'<sup>50</sup> Also, as Weinandy makes clear, 'strange as it may seem, but not paradoxically, one must maintain the unchangeable impassibility of the Son of God as God in order to guarantee that it is actually the divine Son of God, one in being with the Father, who

<sup>47</sup> John O'Donnell, 'The Trinity as Divine Community. A Critical Reflection upon Recent Theological Developments', *Gregorianum* 69/1 (1988): 21. For a similar, more recent, critical assessment, see Veil-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2007), 115-22.

<sup>48</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 154.

<sup>49</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 60-3. See also the classic study by Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000) for a robust rebuttal of a theology of a suffering God.

<sup>50</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 64.

truly suffers as man'.<sup>51</sup> Readers will recall that this echoes Calvin's critique of Luther.

Moltmann applies human categories to God (such as 'suffering') without developing a proper theory of analogy which sets out the boundaries and limitations of human concepts when applied to God. In short, because Moltmann does not adopt a proper theory of analogy<sup>52</sup> his talk of 'a suffering God' is in danger of anthropomorphism.<sup>53</sup>

Moltmann also eschews the distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity because he wants to place the cross and the reality of suffering at the heart of the Trinity and to show that the economic Trinity not only reveals the immanent Trinity but also has a retroactive effect on it (*TKG*, 160). Commentators sympathetic to his project would argue that Moltmann does not intend God's radical dependence on the world but points to a real interaction between the two. We might say that there is a dialectical or dipolar dimension to his *theologia crucis*. Thinking of God in abstraction from the experience of revelation, prayer, and liturgy gives rise to the classical divine attributes of immutability, impassibility, and so on, whereas thinking of God temporally and historically leads to the attributes of faithfulness, compassion, and love. Moltmann's trinitarian theology of the cross wants to show how the second group of attributes belong just as much to divine personhood as the more classical ones.<sup>54</sup>

#### HANS URS VON BALTHASAR (1905–88): A TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY OF THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

In this section we discuss another significant contemporary theologian who puts the paschal mystery at the heart of his theology of the Trinity,

<sup>51</sup> Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, 205. He continues (p. 206): 'This is what humankind is crying out to hear, not that God experiences, in a divine manner, our anguish and suffering in the midst of a sinful and depraved world, but that he actually experienced and knew first hand, as one of us – as a man – human anguish and suffering within a sinful and depraved world. This is what a proper understanding of the Incarnation requires and affirms . . . The eternal, almighty, all-perfect, unchangeable, and impassible divine Son, he who is equal to the Father in all ways, actually experienced, as a weak human being, the full reality of human suffering and death.'

<sup>52</sup> Analogy is a theory about speech about God, which holds a middle position between univocal and equivocal use of language. Univocal use leads to anthropomorphism; equivocal to utter agnosticism. See Aquinas' *ST* 1.13, and Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 58–79 for a brief discussion.

<sup>53</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 65–9.

<sup>54</sup> 'God is free in himself and at the same time interested in his covenant relationship and affected by human history.' *TKG*, 272. See also Bruno R. Brinkmann, 'The Cross in Question. I', *The Clergy Review* 60 (1975): 286.

namely, Hans Urs von Balthasar. This Swiss theologian ranks as one of the most important Catholic theologians of the twentieth century. His theological output is only rivalled by that of Karl Barth, whose works left a deep imprint on Balthasar. Like Barth, Balthasar is not particularly interested in the latest findings of historical-critical research. What is more important, in his view, is the receptivity and openness of the believing person towards the mystery of the triune God as revealed in Christ. This receptivity has an aesthetic quality: just as we can be captivated by a profound piece of art, and cannot appreciate it if we approach it with a merely objective, scientific mindset, so too the believer needs to be captivated by the Christian story. This implies that Balthasar is profoundly unhappy with the manner in which theology and spirituality have become separated since the late-medieval period.

Given the emphasis on the need to be captured by the beauty of the triune God, it will come as no surprise that Balthasar's first major work, *The Glory of the Lord – A Theological Aesthetics* (comprising seven volumes) deals with the transcendental of beauty. In this project, he attempts to make the reader aware of the beauty of Christian revelation. A second major project focusses on the transcendental of goodness, and in this work, called *Theo-Drama – Theological Dramatic Theory* (comprising five volumes) Balthasar tries to do justice to the dramatic aspects of God's redemptive activity in the light of human sinfulness. Finally, he looks at the transcendental of truth in *Theo-Logic* (three volumes).<sup>55</sup> The three projects are deeply intertwined: *beauty* is the way in which God's *goodness* gives itself to us, and is understood by us as *truth* (*GL* I, 11).

Balthasar develops his theology of the Trinity throughout his works. Apart from different volumes in his major trilogy, we will also refer to his *Mysterium Paschale* (*MP*), a profound treatise in which he explores in a highly original manner the theological meaning of the descent of Christ into hell. We will first deal with the problem of human sin. In a second section we will discuss how sin was overcome by the obedience of Christ in the paschal mystery. Then we will show that the obedience and self-surrender of Christ is grounded in the kenotic or self-emptying love at the heart of the Trinity.

<sup>55</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, 7 vols. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982–9); *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, 5 vols. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988–98); *Theo-Logic*, 3 vols. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000–5). These works will be abbreviated as *GL*, *TD*, and *TL*, followed by the number of the volume, and page number in the English translation.

*a. Sin and pride*

For Balthasar, at the heart of sin is the inordinate desire to be like God and the refusal to accept our creaturely limitations. Balthasar develops this idea by examining the nature of human freedom. He argues that finite, human freedom only comes to fulfilment when it becomes receptive to infinite freedom, the freedom of God. He distinguishes freedom as 'autonomous motion', the freedom of choice, and freedom as 'consent', that is, freedom towards God (*TD* II, 207–42). In a powerful analysis of evil in *TD* IV, 137–201, he shows that the primal sin is to inflate the first dimension of freedom (freedom as autonomy) while refusing to acknowledge the second (indebtedness to God). We genuinely do *have* autonomous freedom of choice, but it is a freedom which has been *given* to us. We should acknowledge this gift-character in order to be true to our nature: finite freedom 'cannot see itself as purely autonomous but must also realise that . . . [it] is a gift, owing its existence to some other source' (*TD* IV, 150). When we refuse to acknowledge that we ourselves are a gift from the Creator at the core of our being, when we regard the autonomous dimension of our freedom as something absolute, then our orientation towards God is being dissolved. Our freedom turns in on itself, and the dynamism towards God (the second dimension) is attributed to the first dimension of freedom. That is: in seeking to arrogate freedom to itself, we attempt to set ourselves up as absolute good, as the norm of the good. But this is a contradiction: it is the contradiction of 'the will to power', which attempts to determine what is good and evil without, however, wanting to acknowledge the Source of all Goodness (i.e., God):

Autonomous freedom, once it has been set forth as absolute, can only understand *itself* as the norm of the good. In other words, it has the good in its power, which is an internal contradiction, since, in the absolute, the good is identical with power . . . This contradiction . . . not only deprives finite freedom of its harmonious relationship with absolute freedom: it also deprives it of such a relationship with itself. Its undeniable finitude has usurped an element of the infinite; this renders its finitude unintelligible . . . (*TD* IV, 163)

The more we try to liberate ourselves without wanting to acknowledge our relationship with God, the more we get entangled in the blind and meaningless pursuit of power and self-assertion, thereby becoming a riddle to ourselves, and eliciting antagonistic relationships with our fellow human beings. In short, setting ourselves up as the standard of the good, and thus trying to subordinate goodness to our own exercise of power, is the primal temptation, the attempt to be 'like God, knowing good and evil' (cf. Gen.

