

THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY TRINITY AS WITNESSED BY BROTHER GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS AND BROTHER AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR A RELEVANT APPRECIATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY TRINITY IN THE CHURCH TODAY

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ABSTRACT

In today's theological circles there is a silent maxim that 'there is no theology without the foundational doctrine of the Holy Trinity'. In that light, this paper is an attempt to bring to the fore, some of the contemporary contributions or claims regarding the Holy Trinity. It shows the lopsided emphasis placed on the economic Trinity in its relation with the immanent Trinity. It examines the claims of contemporary Trinitarian doctrine in the light of the classical formulation which was arguably in its final form based upon the formulations of Gregory of Nazianzus and Augustine of Hippo. The classical view is that the immanent Trinity though distinct is intertwined with economic Trinity. Their importance resides in the Christian life and in edifying the body of Christ. The demur of contemporary theology regarding the classical emphasis on the immanent as the contemplation of economic Trinity is found in this paper to be exaggerated and unbiblical. Therefore, by this paper the classical or traditional doctrine of the Holy Trinity is upheld.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is inspired by the contemporary emphasis on the Holy Trinity as the indispensable locus for doing theology or for formulating any Christian doctrine. Many contemporary scholars seem to have embraced the view whole heartedly. It would be interesting to observe that following the upsurge in the interest in the doctrine of the Trinity there may be the tendency also to reformulate the doctrine by this generation on the basis of "fine tuning" to meet the needs of the world today. And it is upon that basis that contemporary theology stressed so much on the economic Trinity at the expense of the immanent Trinity.

Stanley J. Grenz has shown that, the suppression of the immanent Trinity by contemporary theologians has received a response from theologians like Elizabeth Johnson, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Thomas Torrance by bringing the immanent Trinity back while maintaining the relationality which was emphasized by contemporary theologians.² And it goes to stress the point that, there is need to re-examine constantly theological positions in order to shape its development in the course of history. Therefore, in this study we intend to take a look at a few contemporary Trinitarian doctrines such as those which have been formulated by Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg and Robert Jenson and Catherine Mowry Laguna.

It follows the criticism that in their attempt to reformulate the classical doctrine of the Trinity, by a new emphasis on relationality, some of these theologians may have justified their claims by a rather critical appraisal of Gregory of Nazianzus³ and or Augustine of Hippo.⁴ The tendency is that to the lay person, it may represent an erroneous impression that these Fathers did not express the Trinity in terms of

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² S. J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 163-215.

³ See among others Gregory's Five Theological Orations on the Trinity; *Orations 27- 32*.

⁴ See Augustine's work on the Trinity (*De Trinitate*).

relationality. Hence, there is no disputation that, many carry the false impression that, Trinitarian theology has ever abandoned relationality as a concept as evident in the classical formulations of the two fathers; of Thomas Aquinas of the Roman Catholic Church⁵ and John Calvin of the Protestant Churches⁶. Nonetheless, however that all these classical theologians have actually demonstrated in their works, the relationality of God, it is not the main focus here. The concern for this paper is to focus on the challenges posed by contemporary reformulation of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity that seeks to give the impression that the classical doctrine has dubious starting point and an unbiblical basis of the doctrine. Furthermore, the paper focuses on criticism that suggests that relationality of the Triune God is not to be conceived without the temporality of the Trinity- a position which confuses the temporality within the Trinity and the role of essential divine reality.⁷ In other words, contemporary theological emphasis on the economic Trinity leads to the obviation of the immanent Trinity. And it is because the emphasis on the economic Trinity does not even lead to immanent Trinity as they purport but rather the consummation of the economic Trinity at the end of history.

Perhaps such approaches were to demonstrate a 'progressive' way of making theology comprehensible and relevant through its ability to relate to scientific knowledge and the interpretation of history. Nevertheless, the work of Thomas Torrance has demonstrated in his award winning contribution to the science and theology relations that the relations can go on progressively in the classical combination of both immanent and economic Trinity. It is said that he is consistent in following Calvin and Barth.

Only Temporality or Temporality and Eternity?

