

# WHAT ON EARTH IS THE TRINITY?

## THE TRINITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

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### 1 Introduction

#### (a) The Need for Christian Engagement

The end of the second millennium after the birth of Jesus rings to Christians of the western world a new crisis of faith. No longer do we seem to have the assurance, at least in retrospect, which seems to us to have characterized previous generations, whether in fact they had this assurance, or not. First, the idea of secular progress has contrived to make Christianity seem at best obsolete and at worst pure self-delusion; and then the idea of progress itself has been called into question by the succeeding idea of a multiplicity of stories each with its own internal validity.

#### (b) The Crisis of the Modern World

The need is to show both that the Christian faith is true and that it is relevant to the struggles of our contemporary age. How can we as Christians engage creatively with the challenge first to the truth of our faith as a coherent and comprehensive world stance, and then to its contemporary relevance. These are challenges we need to meet on one hand if we are to offer something distinctively to the world, and on the other were not simply to remain within a self- created ghetto as the price of retaining such distinctiveness. In other words, we need both to be distinctive and capable of engaging from this distinctive Christian position the deepest concerns of our world.

#### (c) Attempts at a Christian Response

There have been many different attempts at a Christian response, but too often these attempts stumble at integrating Christian faith with a comprehensive world view. Attempts at a Christian response tend to operate on a piecemeal basis, and where an more thoroughgoing approach is attempted, there can too often be a gap between the substantive analysis and the Christian roots for that analysis. The two most comprehensive approaches at Christian response this century have been those of the Neo-Thomists such as Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson, and on the other, the Neo-Calvinists of the Amsterdam School of Abraham Kuyper and Hermann Dooyeweerd. There remains a gap between substantive analysis and the theological foundations: the Neo-Thomists are dependent on a natural theological approach, while the Neo-Calvinist philosophers remain deeply suspicious of the claims of theologians

to contribute anything of substance to the global understanding of the world beyond the sphere of creedal formulation. Neither Neo-Thomism nor Neo-Calvinism, for all their intellectual comprehensiveness, and despite hints which might be further teased out more explicitly, can fully cope with the ideas of Jurgen Moltmann such as set out in his *Theology of Hope* namely that we need to take into account the radically open nature of the future as it exists in the hands of God. As Moltmann and other theologians, such as Wolfhart Pannenberg or Robert Jenson (the theologian I personally have studied in detail) have shown, the present needs to be understood in terms of the future; or in other words, Christology needs to be complemented by Pneumatology. Each of these theologians has argued forcefully that the role of the Spirit needs to be central to our understanding of the Christian hope. It is no surprise that together they have powerfully moved our understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity from being a recondite dogma to being placed very firmly at the centre of the theological map, albeit not everywhere!

## 2. The Nature of a Trinitarian Response

### (a) The Trinity as a basis of faith, understanding and engagement

There is not place here to argue for this doctrine of the Trinity as the basis of Christian faith but I shall contend for it implicitly as such. The doctrine proceeds from the central tenet of the Judeo-Christian faith, expressed in the Jewish Shema: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one God" As G.A.F, Knight has shown<sup>1</sup>, the "one" here is *ehud*: not arithmetic but a unity in diversity. The classical Trinitarian dictum, *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* ("the external acts of the Trinity are indivisible") is completed: *servato discrimine at ordine personarum* ("the distinction and order of the persons being preserved) the indeed the force of the doctrine of the Trinity rests in the equal ultimacy of the unity of the Godhead and the diversity of the persons; and needs to do so if it is to encapsulate fully the implications of the Resurrection of Jesus as Pannenberg (as well as Moltmann and Jenson) has so powerfully demonstrated.

I wish to argue that in addition to being central to our theology, the Trinity needs also be the basis of our understanding and engagement with the world Indeed I shall argue that a Trinitarian approach requires our understanding of and engagement with the world to be intimately linked. It has been suggested variously over the years that the doctrine of the Trinity can be a solution or at least the basis of a solution to the perennial philosophical problem of the one and the many; but this tends to be a formal observation which does not take us very far. Most famously, Augustine of Hippo used Trinitarian analogies in his understanding of the human being. This was done in the context of an engagement with God and with the world, but it still leaves us somewhat with a sense of special pleading. The same might be said of many of the attempts to find what are called *vestigia trinitatis in creatura* (traces of the Trinity in the created order). The problem is to find a more secure way of understanding unity and diversity, and then to live it out, in the light of our encounter with the Triune God.