3:5). It is original sin (*TD* IV, 151). We try to determine what is good and evil, without acknowledging Goodness itself, that is, God, as our origin and goal. This leads to a profound self-alienation: when we exclusively opt for our own autonomy, and cut it loose from freedom as consent (which implies an acknowledgement that we are not our own origin), the freedom of autonomy acquires a purposeless dynamic of its own. We become our own origin and goal, and we become unintelligible to ourselves. The history of modernity (and its attempt to master the whole earth aided by instrumental rationality) is the most disturbing illustration of this dynamic.<sup>56</sup>

The Christian response is different. We can only attain fulfilment when we acknowledge our created status, the fact that we are a gift (*TD* II, 284ff.). This acknowledgement leads to gratitude for the gift of ourselves, transforming our whole existence in a word of thanksgiving.

It is not only a theology of creation (and its implication that we are a gift from God) which grounds this spirituality of surrender. Even more important for Balthasar is God's revelation in the self-emptying, obedient love of Christ. Finite freedom must be *summoned* by divine freedom, calling to open itself to the divine self-disclosure. This brings us to Balthasar's soteriology.

*b. Christology and soteriology*

It is in the paschal mystery that Christ's obedience and self-surrender finds its utmost expression. By assuming what is so radically contrary to the divine (i.e., sinfulness), the Son reveals the true nature of the divinity in what is utterly opposed to him (*sub contrario*) (*MP*, 52). This is the great paradox of Balthasar's theology, Lutheran in inspiration: God's love shows itself in the desolation of Christ; his power reveals itself in weakness; the silence on the cross is God's most eloquent revelation. Because of his solidarity with sinful humanity, Jesus experiences the godforsakenness and guilt of sinners, and their separation from God.

This notion of radical solidarity of Christ with sinful humanity is a recurring theme in twentieth-century theology. We also encounter it in the thought of Moltmann. However, drawing on insights from his friend, Adrienne von Speyr, Balthasar develops a highly original theology of Holy Saturday – the time that the dead Christ lies in the tomb in passive silence.

<sup>56</sup> Balthasar, following Heidegger, sees Descartes as the source of the modern project (because of his emphasis upon self-reliance) which culminates in the thought of Nietzsche, who 'does not know the happiness of those who receive'. This 'inability to receive' is the hallmark of the modern age – an age which believes it can produce everything. Against this Balthasar argues that we must cultivate 'a receptivity for the wealth and poverty of being' (*TD* IV, 159).

Taking centre stage, between the cross and the resurrection, is Holy Saturday, the time Christ lay in the tomb, and 'descended into hell', as an article of the creed of Nicea has it. It is here that Balthasar makes his most original – and most controversial – contribution.

The biblical sources for the descent of Christ into hell are slim (1 Pet. 3:19; 1 Pet. 4:6; Mt. 16:18; Rom. 14:9; Rev. 1:18). Whereas traditionally this had been portrayed as a triumphant opening of the gates of hell, Balthasar portrays it in much starker colours. Resisting all mythological interpretations (*MP*, 152), he argues that hell is not a place. It is 'no-where', chaos, a state of sin and total separation from God, who is the source of life. It is absence of faith, hope, and love, and all communication. Hell is an existence of total alienation from God, 'the condition of the self-enclosed "I", the "I" unliberated by God' (*MP*, 76–7). Experiencing hell means experiencing the full weight of abandonment and rejection by the Father, and it is this abandonment that Christ experienced, both on the cross (Mark 15:33) and in the tomb: 'Since the sin of the world is "laid" upon him, Jesus no longer distinguishes himself and his fate from those of sinners . . . and thus in that way he experiences the anxiety and horror which they by rights should have known for themselves' (*MP*, 104). The death of Christ and his sojourn in hell reveals the utter obedience of the Son. It is 'the obedience of a corpse' (St Francis of Assisi) (*MP*, 174), in total abandonment, without enjoyment of the beatific vision, or anticipation of future resurrection (*MP*, 106).

### *c. Trinitarian kenosis*

Although Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday is undoubtedly highly original, we can only grasp its full significance in light of his trinitarian views. Drawing on the work of Sergei Bulgakov, Balthasar claims that the kenosis or self-emptying (cf. Phil. 2:7) of the incarnation and death of Christ is, in turn, based upon a kenotic love within the Trinity. Christ's 'existence rests on a kenotic act of obedience that moved him to let go of the "form of God" and embrace the "form of slave"' (*TD IV*, 498). He describes this kenotic love in terms of 'infinite distance' at the heart of the Trinity. The following major quotation captures his key ideas:

[T]he Father's self-utterance in the generation of the Son is an initial 'kenosis' within the Godhead that underpins all subsequent kenosis. For the Father strips himself, without remainder, of his Godhead and hands it over to the Son; he 'imparts' to the Son all that is his . . . This divine act that brings forth the Son . . . involves the positing of an absolute, infinite 'distance' that can contain and embrace all the other distances that are possible within the world of finitude,

including the distance of sin. Inherent in the Father's love is an absolute renunciation: he will not be God for himself alone . . . The Son's answer to the gift of the Godhead . . . can only be eternal thanksgiving (eucharistia) to the Father, the Source – a thanksgiving as selfless and unreserved as the Father's original self-surrender. Proceeding from both, as their subsequent 'We', there breathes the 'Spirit' who is common to both: as the essence of love, he maintains the infinite difference between them, seals it and, since he is the one Spirit of them both, bridges it. (*TD IV*, 323–4)

Undoubtedly, as with Moltmann, this quotation resonates with Hegelian echoes, especially in its portrayal of the Holy Spirit as the One who 'bridges' the infinite distance between Father and Son. We will examine shortly how Balthasar transforms this Hegelian influence.