The effort to bring back the immanent Trinity by three theologians aforementioned without tampering with the issue of relationality is a great inspiration for this paper. It clearly demonstrates that progress in theology can be achieved without 'temporalizing' it into scientific knowledge. Moreover, bringing back the immanent Trinity legitimately using three different approaches suggests that the initial removal is to be held with suspicion. It may be that the initial removal of the immanent Trinity may be due to speculation and uncritical application of the biblical hermeneutics on the side of contemporary theologians. This new effort to bring back the immanent Trinity reinforces the original position of classical theology. Therefore, the task of this paper is to first of all, present the views of major contemporary theologians; who place a lopsided emphasis on the economic Trinity. Secondly, it would compare the Trinitarian doctrine of Gregory of Nazianzus and Augustine of Hippo; as the pre-eminent doctors of the church for the Eastern and the Western churches respectively. The study will attempt to derive the import of their doctrines; while looking at the similarities and differences. Thirdly, the three major issues raised by contemporary reformulation shall be evaluated in the light of these two great fathers of the church. At the end of the analysis, an attempt shall be made to clarify the doctrine in a formulation as conclusion.

Renewal of the Classical Position: The Way Forward

The thesis of this paper is that the classical understanding of the Trinity both in the East and the West are not quite different although they deal with the same issues in different ways. It is to demonstrate that the starting point of these classical positions is not dubious and unbiblical as insinuated by contemporary theology. Furthermore, it seeks to show that although indiscriminate use of philosophy can becloud the understanding of theology; the two Fathers revered the subject of the Trinity more than in contemporary theology as they warn against that which they have been accused of. And it is their careful

⁵ See T Aquinas doctrine on the Trinity in the *Summa Theologica*, I, 27-43.

⁶ See J Calvin's work in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk. 1:13

⁷ See J Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); and W Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) quoted in J Kim, *Cosmic Hope in a Scientific Age: Christian Eschatology in Dialogue with Scientific Cosmology* (Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley: PhD Dissertation, 2011), 173-175.

explication of the faith which legitimizes their use of the immanent Trinity together with the economic Trinity. It is also the strong position of this paper that essential reality and existential reality cannot be separated in the animated experience of the Christian life; which means that immanent Trinity and economic Trinity are legitimate means of appreciating the doctrine of the Trinity. This thought pattern which is entrenched in the African mind was that which shaped the doctrine in its classical form.

The Theological Method

Although this work is more of an analysis than formulation; its main action is apologetic in nature. Moreover, the approach adopted here stems from the claims of contemporary theology as a challenge to classical or traditional theology. Therefore, the essence of the analysis is according to the correlation of question and answer method. This form may not be directly related to the method of correlation of Tillich; it is also not related to the method employed in the Middle Ages; rather it seeks to employ the analytical method typical of the Apostolic Fathers, the Apologists and the Church Fathers. The method employed in this paper shall however, desist from the polemic slant of these early theologians. In the following discussion we shall only point out the position of contemporary theologians which seek to demur the positions of classical theology of the Trinity.

THE QUEST OF CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY OF THE HOLY TRINITY

Typical of the contemporary theologians regarding the impression that classical theology does not start with the economic Trinity among others expressed above are Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Robert Jenson and Mowry Catherine LaGuna. The following discussion focuses on these four theologians.

Jürgen Moltmann

Clearly the starting point of Jürgen Moltmann in his theology is the experience of the Christian which is based upon the economic Trinity activity in the world.⁸ This activity of the economic Trinity which drives history is revealed in Jesus Christ at the cross.⁹ The suffering of the Son on the cross in forsakenness was the suffering of the Father also.¹⁰ This idea of economic Trinity is based upon passionate love which demonstrates the intimate relationship existing between the Trinity in economy.¹¹ In short, this represents his biblical essence of the Trinity and also the starting point of Christian experience. Therefore, there can be no Trinitarian doctrine that may be adequate insofar as its starting point is not biblical and not based upon Christian experience. Question is, is this passionate relationality of love biblical or adequate? Now, Moltmann critiqued Christian theology as follows:

Christian theology acquired Greek philosophy's ways of thinking in the Hellenistic world; and since that time most theologians have simultaneously maintained the passion of Christ, God's Son, and the deity's essential incapacity for suffering – even though it was the price of having to talk paradoxically about 'the sufferings of the God who cannot suffer'. But in doing this they have simply added together Greek philosophy's 'apathy' axiom and the central statements of the gospel. The contradiction remains – and remains unsatisfactory.¹²

⁸ J Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 2-5.