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<sup>1</sup> "A Biblical Approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity" in *Scottish Journal of Theology* Occasional Papers No 1 (London and Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd Ltd., n.d.)

(b) Modalism and Subordinationism

The problem in any formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity is to be true to the unity and the diversity of God in Trinity. The diversity of God is undermined by Modalism: the depiction of God in terms of successive appearances by an underlying somewhat or something without allowing for the distinctive operation of each of the three persons at any one time. The unity of God is undermined-by Subordinationism: the separation of the persons of Son and the Spirit from the centre of the Godhead, which then tends to be reserved exclusively for the person of the Father. As Robert Jenson has shown so acutely,<sup>2</sup> both Modalism and Subordinationism derive from misplaced attempts to safeguard the transcendence of divinity defined in terms of atemporality. Modalism does this by divorcing the inner being of God, thought of as an unknowable substance, from God's temporal manifestations; Subordinationism does this by placing usually in the second person (and by implication the third) on a putative ladder of being and linking the knowable temporal to the unknowable atemporality as which God is conceived.

(c) Approaches to Triune Diversity: Appropriation and Perichoresis.

There are two approaches to the triune diversity: in both the diagrams which we will consider, I have put God's relationship with the world in the form of a heart, since from a Trinitarian point of view, God's relationship with the world is one of love.

The first approach deriving from the Latin-speaking West. This starts from the unity of God, and then attempts to map out from this the diversity of persons, usually in terms of God's successive acts. This is known as the method of Appropriation. In other words, of identifying "appropriately" the role which belongs to each person. The difficulty with this approach is that at the centre of its understanding of God is an unknowable substance that is finally unknowable and indeed, for all we know, impersonal, certainly not capable of being engaged with in personal terms. The endemic problem of the Western theology has been that of Modalism, and indeed, it is a tendency that the approach of appropriation can naturally lead to this, since it does not give any account of the distinctive persons, except as manifestations of an underlying monad.

The approach deriving from the Greek-speaking East is that of Perichoresis, initially used in the context of Christology to describe the relation between the divine and the human natures of Christ. It has been objected that the approach of Perichoresis is a footnote or an afterthought to the theological method, but I would suggest that although into its explicit application to Trinitarian thinking is comparatively late (John of Damascus 8th Century), yet it takes us to the heart of God as persons-in-relationship, putting communion rather than an unknowable somewhat at the heart of who God is, very much the vision of Jesus' high-priestly prayer in John 17. Although more complex, I would like to suggest that this offers much richer possibilities. The Perichoretic approach begins with the notion of communion, and it is the love of the persons one for another, which flows out into the relation of love, which God has with the world. The Eastern approach does incline towards Subordinationism: it fits into

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<sup>2</sup> *The Triune Identity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1992)

its unity of God in the Father alone, but I would suggest that this need not necessarily be so if the relations are, as depicted in the diagram, fully mutual.

Using this approach of persons in relationship that I would like to introduce some conceptual scaffolding to assist us in the building up of a more satisfactory integration of our understanding of God as Trinity and what that means.

#### 4. Trinitarian Paradigms

(a) What is a Paradigm?

I should like to introduce the notion of "paradigm", especially as it has been made current by Thomas Kuhn in his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*<sup>3</sup>. Kuhn defines paradigms as a set of implicit theoretical and methodological assumptions that make the selection, evaluation, and criticism of facts possible. Kuhn sees scientific revolution in terms of the successive displacement of one paradigm by another. The change from one paradigm to another involves a "Gestalt switch" from organizing the conceptual furniture in one way to seeing their arrangement as susceptible to a very different construction. I want to suggest, that in the context of our understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, that there are different paradigms implicit in the understanding of the Trinity, although *pace* Kuhn, it is possible that two might be held in tandem. Venturing in an analogous way into a field of knowledge which is most certainly not my own, I suggest it might be analogous to the way in which a physicist might hold at once to quantum mechanics (which posits discontinuity) and Einsteinian physics (which posits a smooth and definable space time continuum) in order to do best justice to the available evidence. To take the analogy further, as physicist describes the world in terms of different forces (gravitation, electro-magnetism and strong and weak nuclear force), so it is possible, albeit not entirely satisfactory to deal with different descriptions of the world which cannot be related one to the other. I shall suggest that such an integration is equally desirable in Trinitarian understanding of the world. We need to find a way to relate the diversity of different paradigms to one another and to the whole without reducing or losing sight of their distinctive insights into the work of God in the world.