The three Persons have to make space for one another, allowing the Others to be. Letting-be, surrender, is at the heart of the Trinity, and this is the ultimate reason why finite freedom is not threatened by infinite freedom but rather finds its fulfilment in it:

If *letting-be* belongs to the nature of infinite freedom – the Father lets the Son be consubstantial God, and so forth – there is no danger of finite freedom . . . becoming alienated from itself in the realm of the Infinite. It can only be what it is, that is, an image of infinite freedom, imbued with a freedom of its own, by harmonising with the (trinitarian) 'law' of absolute freedom (of self-surrender) . . . (*TD II*, 259)

Of course, the possibility of finite freedom, which is grounded in the trinitarian letting-be, also allows for the possibility of evil, which is why Balthasar states that 'the distance of sin' is also made possible by the infinite distances within the Trinity.

Thus, this letting-be at the heart of the Trinity finds expression in creation: the trinitarian God has to make room for the created world 'to be'.<sup>57</sup> But this self-surrender at the heart of the Trinity finds its supreme expression in the obedience of the incarnate Son. As Mark McIntosh has convincingly shown, this obedience and self-emptying at the heart of the Trinity allows Balthasar to combine a high Christology (which strongly emphasises the divine identity of Jesus Christ) with a low Christology (which safeguards the genuineness of the humanity of Jesus). If self-emptying (kenosis) is at the heart of the Trinity, then the humanity of Jesus, in all its frailty, reveals the divine precisely by being so human.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> In this context (*TD II*, 271ff.) Balthasar adopts the Jewish idea of *tsimtsum*: God withdraws to a certain extent from creation, respecting the freedom of his creatures, and becomes somewhat hidden, without, however, abandoning creation.

<sup>58</sup> Mark McIntosh, *Christology from within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 41.

Everything that Jesus does reflects his divine mission and filial obedience within the Trinity. These insights have important implications for Christian spirituality, and we shall now unpack some of these.

The reader may recall the objections that Schleiermacher had raised against using the same terminology of 'Personhood' and 'nature' in the theology of the Trinity and in Christology.<sup>59</sup> Balthasar's approach allows us to counter this critique. Because Balthasar understands personhood in terms of mission, he can establish a close link between Christology and theology of the Trinity. Mission (a trinitarian concept referring to the Persons 'being sent') constitutes the Son as a Person.<sup>60</sup> This, in a sense, applies to all of us: we only come to know ourselves – who we are – through the acceptance and fulfilment of commitments, goals, and acts of love. We speak of 'finding one's mission in life', suggesting that it is only when we identify ourselves with certain ideals, when we are captivated by them, that we find our true sense of self. It is like an artist 'who is so possessed by his vocation that he only feels free, only feels totally himself, when he is able to pursue this task that is so much his own' (*TD III*, 225). This analogy may assist us in understanding how Christ's mission (his being sent by the Father) constitutes who Christ is. Christ's earthly mission reflects his eternal receptivity and obedience to his Father, and it is this which constitutes him as a Person:

It is when God addresses a conscious subject, tells him who he is and what he means to the eternal God of truth and shows him the purpose of his existence – that is, imparts a distinctive and divinely authorised mission – that we can say of a conscious subject that he is a 'person'. This is what happened, archetypically, in the case of Jesus Christ, when he was given his eternal 'definition' – 'You are my beloved Son.' (*TD III*, 207)

As Mark McIntosh puts it:

What makes Jesus unique is that in him mission and person coincide perfectly, indeed are one; for his mission is *to be* the Son. He is definitively 'person', and since all humanity is oriented towards fulfilment in him, each human being achieves his or her own personhood and stability of identity, expressly by sharing in Christ's mission.<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, it is only when we respond in obedience to God's calling, by surrendering ourselves, that we find ourselves and attain true selfhood. In

<sup>59</sup> The gist of Schleiermacher's critique is that in Christology, 'personhood' is understood as that which particularises the human and divine natures of Christ. If personhood is understood in the same way in the theology of the Trinity, then we end up with tritheism.

<sup>60</sup> McIntosh, *Christology from within*, 51. <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

Christ there is an identity of personhood and mission, and both can only be properly understood in terms of receptivity and obedience. By reinterpreting personhood in dynamic terms (as a filial mission), rather than in a static, reified manner, Balthasar can link theology of the Trinity and Christology (including the notion of personhood) in a way that is quite innovative and fruitful for Christian spirituality: we can only attain true selfhood when we surrender ourselves as the Son surrendered himself, within the bosom of the Trinity, and in his life and death on earth.

We have seen that the ultimate presupposition of kenosis is the selflessness of the Persons in the inner-trinitarian life (*MP*, 35). Because the kenotic existence of the Son on earth reflects the kenotic obedience within the Trinity, neither creation nor incarnation necessitates a change in God (*TD V*, 513). This is an important difference between Moltmann's thought and that of Balthasar: whereas Moltmann's God is in danger of succumbing to the Hegelian influence of bringing change into God, and making God open to suffering, Balthasar's views, based on a kenotic trinitarian love, do not have to imply this: the life and death of Christ does not import passibility and change into God; it is the inverse: because the Trinity is a community of kenotic love, we can begin to understand why creation, the incarnation, and the death of Christ take place: the kenotic selflessness is the basis of the kenosis that occurs in the creative act, as well as in the incarnation and death of the Son (*GL VII*, 214).

The Spirit is the 'excess' or ecstatic dimension of the kenotic love between Father and Son (*TL III*, 159). In developing his pneumatology, Balthasar explicitly draws on Richard of St Victor's idea that 'shared love is not perfected without an inner fruit' (*TL III*, 164). The Holy Spirit is both the bond of love between Father and Son, and the fruit and witness of this love (*TL III*, 160, 243, 296). One way of clarifying the role of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity is by adopting the analogy of love between man and woman, and the fruit of this love, the child, as a genuine *imago Trinitatis* (*TL III*, 140–I, 160). As we saw in an earlier quotation, Balthasar describes the Holy Spirit as the 'We' of Father and Son, which partly explains the somewhat elusive character of the Holy Spirit.<sup>62</sup> The Holy Spirit's freedom to blow whither he wills, to distribute gifts as he wills, reflects the kenotic nature of the love of Father and Son which the Holy Spirit is (*TL III*, 241). The Holy Spirit is poured out after the resurrection (*MP*, 203, 210) and is the interpreter of God's self-proclamation in Jesus Christ, leading believers

<sup>62</sup> See Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'The Holy Spirit as Love' from *Explorations in Theology*, vol. III. *Creator Spirit* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 128.

into the divine revelation (TL III, 107, 141). He is the gift of Father and Son, the liberator who bestows freedom (TL III, 236), the one who eternally arouses the divine love and witnesses to it (TL III, 242–9).