⁹ J Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. J. W., Leith (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 227; quoted in Grenz, *The Triune God*, 76; also J., Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Jesus Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* trans. R.A., Wilson and J., Bowden. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 240-241; 246; in C-H., Baik, *The Holy Trinity – God for God and God for Us: Seven Positions on the Immanent-Economic Trinity Relation in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 80-81.

¹⁰ Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 21-96; 108-114.

¹¹ Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 156-161.

¹² Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 22.

In his view regarding the immanent and economic Trinity, it is clear even from the above, that nothing much could be said about the immanent Trinity¹³ inasmuch as his starting point and medium of explicating the subject is solely through the economic Trinity. Granted that this may be an individual's view, nonetheless, he states clearly that immanent Trinity is expressed liturgically in doxological fashion whereas it has no function in theological formulations.¹⁴ This emphasis on the economic Trinity by Moltmann enables him to incorporate temporality and materiality in his theology.¹⁵ It is a move which consolidates the role of utility or the role of free and independent humanity in the activity of the economic Trinity in the universe. Furthermore, the immanent Trinity in his view shall be actualized in as reality only at the eschaton.¹⁶ Next, for discussion is Pannenberg who seem to possess similar position as Moltmann.

Wolfhart Pannenberg

Pannenberg presents a Trinitarian explication quite similar to Moltmann in that they all believe that the immanent Trinity shall be realized in the eschaton fully. But he differs from Moltmann by focussing on the resurrection as the point of Christian experience of the Trinity of economy which drives history.¹⁷ The relationality of Father and Son is also founded in the distinction he shows between them.¹⁸ Another point worth considering is his position that the immanent Trinity is intimately linked to the economic Trinity.¹⁹ He explains that the economic Trinity gives rise to the immanent Trinity which idea is not far from the position of classical theology.²⁰ Yet Pannenberg criticised the Eastern Church including Gregory of Nazianzus for being infested with the doctrine of emanation and hence Neoplatonic to say the least of their "subordinationist tendency of the Logos doctrine".²¹ He also criticised Augustine although he leaned toward Augustine's conception of relationality.²²

The issue at stake is that the position of Pannenberg reveals his reluctance to actually work with the immanent Trinity because there is a suspicion that it leads to unwarranted speculation. Therefore, to stay safe and free from the Greek metaphysics, it was preferable to stick to the economic Trinity as revealed in the Christ event starting from the resurrection and waiting for the immanent Trinity realization in the eschaton. This idea also seeks to promote human understanding of God in temporality and in materiality – a position which shows a 'progressive' approach to theology merely because it can relate to science.²³

Robert Jenson

It may be realized also that in the analytical work of Jenson regarding the immanent and economic Trinity, he is of the same view that it is the eschaton that the immanent Trinity shall be realized. For him the knowledge of the Trinity rests in the activity of God in temporality which ultimately refers to the economic Trinity. He asserted that the "narrative" is by nature temporal which "exercises a considerable

¹³ S M Powell, *Trinity in German Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 201-202; Grenz, *The Triune God*, 86.

¹⁴ Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 152-154; 161-162.

¹⁵ Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 213; 214-218.

¹⁶ Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 161; see also Baik, *The Holy Trinity*, 78-84; 144-148.

¹⁷ W Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man* trans. L L Wilkins and D A Priebe (Great Britain: SCM Press Ltd., 1968), 307.

¹⁸ Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, 158-160.

¹⁹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Problems of a Trinitarian Doctrine of God." *Dialog* 26 (1987), 250-57.

²⁰ Baik, *The Holy Trinity*, 84-90.

²¹ Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, 180.

²² Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, 181.