(b) What makes a Trinitarian Paradigm adequate?

In order to be adequate, a Trinitarian paradigm needs to account for the diversity of persons and the possibility of their joint action without thereby their either depicted as being reduced or subordinated one to another (as in Subordinationism) or as rendered incapable of mutual relation or joint action (as in Modalism). The account needs to give equal but distinctive weight to all three persons and account for how they can exchange attributes and are interdependent one of each other, and yet each retain their distinct identities.

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<sup>3</sup> First published 1962 but revised and published Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973.

## 5. Three Trinitarian Paradigms

Using a combination of the method of appropriation, and a more thoroughgoing Perichoretic approach, a number of different models of the trinity have been put forward. some closer to metaphorical sketches or illustrations, and some more rigorously paradigmatic I would like to suggest that the different models of the Trinity resolve themselves into three different paradigms, each with their particular strengths and weaknesses.

### (a) The Existential Paradigm

The first is that of the existential paradigm which focuses on the calling and vulnerability of the individual Christian before God (defined in terms of his or her experience). It is a paradigm which underlies the thinking of Paul Tillich, although John Macquarrie has expressed much the same approach more succinctly. It can also be traced as underlying one element in the thinking of Karl Barth, especially in his earlier work. John Macquarrie speaks of the Father as Primordial Being, "the depth of the mystery of God", the Son as Expressive Being, through whom the energy of Primordial Being is poured out, and the Spirit as Unitive Being, who builds up a unity comprehending all responsible beings. I would like to suggest that this paradigm is focused on our dialogical God the Father and is primarily Patrological. The weakness of this paradigm is that that it tends to fall into Subordinationism: it is the Father who is the source of being and the persons of the Son and the Spirit are constituted by their relationship to the Father.

### (b) The Salvation~historical Paradigm

The second is the salvation-historical paradigm which, according to the method of Appropriation, identifies the persons of the Trinity with the successive stages of salvation history identified variously as creation, redemption and consummation, or creation, reconciliation and redemption. This paradigm has probably the longest provenance of all and, as has been noted is the dominant paradigm in the West. It is predominant in the central work of Karl Barth, and there is an interesting continuity in this respect also with the theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg (although secondary in that thinker to the temporal paradigm).<sup>4</sup> This paradigm is focused primarily on the role of Christ in the plan of God, and is primarily Christological. The weakness of this paradigm is that it is Modalistic in tendency and by only indirectly allowing for the joint operation of all three persons in the divine economy at any one time, undermines the notion of true community - or *communio* - of the three persons of the Trinity.

### (c) The Temporal Paradigm

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<sup>4</sup> In a fascinating discussion towards the end of the second volume of his *Systematic Theology* (T&T Clarke, 1994), Pannenberg characterises the eschatology of Paul, accentuated in what he sees as its post Pauline expression, in what effectively are salvation-historical terms, and that of Jesus (where the sole concern was "with God and with God's future" in temporal terms (*ST* 2:445); but he merely moves on without resolving the tension between the positions he characterises as belonging to Jesus and Paul respectively. See also Pannenberg's criticism of Barth for omitting the notion of eschatological consummation, implicit in passages such as 2 Cor 5.18 ff. and Rom. 11:15. (*ST* 2:413)

The third is the temporal paradigm which stresses the priority of the future in determining the nature and character of God. This paradigm has been identified with the medieval thinker, Joachim of Fiore, but its most prominent exponents are Jurgen Moltmann and Robert Jenson. As Jenson develops this paradigm, the Father is linked to the Past, the Son to the Present and the Spirit: to the Future. Jenson sees the relations of the Trinity as fully reciprocal. It is through the Spirit that the Father is freed, and it is by the Father and the Spirit that the Son is respectively intended (from the past) and witnessed (from the future) not least in the Resurrection, by which the primacy of the Future. over the Past is supremely vindicated. This paradigm is focused primarily on the eschatological reality achieved by the Spirit, and is primarily Pneumatological. This paradigm avoids Modalism, because any point in time has a past, a present and a future at once, but only finally at the expense of dissolving the triune relations into history, or alternatively, finds with Marcellus of Ancyra an eschatological Modalism, where Father, Son and Spirit flow together into an undifferentiated end, with, as Colin Gunton puts it: "a disappearance of creation into eschatology"<sup>5</sup>