It is through the operation of the Holy Spirit that the resurrected Christ becomes a eucharistically fruitful body for the world (TD V, 477). The Holy Spirit 'universalises' the existence of Christ, so that it can become 'the immediate norm of every individual existence' in a number of ways: first, through the ascension (closely associated with Pentecost); then through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist in which the Lord, in another instance of kenosis and surrender, is distributed in bread and wine throughout the world (GL VII, 151, 226); and, finally, in the life of the Christian who lives by Christ's commandments and the example of his love.<sup>63</sup>

#### d. Evaluation

Balthasar's approach may at first seem similar to that of Moltmann. Moltmann, following Hegel, is, however, in danger of making the intra-trinitarian life dependent on, and conditioned by, the history of the world, thereby attributing suffering to God himself. Balthasar's emphasis upon the eternal self-emptying love within the Trinity allows him to argue that the cross is the revelation of the self-emptying love of God, without meaning to imply that the cross changes God, or effects pathos within the Trinity, turning God into 'a tragic, mythological God' (TD IV, 322). The key difference between Moltmann and Balthasar is that while Moltmann is inclined to abolish the distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity, thereby attributing historicity and temporality into God, Balthasar, by maintaining this distinction, can see the cross as the manifestation and result of the intra-trinitarian kenosis, rather than its cause.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, Balthasar is very much aware that all God-talk is analogous, while Moltmann does not develop a proper theory of analogy.

Undoubtedly, Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday is the most original aspect of his theology. But it is controversial, and Alyssa L. Pitstick has raised a number of probing questions in relation to this key aspect of Balthasar's theology.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup> See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 81–III.

<sup>64</sup> See Thomas G. Dalzell, *The Dramatic Encounter of Divine and Human Freedom in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity 105 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997), 161–93.

<sup>65</sup> Alyssa L. Pitstick, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007).

It will have become clear that Balthasar's emphasis upon the kenotic love within the Trinity allows him to establish an intimate link between the theology of the Trinity, Christology, and spirituality. But the question can be raised: Why exactly is self-surrender on behalf of another to be identified with love? Pitstick points out that this is a deficient understanding of love. For instance, if love is nothing but self-surrender, can we still be said to love ourselves? And if not (for how can we surrender ourselves to ourselves?), how then do we love our neighbour as ourselves?<sup>66</sup>

Moreover, and more fundamentally, Balthasar's theology of the descent is profoundly untraditional. Balthasar sees the descent as an extension of the cross in which Christ suffers the consequences of his radical solidarity with the sinfulness of humanity, while in the tradition it was seen as the victorious entry of Christ into the underworld, opening the gates of hell.<sup>67</sup>

Although Balthasar has acquired the status of a modern Church Father in some (conservative) Catholic circles, we note that Balthasar's soteriology actually has a close affinity with some Protestant perspectives. While Balthasar distances himself from the excesses of some Reformed views (GL VII, 205, 232; TD III, 241), and although he states that the divine wrath must be understood in the light of divine love (GL VII, 205, 232; MP, 139), his notion that Jesus identifies himself radically with *sinful* humanity (Christ's 'real assumption of universal guilt' MP, 101) seems more reminiscent of Luther's thought, and shares similar ambiguities. It leads to a soteriology in which the Father actively withdraws from his Son and loads the punishment for sin upon him (GL VII, 209; MP, 108–12, 136). Balthasar makes it clear, however, that the aggression comes from us, and that the cross does not turn an angry God into a loving one. Admittedly, Balthasar argues that his view is different from the Protestant view in that the Son freely accepts this abandonment (TD III, 242). Still, this is a very different approach to soteriology from that of Anselm or Aquinas, who, rather than seeing Christ's salvific work in terms of *punishment*, see it in terms of a freely undertaken *penance* for the sake of humanity. Again, Balthasar's more radical ideas on the descent and eschatology are indebted not to the Scriptures or the Church Fathers, but to the mythological ideas of his friend Adrienne von Speyr whose work is, by his own admission, inseparable from his own.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 214. <sup>67</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>68</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *My Work in Retrospect* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 89.

JOHN ZIZIOULAS (1931-): TRINITY, PERSONHOOD,  
AND CHURCH

We have seen that Rahner and Barth criticised the use of the word 'person' in theology of the Trinity, arguing that it effectively leads to modern misunderstandings of God as tritheist. The Greek Orthodox theologian and Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas puts forward a different view in two influential works, both a collection of essays, namely *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (BC) and *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (CO).

According to Zizioulas, the concept of 'person' is the 'most dear and precious good . . . which the world owes to Greek patristic theology' (BC, 65; CO, 166). More specifically, he claims that the Cappadocian Fathers (St Basil the Great, St Gregory of Nazianzus, and St Gregory of Nyssa) redefined personhood in relational terms, giving it ontological priority over universal being. This shift had a fundamental impact on Christian thought and culture, according to Zizioulas. His key idea is that relationship is introduced into substance itself, and this results in a relational understanding of being (BC, 84-9). This is supremely the case within the Trinity; but it is only through participation in Christ that the human drive to personhood can be fulfilled (CO, 108-9). In what follows we will explicate Zizioulas' thinking.

As we saw in Chapter 3, the Cappadocian Fathers argued for the ontological priority of personhood over substance. In order to fully appreciate the Cappadocian revolution (as Zizioulas sees it), we need to say a few words about Greek philosophy. For Greek philosophy the universal nature always had priority over the particular manifestations of this universal nature. Human nature, for instance, is ontologically prior to and more important than any of its particular manifestations (such as Rose or Henry) (CO, 102). The particular person exists only for the sake of the whole (human species, society, . . .) (CO, 164). Similarly, classic Greek tragedy invites humans to succumb to the order and justice that held the universe together. It is here that the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocians introduced a major change, as we saw in Chapter 3: for them the particular is not secondary to being or nature. This implies that the concept of personhood acquires ontological priority (CO, 166).

Of course, divine and human personhood are different from one another. Each human person is an individual, that is, an entity ontologically independent from other human beings. Also, in human existence nature precedes the person: when Rose and Henry are born, the one human nature

precedes them – they embody only part of the human nature (CO, 158-9). In God, however, the three persons of the Trinity do not share a pre-existing divine nature, but they coincide with it. The three persons of the Trinity are united in an unbreakable communion of love, and therefore none of the three can be conceived apart from the other two (CO, 159).

The important reversal that Zizioulas has documented – in God persons have priority over divine nature or being – had, in his view, significant implications for the Christian heritage and our culture in general. First, nothing is 'more sacred than the person since it constitutes the "way of being" of God himself. The person cannot be sacrificed or subjected to any ideal' (CO, 166). Second, personhood must be understood in terms of communion and relationship: 'It is the other and our relationship with him that gives us our identity, our otherness, making us "who we are", that is, persons' (CO, 166). The meaning of our existence is to be found in being a person, not in our nature: 'As a person you exist as long as you love and are loved. When you are treated as nature, as a thing, you die as a particular entity . . . Nature always points to the general; it is the person that safeguards uniqueness and absolute particularity' (CO, 167). Thirdly, while nature and species are perpetuated and replaceable, the person is something unique and unrepeatable. It is our personhood, constituted by our relation with others (including and especially God), which gives us our identity and value.