²³ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology II*; quoted in Kim, *Cosmic Hope in a Scientific Age*, 174; See also T Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 139-142.

impact on his understanding of deity and eternity.”²⁴ Baik notes that Jenson like the others aforementioned, demurred the Hellenistic interpretation of deity which seemed to ‘drown’ the kernel of “deity or eternity as timelessness.”²⁵ And in particular among those he found as culprits were, the Cappadocian Fathers which Gregory of Nazianzus was prominent.²⁶ In addition he pitted the Cappadocian Fathers with Augustine to show that there were differences in relations of the persons of the Trinity.²⁷

Consequently, the interest of Jenson also rested on the fact that the subject of the *Logos asarkos* in classical theology was a hindrance to a thorough appreciation of the knowledge of Jesus as fully God and fully man in space and time.²⁸ There is no doubt that his emphasis is on following the biblical narrative of the both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Nonetheless, he has an affinity for materiality and temporality.

Catherine Mowry LaCugna

LaCugna is renowned as those few people who enliven the Trinitarian discourse. She is also classified among contemporary theologians.²⁹ And an assessment of her work also places in the category of those discussed above who will have nothing much to do with the immanent Trinity while accentuating the economic Trinity.³⁰ She is also of the view that classical theology has uploaded too much of Greek metaphysics into the conception of the Trinity as revealed in history.³¹ It was a concern that the immanent had no use unless it is subsumed into the economic Trinity which event should be realized in the consummation at the eschaton.³²

Similar to other contemporary theologians with respect to this discussion, LaCugna is strongly with the position that the biblical and starting point for the Trinitarian discourse starts with the Christian experience of the divine life. Rightly so, she moves in that direction to underscore the importance of relationality of the Trinity *ad intra* and *ad extra* as inseparable. Her worry was that Trinity *ad intra* (immanent) and Trinity *ad extra* (economic) were never separated until the issue of subordination came up.³³ Nonetheless, she is of the opinion that the fear of the neo-Arians should not lead to the separation. In spite of the fact that she suggested essence-energies; theologia-oikonomia scheme following the steps of the Cappadocian fathers she leaned on the side of economic Trinity.³⁴ According to Peters she leaned

²⁴ R Jenson, “Futurist Option in Speaking of God” *Lutheran Quarterly* 21 (1969), 17-25; quoted in Baik, *The Holy Trinity*, 92-93.

²⁵ R Jenson, *Triune Identity: God according to the Gospel* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 140; Baik, *The Holy Trinity*, 93.

²⁶ Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 57, 165; quoted in T., Peters, *God as Trinity*, 128-129;131

²⁷ Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 140; Peters, *God as Trinity*, 133.

²⁸ Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 140; Baik, *The Holy Trinity*, 93; R W Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, volume 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997-1999); T Peters, “Trinity Talk II,” *Dialog* 26/2 (Spring 1987): 135; P., Cary, review of R W Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, volume 1: The Triune God, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52/2 (1999)135; quoted in S J Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 110-113.

²⁹ Grenz, *The Triune God*, 5.

³⁰ M C LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 229-230.; See B Leslie, “Does God Have a Life? Barth and LaGuna on the Immanent Trinity,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 24/4 (Winter 1997):385 n. 32; in Grenz, *The Triune God*, 159.

³¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 229-230.

³² P D Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology*. (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 4 in Baik, *The Holy Trinity*, 169-170.

³³ See LaCugna, *God for Us*, 229; 224-230; Peters, *God as Trinity*,123-124.

³⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 229; 224-230.

towards the direction of Moltmann and Boff ‘politically,’ against the idea of monarchy.³⁵ That implies that her position is inclined towards temporality.

The key issues raised in the above discussion are that, firstly, with the exception of LaCugna, the classical treatment of the subject of Trinity was not biblical inasmuch as it does not start from the Christian experience. Secondly, the classical position is demurred on the basis that their focus was overly placed on the immanent Trinity at the expense of the economic Trinity. Thirdly, there is also the notion that the East and West did not agree regarding the nature of the relations of the persons of the Trinity. Finally, the classical position is criticised for not making room for temporality, passionate love and materiality. It should be noted that the above criticisms are based upon the assumption that classical formulation was arbitrarily uploaded with Greek metaphysics.