## 5. A Unified Trinitarian Paradigm

I should like to suggest a way forward, which takes seriously the call to a Trinitarian vision, and which draws on the insights of the Trinitarian paradigms at which we have been looking . By integrating them I would suggest it corrects their short comings is not an abstract procedure, but flows from the very character of the Trinity itself: it gives each of the persons equal weight, and preserves the diversity in unity. As we have seen, the existential paradigm give final weight to the Father, their salvation-historical to the Son, and the temporal to the Spirit, and yet each recognizes an important aspect of the work of God in the world. To sketch the outlines of a unified paradigm which draws on the insights of the three paradigms examined already, it is not possible to approach it in a discursive way or to show all its Scriptural underpinnings. Nevertheless, it is possible to show such a paradigm can have Perichoretic adequacy and it also consistent the wider Scriptural vision. We, are dealing here with what Professor Colin Gunton calls "open transcendentals", which he defines as

A notion, in some way basic to the human thinking process, which empowers a continuing and in principle unfinished exploration of the universal marks of being.<sup>6</sup>

It is important, as Gunton suggests, that the open transcendentals be ontologically relational, that is, defined in their being by their relation to other beings; and also that they be characteristically personal, that is, distinguished as who they are by personal attributes which they contribute to the community or communion of the whole.

### (a) The Father: Ultimate Trustworthiness

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<sup>5</sup> *The One, The Three and the Many* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), p. 160, n. 5.

<sup>6</sup> *The One, the Three and the Many*, p. 142.

From the existential paradigm, there is the inside of God as one in we can have ultimate trust, the "ground of being" as Tillich famously put it.<sup>7</sup> This is consistent with the Scriptural witness to the Father as the One who calls us, and in whom true authority rests: not my will but your will be done, as our Lord said in the Garden of Gethsemane, and indeed through his ministry he was consistent in his testimony that he came not in his own authority but in that of his Father. It is important here to see that the authority which Jesus brought was and is not an authority of domination (although there is properly a dominion which belongs to the Godhead as a whole which flows out of their communion), but rather authenticity: absolute owning before God of every aspect of our being,

(b) The Son: Relational Truthfulness

From the salvation-historical paradigm, we can draw the insight of the Son as the one, through whose relationship with the Father embodiment and the engagement of God with the world is made possible. As Irenaeus of Lyon pointed out<sup>8</sup> taken up of course powerfully by Athanasius<sup>9</sup>, it is no accident that the marred image of humanity is restored in the true image seen in the Son, or as the Epistle to the Hebrews (1;3) puts it: the "exact imprint" (NRSV) *xarakter* of God's being). To take an idea from Maximus Confessor, the Son is the *logos* from whom all *logoi* derive and in whom they are grounded.<sup>10</sup> This is consistent with the Scriptural vision of Christ in whom all things hold together (Col. 1:17) and who, in his person constituted truth - not an abstract idea, but a personal embodiment of what it is to be in relationship with others. This is the Hebrew concept of *emeth* rather than the more abstract Greek concept of *aletheia* (although the latter has the Hebrew force for example in the Johannine corpus). The possibility of incarnation is the pre-condition for the relatedness of the created order (rather than the other way round) and the fact of the incarnation its confirmation, as well as, basis wall of redemption and transformation of the created order.<sup>11</sup>

(c) The Spirit: Dynamic Transformation

From the temporal paradigm, there is the insight that it is through the Spirit that any development is possible. It is because of the Spirit that a future is not imprisoned in the past, because it is through the Spirit as the bringer of hope that the last things of

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<sup>7</sup> *Systematic Theology* (University of Chicago, 1951), 1:235-49.

<sup>8</sup> *Against all Heresies*. 3.18.1. See also *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 97.