The uniqueness of each person also has implications for a theology of love and death. Death strikes us as tragic only when we regard human beings as persons, in their unique identity. After all, through procreation and child-bearing the survival of the species is guaranteed. But the survival of the uniqueness of a person cannot be guaranteed through the substance, that is, human nature. Christians can only begin to conceive of the immortality of each person through love, which endows something 'with uniqueness, with absolute identity and name' (BC, 49, note 44). This love is always trinitarian at heart:

The life of God is eternal because it is personal, that is to say, it is realised as an expression of free communion, as love. Life and love are identified in the person: the person does not die only because it is loved and loves; outside the communion of love the person loses its uniqueness and becomes a being like other human beings, a 'thing' without absolute 'identity' and 'name', without a face. (BC, 49)

Being loved by God and loving him in return opens the door to eternal life. It is this which the Fathers call 'divinisation' (BC, 49). It is a mirroring of the personal life in God by realising personhood in ourselves.

This can only occur through a new mode of existence, which Zizioulas calls the 'hypostasis of ecclesial existence'. This new mode of existence, or regeneration, is inaugurated by baptism (BC, 53). Here our personhood or *hypostasis* becomes rooted in an ontological reality which does not suffer from createdness (the way our biological reality does) (BC, 54–6). This happens through Christ:

Thanks to Christ man can henceforth himself 'subsist', can affirm his existence as personal not on the basis of the immutable laws of his nature but on the basis of a relationship with God which is identified with what Christ in freedom and love possesses as Son of God with the Father. This adoption of man by God, the identification of his hypostasis with the hypostasis of the Son of God, is the essence of baptism. (BC, 56)

In baptism we are born as an ecclesial person, able to 'transcend' the biological laws, allowing us to love unconstrained by the natural laws (BC, 57). Baptism, a new birth, is 'nothing but the acquisition of an identity not dependent on the qualities of nature but freely raising nature to a hypostatic existence identical with that which emerges from the Father–Son relationship' (CO, 109). Now we can love without exclusivism, as Christ did.

Some readers may want to object that this ecclesial way of being does not do away with our biological way of being, and with it, death. Zizioulas grants this point and qualifies his argument by arguing that our ecclesial identity refers not to that which we are but to that which we will be: the ecclesial identity is linked with eschatology, the final outcome of our existence (BC, 59). Our present identity has its roots in the future but its branches in the present (BC, 59). It is a sacramental or Eucharistic identity or *hypostasis*.

Thus, the emphasis upon communion, which is at the heart of the Trinity, also finds expression in the Eucharistic community. The Eucharist is first and foremost an assembly, a community, in which we 'subsist' in a manner different from a biological way of existing. In the Eucharist we transcend every exclusiveness of a biological or social kind. The Eucharist manifests the principle that the *hypostasis* expresses the whole: the whole Christ is present, and every communicant is the whole Christ and the whole Church. But the Eucharist is not solely an assembly. It is also a movement towards our eschatological existence (BC, 59–61). It makes us realise that our authentic, true personhood is not in the pursuit of goods and values of this world (BC, 62).

Zizioulas' insights into the Eucharist have a strong pneumatological dimension. It is the Holy Spirit who brings history to fulfilment, who

'eschatologises' it. In the Eucharistic event the presence of the *eschaton* in history is manifested, and this is nothing less than communion with the triune God.<sup>69</sup> If the Son's role is to become history, then the role of the Holy Spirit is the exact opposite: it is the fulfilment of history, bringing the triune presence into history.<sup>70</sup> The Holy Spirit transforms everything he touches into a relational being: 'The Spirit de-individualises and personalises beings wherever he operates' (CO, 6). It is the Spirit who supports us in loving the other as person, as a unique and irreplaceable other with whom we enter into relationship, rather than somebody who can be pigeonholed in general categories (i.e., in social, racial, and moral terms) (CO, 111–12).

While developing his pneumatology Zizioulas returns to the contribution made by the Cappadocian Fathers. His interpretation of their contribution to the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (AD 381) is especially significant in relation to the issue of the *filioque*, the belief that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*. It is fair to say that until recently the *filioque* was a defining issue in the identity of Western Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox theology. Given its historical and theological importance, we will conclude this section with a brief discussion of this issue.

The historical background to this topic is well known. The original Creed of Constantinople (325) does not contain the *filioque*. In response to the Arian threat, and influenced by the theology of Augustine, it made its way into the confession of the Creed in Spain during the sixth century. The addition of this phrase was a gradual process. From Spain it spread to Gaul and Germany. At the beginning of the ninth century Charlemagne requested Pope Leo III to officially include it into the Creed, but he refused. In the East, Patriarch Photius rejected the *filioque* in an encyclical of 866, mainly on the grounds that it undermines the monarchy of the Father. The cultural and political separation of East and West deepened in subsequent centuries, leading to a *de facto* religious division in the middle of the eleventh century (with mutual excommunications in 1054). It was, however, only in 1014 that Pope Benedict VIII admitted the *filioque* into the Latin version of the Creed. Attempts at reconciliation were made during the Councils of Lyons (1274) and again, for political reasons (the need for support from the West against the threat of the Turks, which resulted in the fall of Byzantium), at the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438–9).

<sup>69</sup> Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being with God: Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine–Human Communion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 32.

<sup>70</sup> Papanikolaou, *Being with God*, 36.



In the twentieth century, in a climate of renewed ecumenism, there appeared to be, if not a convergence of views and greater tolerance, at least a better understanding of the historical origins of the diverse views on this matter. A more profound engagement with the historical and theological background has also dispelled some of the deep linguistic misunderstandings that had bedevilled the discussions in earlier centuries.

Orthodox theologians have traditionally claimed that (a) the unilateral insertion by the Latin Church of the *filioque* into the Creed of an Ecumenical Council is unacceptable. (b) They have argued that attributing spirative power to the Son as such obfuscates the distinction between Father and Son, which inevitably results in a kind of modalism. For Orthodox theologians, only the Father is the cause of the procession of the Holy Spirit. There are not two causes within the Trinity. (c) It tends to give primacy to the divine substance or essence over the personal nature of the Trinity. Orthodox theologians claim that the West (by regarding not the Father but the Father and the Son as the source of the Holy Spirit) is in danger of considering the impersonal essence the principle of unity in the Trinity. In their view the Person of the Father is the origin of the Trinity; it is the Person of the Father who guarantees the unity of the three Persons, and not an impersonal divine substance or essence. Also, (d) Orthodox theologians point out that the Western position leads to a subordination of the Holy Spirit, which results in extreme Christocentrism in the West at the expense of pneumatological thinking – a charge not entirely without justification.