Now having stated the positions of four contemporary theologians in the synopsis above, it is now appropriate to look at how a response may be given in the light of the work of Gregory of Nazianzus and Augustine of Hippo.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY TRINITY AS WITNESSED BY BROTHER GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS AND BROTHER AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

The Witness of Brother Gregory of Nazianzus

Christopher Beeley has demonstrated quite convincingly that Gregory of Nazianzus is a great theologian who was not involved in speculative theology but rather one who was immersed in church life. It is shown that most of his treatises on the Holy Trinity were homilies which strongly suggests that for him, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity was not merely academic but rather fundamental to the life of the Christian. These homilies were delivered on special occasions such as the Easter festivities of the church. There is no doubt that he is known as “The Theologian” among the Fathers which position is acknowledged by both East and Western churches. Again his importance is affirmed by the fact that relics of his were kept in the Vatican until the end of the twentieth century when it was handed over to the Eastern Church where it rightfully belonged. For Gregory Christian piety [Christian life] is “the worship of Father and Son and Holy Spirit, the one Divinity and power in the three” (22.12).³⁶

Again while sticking to the position above, which is the economic Trinity, Gregory shows that out of the experience there is a contemplation of the economy of salvation which leads to the immanent Trinity that he calls *Theologia* or “theology”. Beeley states that:

Through faith one comes to recognize that Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, who have been met in the economy of salvation, share fully in the divinity of God the Father. The act of confessing the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation Gregory typically calls “theology”...Gregory’s doctrine of the Trinity is not fundamentally about the metaphysics of consubstantiality.³⁷

Again, Beeley emphasizes the following which may be a response against the criticism of Gregory that:

Gregory commonly uses the ancient Christian term [*oikonomia*] and its cognates to speak of God’s relations with the created order. As formulated by Irenaeus and especially the Alexandrian tradition, “economy” refers in Gregory’s work to God’s purposeful governance, administration, and arrangement of the affairs of the created order, both in

³⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 229; 224-230; See also Peters, *God as Trinity*, 127.

³⁶ C Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 188; Regarding the starting point of the Cappadocian fathers refer to LaCugna, *God for Us*, 225; LaCugna states that “in the spirit of the Cappadocians, and also to speak in a way more consistent with the Bible, liturgy, and creeds, we ourselves should abandon the mystery of God’s activity in creation, in human personality and human history, since it is there in the economy and nowhere else that the ‘essence’ of God is revealed.”

³⁷ Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity*, 194.

general and in particular from creation to the final consummation, as it is definitively represented in the biblical revelation. While this broad, providential sense of divine governance is much more common in Gregory's work, in a few passages [*oikonomia*] refers specifically to the incarnation, which is God's primary act of governing the affairs of creation, by restoring the process of growth toward *theosis*.³⁸

Therefore, there may be an agreement here with LaGuna regarding her acknowledgement of the Cappadocian fathers as those who did not separate immanent Trinity from the economic Trinity. For Gregory, theology which is the immanent Trinity is based upon the economic Trinity which also emphasizes the strong link between the two as affirmed by Pannenberg. At this point it is proper to note the point that Gregory did not concern himself with transcendental life of God but "always based upon the divine economy".³⁹ Therefore while dwelling on the divine revelation in the economy of the Trinity, immanent Trinity was seen as theological formulation as in – *faith seeking understanding*. Again it enhances the understanding that no matter how the divine economy is contemplated in immanent Trinity they are distinct yet mutually beneficial. Therefore, the one cannot be contemplated without the other; the two ought to be held in tandem which contemporary theology fails because it places too much focus on the economic Trinity.

LaGuna makes quite a factual submission when she criticizes the classical doctrine for fear of subordination or neo-Arianism. Indeed, much of the work of Gregory which dealt with the issue of temporality, timelessness, passion of God and change in God or materiality of God was in a direct opposition against the Arians. And it could be held as legitimate inasmuch as contemporary theologians while criticizing the position do not offer any solution to the problem posed by Arianism. The matter is that if temporality and materiality is in God's essence, then God is created. If God is created, then there should be a God who created God which situation leads to absurdity. The result is that it deconstructs all the efforts of the Early Church Fathers, the Apologists, and the Church Fathers completely. Gregory buttresses the above point when he dealt with the nature of the divine relations thus: "But how can this generation of the Son be without passion? Because it is incorporeal. For if corporeal generation involves passion, incorporeal generation excludes it. And I in turn will ask you: How can the Son be God if He is created? For that which is created is not God."⁴⁰ Admittedly this position does not also simplify the issue of *Logos asarkos* it rather gets entrenched.