<sup>9</sup> See for example, "On Luke 10:22 (Matt 11:27)" in *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers* (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, reprinted 1989) Second Series, Vol. IV, p. 87.

<sup>10</sup> PG 91, 1081B-C, 1217A quoted in Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* "2:25

<sup>11</sup> The enhypostatic humanity of God in the person of Jesus, affirmed and confirmed by the Resurrection, is the definitive embodiment of the personality of God, not its necessary ground, otherwise God would not be truly transcendent. The Incarnation remains the supreme affirmation of the goodness, truth and beauty of the creation. This is true quite apart from its redemptive purpose, as Duns Scotus rightly pointed out, and must be, even on a counter-factual level if the transcendence of God the Son from creation is to be secured; although there is also a sense, as Irenaeus set out in a preliminary way, that redemption is in retrospect, a summing up of creation (*felix culpa!*) in the person of Christ in the economy of salvation. This tension can only be secured if we hold to a unified paradigm, since the salvation-historical paradigm alone would tend to reduce creation to redemption (which is of course a problematical tendency in Barth, and probably Pannenberg as well, although mitigated, albeit in an unstable way, by their oscillating between the salvation-historical paradigm on the one hand and the existential and temporal paradigms respectively).

God are continually being brought into the present. This was supremely seen in the act of the Resurrection of Jesus<sup>12</sup> As the graphic description of the work of the Spirit in Romans 8 makes clear, it is through the Spirit that the creative groaning, as if in childbirth is taking place and through this the order which is to come (the Hebrew idea of *ha olam ha ba*). This dynamic is a complex one, and involves an intimate relationship of the Spirit and the Son and both with the Father. The work of the Spirit and the Son is powerfully described by Irenaeus as the two hands of God<sup>13</sup>, and Irenaeus represents a strand lost in the course of subsequent theological development, which ascribed Wisdom to the Spirit.<sup>14</sup> Here we see the work of God not as a negation of the created order, but of its affirmation through its transformation. To recognize the goodness of creation is not to stand still, but continually not just to realize its implicit potential and to recognise that through the Spirit, it might be opened up in surprising and new ways. This is not a denial of the integrity of the created order, but rather a matter of being open to the complex *perichoresis* between the continuity of truth and its continually being transformed.

(d) Perichoretic Assessment

I would like to suggest that this paradigm is fully perichoretic in form, because it allows us to conceive of the combined operation of all three persons at any one time and how the exchange attributes take place. The Son bears the authority of the Father, and is empowered through the Spirit. as we see in his life and ministry, supremely in the Resurrection. The Spirit comes with the authority of the Father, and is shaped by the personality of the Son, who is none other than Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>15</sup> The Father possesses the personality of the Son, and the Spirit opens up his universal presence.<sup>16</sup>

According to this paradigm, the characteristics of ultimacy, relationality and self-surpassing and liveliness belong primarily to the divine communion, and only secondarily, and derivatively to created order. God cannot be reduced to being an element in the created order except by blurring or ignoring triune relations. The relation of the persons is thus neither a Subordinationistic hierarchy of being nor a Modalistic succession of temporal manifestations by an unknowable underlying monadic entity. Each person is entirely dependent, both in being and operation, on the others, and the immanent relations (the relations interior to the Godhead) flow

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<sup>12</sup> Rom. 1:4; 8:2,11; Eph 1:20; Phil. 3:10; 2 Cor. 4:14; 1 Pet. 3:18. See Pannenberg, *Jesus, God and Man*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press) pp. 170, 172.

<sup>13</sup> **Against all Heresies** 4.20.1

<sup>14</sup> Here I cannot agree with both Wolfhart Pannenberg (*Systematic Theology*, Eerdmans, 1991; 1:270) and Robert Jenson (*Christian Dogmatics*, OUP, 1997: 2:176-7) that the Spirit-Wisdom tradition is an eccentric aberration. It captures, I would suggest, an important understanding of how the Spirit engages with the world, and is an important counterweight to the Subordinationistic tendencies of Logos theology.

<sup>15</sup> This is the corollary of the *enhypostasia*. This helps us to see how Spirit-flesh and , Word-flesh Christologies are all in a sense right, albeit each inadequate in themselves. Christology, except approached within a rigorous Trinitarian framework, runs into irresolvable difficulties.