A text from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, entitled 'The Greek and Latin traditions about the procession of the Holy Spirit'<sup>71</sup> tackles a number of these issues. It explicitly states (a) that the Catholic Church acknowledges the 'normative and irrevocable value' of the Creed of Constantinople, and goes on to say: 'No profession of faith peculiar to a particular liturgical tradition can contradict this expression of faith.' In response, Zizioulas has welcomed this statement 'with deep satisfaction' and considers it 'a very good basis for discussion'.<sup>72</sup> It means that the Catholic Church does not consider the *filioque* a creedal innovation but rather a clarification, or interpretation. This is in line with the view

<sup>71</sup> The text was published by *Osservatore Romano* (13 September 1995) and in *Catholic International* 7/1 (January 1996), 36–43. It is also widely available online, such as in: [www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=1176](http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=1176) or [www.ewtn.com/library/CURLA/PCCUFILQ.HTM](http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURLA/PCCUFILQ.HTM)

<sup>72</sup> The text 'One Single Source' is available online at [www.agrino.org/cyberdesert/%20zizioulas.htm](http://www.agrino.org/cyberdesert/%20zizioulas.htm)

expressed in *The Decree for the Greeks* from 1439 during the Council of Florence.<sup>73</sup>

Against (b) and (c) Western theologians could, of course, argue, in turn, that a denial of the *filioque* makes it very difficult to distinguish the Son from the Holy Spirit. Even so, it is important to dispel a number of misunderstandings. First, we need, once more, to reiterate that the popular view, shared by Zizioulas (see *CO*, 198), that the Latin West puts more emphasis upon the impersonal divine essence, at the expense of a personal understanding of the Trinity, is incorrect. Zizioulas' presentation of the Western tradition is in danger of becoming a caricature. He describes it as shaped by 'the Boethian individualistic tradition' (*CO* 208–12). From previous chapters the reader will know that the Western tradition too understood personhood in terms of relation. Similarly, Zizioulas follows Rahner uncritically (who, in turn, bases his views on those of De Régnon) in his claim that the Western tradition gave priority to the divine substance, while the existence of God as triune was treated as secondary (*BC*, 40, note 34, and *CO*, 106: 'Substance is something common to all three Persons of the Trinity, but it is not ontologically primary until Augustine makes it so'). In fact, the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) explicitly stated that it is not the divine substance that is the cause of the Son's generation and the Spirit's procession, but it is the Father, who generates.<sup>74</sup>

Moreover, while the Father, and not the divine substance, is the origin of the other divine Persons, Western theology does not claim that there are two causes of the Spirit. Indeed, the Second Council of Lyons (1274) confessed that 'the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from Father and Son, not as from two principles but from one (*ex uno principio*), not by two spirations but by only one'.<sup>75</sup> According to the Western view, the Spirit does not proceed from the Father and the Son as if from two separate causes. In that sense it is clearly misleading to speak of a 'double procession' (as some Orthodox theologians have done when discussing the Latin view). This point is reiterated in the document from the Pontifical Council for

<sup>73</sup> See *The Decree for the Greeks* (1439), *DS* 691, which states that 'the explanatory words' (*explicationem verborum illorum*) have been added to the creed legitimately and with good reason 'for the sake of clarifying the truth'.

<sup>74</sup> The Latin view is not uniform either. As we saw in the previous chapter, for St Bonaventure innascibility, for instance, has positive connotations, as it implies the fontal plenitude of the Father. Aquinas rejects this point of view (*ST* I.33.4 *ad* 1). The Franciscan approach is more amenable to the Greek view, which distinguishes the Holy Spirit from the Word by different modes of procession rather than by their relationships. See Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1997), vol. III, 180–1.

<sup>75</sup> *DS* 460.

Promoting Christian Unity, which explicitly acknowledges the monarchy of the Father, stating that the Father is the sole trinitarian Cause (*Aitia*) or Principle (*Principium*) of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the *filioque* does not undermine the notion of the sole monarchy of the Father, the one origin of the Son and of the Spirit.<sup>76</sup> In short, the *filioque* does not imply that the Holy Spirit finds his origin in two distinct causes (Father and Son); rather, it refers to the communication of the consubstantial communion of Father and Son, to the Spirit.

Orthodox theologians themselves, including Zizioulas (*CO*, 193), admit that the Son has a mediating role in the procession of the Holy Spirit: the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son. Because the Son has the faculty of being the co-principle of the Spirit entirely from the Father, the *filioque* does not necessarily imply the rejection of the thesis that the Father is the sole cause of divine existence (*CO*, 197).<sup>77</sup> Clearly, a rapprochement between the East and the West is possible on this issue.

Nevertheless, an important issue remains outstanding. It seems to us that the crucial element in the debate over the *filioque* is how our understanding of the economic Trinity shapes our theology of the immanent Trinity. A crucial text, which illustrates the different approaches of the East and the West, is John 15:26, in which Christ says: 'When the Paraclete comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he shall give testimony of me.' Latin theologians will argue that the revelation of the sending of the Spirit into the world by the Son (the economy) mirrors the immanent Trinity. In other words, the economy reveals something of the immanent processions within the Trinity (in this case: the fact that the Son is involved in the procession of the Holy Spirit). Orthodox theologians, on the other hand, will argue that the scriptural text says nothing about an immanent procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son. They accept that the Son sends the Holy Spirit in the economy but they refuse to deduce from this that there is a similar sending (or 'procession') within the Trinity. At first sight the view of Western theologians seems to have an important advantage: if the economy does not reveal the immanent Trinity, and if our statements about the immanent Trinity are not founded on the economy (as witnessed by the Scriptures), then these theological statements about the immanent life of the Trinity risk becoming

<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, it must be admitted that there is a certain ambiguity in the Western position. *The Decree for the Greeks* (1439), for instance, does state that the Son is a 'cause' of the subsistence of the Spirit (cf. DS 691).

<sup>77</sup> Zizioulas is indebted for this view to Yves Congar, whose work *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (vol. III, 86) he quotes in *CO*, 197.

mythology. However, in the history of salvation (the economy) as witnessed by the Scriptures, we notice that the Holy Spirit has an important role to play in the annunciation, the conception, the baptism, and the ministry of our Lord. Hence Zizioulas is correct in arguing that 'if one looks at the Economy in order to arrive at *Theologia*, one begins with the Holy Spirit, then passes through the Son, and finally reaches the Father' (*CO*, 188) – the reverse order to that which Latin theology ascribes to the immanent Trinity.<sup>78</sup> In other words, the economic Trinity seems to sit uneasily with the immanent Trinity (as construed in Latin theology), at least if one insists, as Western theologians do, that our portrayal of the immanent Trinity must be based on our understanding of the economic Trinity.

It is clear that this debate needs to be continued, and no consensus has as yet been reached. Western theologians will argue that the *filioque* can be retained as a valid theological opinion (or *theologoumenon*), although most Westerners will now concede that its unilateral inclusion in the Creed of Constantinople was canonically and ecumenically dubious.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

When we examine the trajectory covered in the last two chapters, a number of issues strike us. First, there is a rich diversity in the understanding of the theology of the Trinity. Although a number of authors may share a certain approach (such as those who espouse the intrapersonal model of the Trinity), almost every author we discussed has made a distinct contribution to the doctrine of the Trinity.

Second, we dispelled a number of untenable scholarly views. The notion that the West puts more emphasis upon the divine substance than the divine Persons proved difficult to sustain in light of the rich theologies of the Trinity we encountered from the medieval period to the present day. Nor did we find any traces of a 'decline' and 'reinventing' of the theology of the Trinity. What we did notice, however, was the gradual appearance of theologies of the Trinity which 'rival' traditional patristic and medieval theologies of the Trinity. These 'rival' theologies of the Trinity are usually Hegelian in inspiration. The indebtedness to Hegel becomes evident in a number of ways: process and change are attributed to the inner life of God, which can also be affected by, and become dependent upon, events on

<sup>78</sup> It should be noted that Ruusbroec's theology, with its circular view of the trinitarian life, contains resources to solve this theological problem.

earth. Indeed, the reduction of the immanent Trinity to the economic Trinity is one of the distinctive features of the Hegelian influence.

The 'rival' theology which Hegel developed must, in turn, be seen in light of intellectual developments that characterise modernity, and which find their origins in the late-medieval period and Reformation thought (especially Lutheran theology). We will recall the major focal points and indicate how we believe recent developments in theology may redress some of the imbalances that have grown over the centuries.

First, there was the collapse of the scholastic *synthesis of faith and reason*. Although authors such as Richard of St Victor, Bonaventure, or Thomas Aquinas held different views on how faith and reason should relate to one another, they all shared the view that some engagement of faith and reason, and theology and philosophy, was desirable. By the time Descartes, the father of modernity, wrote his *Meditations*, this kind of rapprochement between faith and reason is no longer considered viable or even desirable. The resulting chasm, separating faith and reason, and theology and philosophy, led to an impoverished view of human understanding, which became increasingly 'rationalistic' rather than sapiential. The religious-aesthetic mindset, which most pre-modern authors shared (and which found its most eloquent expression in St Bonaventure's work), faded away in the modern paradigm. Its decline was accompanied by the gradual displacement of a sacramental by a mechanistic worldview. Creation (even the human being herself) was now increasingly understood in mechanistic terms, and no longer as a reflection of the trinitarian glory. In short, what we called the aesthetic receptivity (which we encountered in Richard, Aquinas, and Bonaventure) appears to dissipate in the late-medieval period. As we indicated, the Reformation was to widen this gap between faith and reason even further.

In order to approach the mystery of the Trinity, a rationalistic approach will be insufficient, or even a hindrance. A broader view of human understanding, which pre-modern authors shared, is a necessary condition for traditional approaches to the Trinity to flourish. It is hardly surprising that unitarianism and deism are modern phenomena.

Schleiermacher attempted to reconstruct theology after the Kantian challenge, which further cemented the separation of faith and reason. His emphasis upon human subjectivity certainly proved very influential and has deeply shaped modern theology. It could not, however, do justice to traditional approaches to the mystery of the Trinity, and it comes as no surprise that Schleiermacher duly rejects them, with arguments that prove particularly rationalistic. Hegel promisingly argued for a broader understanding

of human rationality, but in his preference for philosophy over religious 'imagination' he succumbs to a key prejudice of modernity. Karl Rahner's original transcendental analysis attempts to reveal how the mystery of the trinitarian God grounds our being and everyday existence. In this Rahner proves a sophisticated heir to Schleiermacher's fundamental stance: the turn to the subject.

As we noted, it is difficult to place Karl Barth in the modern landscape. On the one hand, he accepts the separation of faith and reason, theology and philosophy. But he also vehemently reacts against the Schleiermacherian turn to the subject. His unapologetic theocentric stance leads to an original theology of the Trinity, based upon the revelatory act itself. The relevance of this approach for Christian spirituality is that our faith and obedience is part of the trinitarian event that is the revelatory act. Only those who have already been transformed in faith by the Holy Spirit will heed the Word of God. His theocentrism, which is alien to most modern theology, goes a long way in qualifying his Kantian epistemological position (and the separation of faith and reason it implies). Thus, in different ways the authors we discussed have grappled with the challenges of modernity.

In the postmodern era, however, we have become much more aware of the fiduciary nature of human rationality. The Cartesian 'autonomous reason' has been discredited. Michael Polanyi has shown that even scientific knowledge and practices presuppose procedures and beliefs which are simply assumed and never questioned. Hans-Georg Gadamer, working in the field of hermeneutics, has shown the significance of pre-understandings in the interpretative process. Alasdair MacIntyre has emphasised the importance of specific traditions for human rationality and morality.<sup>79</sup> All these authors allow us to challenge the notion of 'autonomous reason'. In doing so, they open up opportunities for theologians to recapture a broader understanding of human rationality, closer to the sapiential understanding that proved so central in the pre-modern development of trinitarian theology. In our view the work of Balthasar attempts to reintroduce something of this religious-aesthetic disposition, which is fully aware of the fiduciary nature of human rationality, and which can be called a sapiential theology that offers important resources for our present era.

<sup>79</sup> For a readable and very useful introduction to these issues, see Trevor Hart, *Faith Thinking: The Dynamics of Christian Theology* (London: SPCK, 1995).

A second key issue we identified is the rise of *different readings of the Scriptures*. We argued that Luther and Calvin adopted fairly traditional trinitarian views. Luther's *Sola Scriptura* principle, however, led to a growing divide between traditional theologies of the Trinity and the interpretation of the Scriptures. Indeed, some of Luther's more innovative principles led to a 'detraditionalisation' of the theology of the Trinity. It is no coincidence that both the historical-critical method and radical anti-trinitarianism find their origin in Protestant theology. Catholics would argue that without the prism of tradition it becomes increasingly difficult to interpret the Scriptures in such a way that they support the traditional doctrine of the Trinity. In fact, St Irenaeus had already made this important hermeneutical point against the Gnostics: without the Rule of Faith (i.e., the Creed) it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to interpret the Scriptures faithfully. In order that this argument does not become circular, Irenaeus also introduced the notion of apostolic succession, supposedly safeguarding the validity of the Rule of Faith.<sup>80</sup> Thus, Irenaeus emphasises the hermeneutical significance of a perspective shaped by faith, but he also underscores a more historical dimension: the Rule of Faith has been handed down from the time of the apostles onwards, and this is (allegedly) historically verifiable.

Irenaeus' contribution offers us resources to tackle a complex theological issue: how, if at all, should historical-critical readings of the Scriptures shape our understanding of Christian faith, including a theology of the Trinity? While the historical-critical method initially flourished in Protestant circles only (given their general anti-traditionalist stance), Catholic theology became more open to the contribution it could make during the first half of the twentieth century (cf. *Divino Afflante Spiritu* by Pope Pius XII). It is fair to say that modern biblical scholarship both illustrates and perhaps, at times, has furthered the decline of non-literal, allegorical readings of Scripture. Modern biblical scholarship has often exposed traditional ways of reading the Scriptures as untenable. These allegorical ways, however, proved rather important in nurturing the religious-aesthetic dimension of pre-modern theology; they were also a major resource for developing traditional theologies of the Trinity.