<sup>16</sup> This is how I read Proverbs 8. The word *qana* (v. 22) is one of intimate, jealous possession, but the passage should not be read in a straightforwardly Christological way, but rather as complex interplay of Word and Spirit (=Wisdom) is played out. This is also true of passages such as 1 Cor. 1:18-end, where it is clear that the qualities of wisdom and power, which mark out the personality of Christ, and which points to the Father (usually referred to as "God" in the Pauline corpus) are attributes which the Son has derived from the work of the Spirit. This is not a deficit of divinity for the Son, but an evidence of Perichoresis in action.

seamlessly into the economic ones (the relations arising from God's operation in the world). Within this context, the classical distinction between the immanence and the economy of God, used by theologians to safeguard God's transcendence is no longer necessary, because God's transcendence is seen everywhere in the infinity of the co-ordinate reference point constituted by the three persons operating together.

## 6 Implications for Everyday Life

### (a) Individuality as Calling

Our identity: who we are, is very problematical for us, because we find ourselves faced with a dilemma, acutely so in the West, where rapid change and the erosion of traditional ties creates for our society and each of us individually an acute dilemma. In starkest terms, we are faced with a choice - we cut ourselves off from others in order to safeguard who we are, or we submerge ourselves in a larger group and no longer find ourselves able to delimit the boundaries of who we are as individuals. The doctrine of the Trinity, understood in terms of the unified paradigm provides a framework for resolving this dilemma. Our individuality consists in the calling of each one of us, uniquely by the Father, to be utterly ourselves before him, at any context of the nexus of relationships grounded and embodied truthfully in the Son and opened up over time by the work of the Spirit.<sup>17</sup>

### (b) True Respect for the Other

Another problem in the West is our difficulty in coping with true otherness. I understand that German has two words for object: that which is related to the subject through action or other connection, or that which is constituted by its being presented to us as material of our cognition: *gegenstand*. It is the latter, which, since the 18th Century Enlightenment, has provided the major grid for our thinking and action as Westerners. The vision of Jesus as the ground of all relating provides a profound antidote for this way of understanding the world. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (popularized by Bishop John Robinson) gave the description of Jesus as the "man for others". From another angle, the Jewish philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas, in critique of Martin Heidegger, and against the backdrop of the atrocities of the Nazi regime in Germany, spoke of the importance of civility: true respect for the other, as a transcendental basis for human relationships which resists any relativising attempt to force them into a particular ideological or sociological grid. As we find ourselves totally in our encounter and calling by the Father, and our relationships grounded in the Son are opened up by the Spirit, we are free truly to meet the other as they are, with firm ground truly to be related to one another, since those relations are mapped out first by the divine relations and are able finally to resist the reduction of other by us, or *vice-versa* to being mere instances of predetermined social categories.

### (c) The God of Surprises

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<sup>17</sup> It is the triune relations who give each particular its *haecceitas* or "thisness" as Colin Gunton puts it, drawing on the terminology of Duns Scotus. (*The One, the Three and the Many*, pp. 198-9). Professor Gunton sees this more particularly as the work of the Spirit, whereas I would tend to emphasize the joint operation of all three persons.

The success of Gerard Hughes book owed much to its title, which I think met a great hunger in our society for being able to be surprised by God. This is true especially in an era when everything seems to be pre-planned, although events on our doorstep, such as the recent events in Kosovo, are still capable of giving us nasty surprises. How does God break through in such circumstances? Are we still moving to an "End of History" where everything will be a matter of rational apportionment governed by a well-oiled democratic process? Will material well being, for as great a number as possible, be the final arbiter of value and decision-making? Here the vision of God as triune is a radical challenge to any false complacency, or alternatively to any sense of *ennui* or despair. The greatest surprise of all was the Resurrection Jesus and in a number of important texts, the fact that the Holy Spirit accomplished this and similarly holds the promise for his transformation of every area of life. And this surprising tendency which the Spirit has, is not at variance either with our individuality or with the well-grounded constancy of our relationships, or indeed the structural coherence of the world as a whole, since we have the distinctive but shared operation of all three persons acting together.