<sup>80</sup> The circularity is as follows: a 'faithful' interpretation of the Scriptures is one which is in accordance with the Rule of Faith; and: the Rule of Faith, accepted as a faithful summary of the history of salvation narrated in the Scriptures, determines which interpretations of the Scriptures are faithful or proper. The notion of the apostolic succession introduces a historical dimension into this, that is, the Rule of Faith has been accurately handed down from the apostles to the present bishops.

In the twentieth century a number of authors, inspired by Henri de Lubac's magisterial *Medieval Exegesis*, have argued that we need to retrieve the riches of pre-modern readings of the Scriptures. Now, in pre-modern readings of the Scriptures the literal (or historical) sense is only one of four possible readings. There are also the allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses (cf. *ST I.I.10*). In short, pre-modern readings are quite inclusivists, and allow for literal or historical-critical interpretations as acceptable readings. Similarly, we are pleading for an inclusivists position, which is willing to include the findings of balanced historical-critical scholarship, but which is also open to alternative, more traditional readings that are not at odds with historical-critical findings. The retrieval of inclusivists, pre-modern interpretative strategies may assist us in bridging the gap between modern biblical exegesis and systematic theology (including the theology of the Trinity). Few theologians have attempted such a synthesis. Authors such as Balthasar, Barth, or Zizioulas have not fully engaged with modern biblical scholarship, while scholars who have done so, such as Edward Schillebeeckx, show little interest in a theology of the Trinity.

Another important element we identified is the connection between *soteriology* (especially the paschal mystery) and the development of trinitarian theology. Again, Luther's emphasis upon the radical identification of Christ with sinful humanity, and his tendency towards radically emphasising the unity of the divine and human natures in Christ, opened the door for a theopaschite theology, of which Hegel is the philosophical heir. Through Luther and Hegel it became a key theme in Moltmann's theology of the suffering God, Balthasar, and others. Especially in Moltmann's theology the Hegelian influence is in danger of undermining the divine transcendence.

In conclusion, a future theology of the Trinity should, in our view, recapture the sapiential, religious-aesthetic stance of pre-modern authors in a postmodern context. Aware of the fiduciary nature of all human rationality, it will be critically aware that human understanding is broader than mere reason (*raison, ratio*). It will also engage with the findings of biblical scholarship without excluding other, more spiritual or allegorical ways of reading the Scriptures. And it will continue to focus on the paschal mystery as a key revelatory event, without succumbing to the temptations of a Hegelian God who is in need of salvation himself. Thus, we need to construe a theology of God who is in radical solidarity with humanity, without, however, becoming guilty of anthropomorphism.

Another issue we identified is the tension between interpersonal and intrapersonal *models of the Trinity*. Balthasar has identified the weaknesses of

each model: 'The interpersonal model cannot attain the substantial unity of God, whereas the intrapersonal model cannot give an adequate picture of the real and abiding face-to-face encounter of the hypostases' (*TL* II, 38). He states that these models can, at best, converge but they cannot be fully integrated with one another 'within the horizon of this world'. Still, it seems to us that a number of authors have attempted this kind of convergence, especially St Bonaventure. A future theology of the Trinity should, in our view, attempt to harmonise both models as much as possible. While the interpersonal model appears to be the one that finds most favour with scholars at present, the intrapersonal model has the distinct advantage of allowing us to establish a closer link between theology of the Trinity and spirituality, although the social model is not without its practical and spiritual implications, as we will make clear in the next chapter. This brings us to our final observations in this chapter: the importance of the *link between theology and spirituality*.

Richard's analysis of the Trinity in terms of a community of shared love continues to inspire theologians to this day, especially those who favour social trinitarianism (such as Moltmann). Also, Richard's view that the Father generates the Son out of gratuitous love can be beautifully linked with the paschal mystery in which the Father surrenders his Son for our salvation. Similarly, the economy of grace must be interpreted in terms of the gift of the Holy Spirit, love freely received (*amor debitus*) from the Father and the Son. It is this love which is breathed into the hearts of the Christian faithful by the Father and the Son.

Bonaventure's sapiential theology allows us to contemplate the whole of creation in light of the Trinity, and where the human soul in particular bears this trinitarian imprint in a supreme manner. When memory (or mind), intellect, and will turn to God we become fully deiform and actualise our trinitarian calling. Bonaventure's theology of the Holy Spirit as Gift offers major resources for theology today, as John Milbank's contribution (see Chapter 6) will suggest.

Aquinas' so-called psychological model, although often maligned in recent scholarship, proves particularly fruitful for Christian spirituality. Following Augustine, Aquinas develops a rich analogy between the generation of the Word and the procession of the Spirit as Love, on the one hand, and the movements of the inner word and love within the mind, on the other hand, that allow for a dynamic understanding of the soul as the image of the Trinity. When we know and love God, we share in the intratrinitarian processions of Word and Spirit.

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While Aquinas' rehabilitation as an important spiritual writer of trinitarian doctrine is overdue, Ruusbroec's status in this regard has never been disputed by anyone familiar with his writings. Ruusbroec's original theology of the Trinity finds a rich application in his spiritual ideal of the common life. This ideal combines charitable activity, desire and devotion for God, and fruition of God in a harmonious synthesis. The common life reflects, and participates in, the intra-trinitarian dimensions (outgoing, ingoing, and fruition or rest in the shared unity).

In the twentieth century both Balthasar and Rahner have called for a re-engagement between theology and spirituality. Especially Balthasar's innovative theology of Holy Saturday offers interesting trinitarian perspectives (as does Moltmann's theology of the suffering God). According to Balthasar, the paschal mystery can only be understood in terms of a kenosis within the Trinity. We also discussed the importance of his understanding of mission for finding one's own identity – again a theme of direct relevance for Christian spirituality.

Finally, John Zizioulas' analysis of personhood and communion provides the foundation for an attractive theology which asserts the unique value of every person, which death (from a Christian perspective) can never abnegate. As we saw, Zizioulas' rich trinitarian thought branches out into ecclesiology, sacramentology (especially baptism and Eucharist), pneumatology, and eschatology. In Zizioulas' work we encounter a theologian who attempts to remain faithful to the legacy of the Church Fathers but who is also willing to engage with contemporary understandings of human existence, personhood, and Church. As such his work witnesses to the continuing vibrancy of more traditional, non-Hegelian approaches to the Trinity.

In our final chapter we discuss a number of other contemporary issues that will impact on a future theology of the Trinity, such as the ongoing influence of the interpersonal model of the Trinity, the postmodern and interreligious contexts.

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