## 7. Wider Implications

### (a) The Possibility of and Integrated Worldview

The unified Trinitarian paradigm makes it possible to develop an integrated worldview without the sense of being trapped in a structure. Perichoresis means that relations need to be owned and open to change as well as defined structurally. This opens up the possibility of continual growth and spiritual deepening as intimately bound up with the heart of our faith, not something somehow exterior to its doctrinal formulation. The old claim of Theology as the Queen of the Sciences belongs to a Scholasticism which has, on the whole, rightly been rejected as providing too static and prescriptive a model of the disciplines and the over-rigid adherence to Aristotelian physics in the light of empirical discovery resulted in the notorious case of Galileo being forced to recant his discoveries in the face of ecclesiastical pressure.<sup>18</sup> What is being suggested here is very different. Far from constructing a straight-jacket, a unified Trinitarian paradigm frees us from the invidious choice of either having to lock ourselves in to a static structure or simply operating on the basis of baptized pragmatism (as we in the Anglo-Saxon world tend to do). Rather it opens the possibility of systemic analysis which is both personal and open to unforeseen possibilities, and accounts theologically for how this is both possible and desirable.

### (b) Christians in Society

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<sup>18</sup> This was, of course, far more complex a confrontation than that between Christian faith and science, as it is too often portrayed as being.

Social engagement based on a unified Trinitarian paradigm is as much a challenge to those who engage upon it as those who are affected by it. Social engagement in these terms, cannot merely be something we do to others, but rather a continual openness to our own self-discovery before the Father and to the surprising work of the Spirit as well as confidence in underlying coherence of all things - albeit tainted by sin and being capable of new possibilities. We can address social issues confidently without feeling that we need to offer all the solutions, because in Christ there is a sure foundation for our relations with others where we are and how we are.

(c) Christianity and Other Faiths

The unified Trinitarian paradigm does provide new opportunities for dialogue with other faiths. An underlying commitment to the doctrine of the Trinity in these terms is not part of the dogmatic baggage to be discarded or set aside at the door, but our very way of being in the world before, with and in God. How the divine conversation extends beyond our given faith community is not something we can fully know, or perhaps are able to know even in part. But if we truly believe that God is active in the world in the way we have been describing, there are points of contact as we explore with others what personal authenticity, relational truth and openness to the future might mean in the contexts of other faiths, and how then we approach the question of what the Christian claim to know God uniquely in the person of Jesus of Nazareth means.

## **8. Conclusion**

(a) The Continuing Challenge of the Great Commissions

It has been pointed out that in Scripture there is not one Great Commission but two<sup>19</sup>: the task to humanity to be stewards of the earth and all its inhabitants, as well as that at the end of Matthew's gospel to make disciples of all nations and to baptize. Both are Trinitarian in basis, the latter explicitly so and the latter based on calling,

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<sup>19</sup> Ranald Macaulay, "The Great Commissions" *Cambridge Papers* 7:2 (June, 1998).

relationship and empowerment. Our engagement with the world needs to take into account the Trinitarian basis on which we are commissioned: and for this reason we need constantly to return to our theological roots, that is, our faith in the Triune God, in order to find in them the basis and direction for our continued obedience to what God is calling us to do in our present situation

(b) A Christian Model for Living

Christianity can too easily be reduced to a set of rules, and how we construct them tends to follow from which part of the Church we may happen to find ourselves in or be influenced by. As we return to the Trinity, we find there not so much a set of rules, but rather a model of God's being which we are drawn into and share his love. The relations of the divine persons are primarily characterized by love, and as the Church, the bride of Christ, is drawn into that reality, it is transformed into a society of the future. Christians are part of this reality which breaks through all our defences and obstinacies, and this reality is Triune in character. We as God's society in becoming need to model this authenticity, relational truthfulness and openness to transformation as we seek, in response to the Great Commissions to be faithful in our task of stewardship and the discipling of the nations.

(c) Hope for the New Millennium

To end where I began: as we look forward to the New Millennium, we can be confident, in the right sense that far from being purveyors of an outdated or irrelevant creed, we are part of a divine communion in which alone is the hope for our world, and the healing of the wounds of our time. As we work out our faith in the Triune God we can find in that divine communion not only a coherent, well founded and yet ever open understanding of the world, but also one never more relevant to the most acute problems of our age.