Gregory deals with the problem of time particularly regarding the begottenness of the Son and the production of the Holy Spirit. He asks rhetorically thus,

"When was the Son begotten?" And again I will answer you: When the Father was unbegotten. - "And when did the Holy Spirit proceed?" When the Son was, not proceeding, but begotten beyond the sphere of time and in a manner which cannot be expressed - although we cannot avoid the imagery of time when we wish to express what is above time. For such expressions as when and before and after and from the beginning are not timeless, however much we twist their meaning. It will be necessary for us to adopt the standard of Eternity, that interval which extends through all things above and beyond time, and which is not divided or measured by any movement, nor by the revolution of the sun, as time is measured.⁴¹

Over here it is clear that the definition for eternity for Gregory was defined as that which is not defined because it is not "timelessness" but "above and beyond time". This view which is not Greek metaphysics, rules out the options of temporality as well as the element of timelessness altogether. And it

³⁸ Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity*, 195.

³⁹ Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity*, 200.

⁴⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, "The Third Theological Orations: On the Son, 1" *Oration 28*; quoted in *Five Theological Orations* trans. S., Reynolds (Estate of Stephen Reynolds, 2011). 48.

⁴¹ Gregory, *Orations 28*.

is because eternity is “not divided or measured by any movement”.⁴² And it is the contemplation on the economic Trinity that can only give rise to such an immanent Trinity. And if such an immanent Trinity informs the economic Trinity regarding the interpretation of its experience and nature, economic Trinity alone cannot suffice in providing adequate understanding regarding the Trinitarian God.

The Witness of Brother Augustine of Hippo

It cannot be disputed whatsoever, that inasmuch as the knowledge of God needed to be accommodated in human conceptualizations; the starting point of Augustine was purely from biblical revelation. Augustine started the whole of his Trinitarian doctrine by taking precautions regarding the wanton use of metaphysics as he decried its arbitrary application in understanding the doctrine of the Trinity.⁴³

Augustine’s work also displays a strong interconnection between immanent Trinity and economic Trinity. For example his strong association or correlation of the divine internal relations demonstrates the mission of the one Trinity in one mission which is found in the theophanies of the Old Testaments and in the “permanent visible manifestation of the Son in the flesh, and the transient visible manifestation of the Spirit in the forms of a dove, a gust of wind, and tongues of fire.”⁴⁴ The immanent Trinity is in this sense intimately linked to the economic Trinity insofar as economic Trinity is the substrate upon which immanent Trinity grows into fruition. In this way without the substrate economic Trinity there can be no growth of immanent Trinity; and without the growth and fruition of immanent Trinity there can be no essence (meaning/destiny) of economic Trinity.

It is in the light of the above regarding Augustine that he considered the economic Trinity as one and immanent Trinity as revealing of the three persons.⁴⁵ Hence economic Trinity is a concrete experience because it is a meaningful experience (full of essence) arising out of the “Holy contemplation” of divine history or divine action in history revealed by the Son. And it is when the Holy contemplation is made in the devotional context i.e. worship of the Trinity that its concreteness is powerfully expressed.⁴⁶ Hence the Augustinian devotion in the contemplation is in the context of the Christian life.

Again it is in this context that Augustine finds out from scripture that the meaning/essence/destiny of the economic Trinity which essence is the immanent Trinity unfolds history or is unfolded in history. Augustine achieves this by showing from scripture that the essential divine processions are intricately connected to the mission of the Trinity.⁴⁷ The meaning of the Christian life is not obtained merely from existence but also from essential reality; neither is it based upon temporality alone but also in eternity. Thus the preponderance of the economic Trinity expunges such elements which bring vitality to the Christian life. This form of spirituality for me is what might have been wrongly labelled as the arbitrary uploading of Greek metaphysics. Therefore, Augustine may have employed timelessness not because he was steeped in Greek metaphysics without recourse to the Christian life that is authenticated by scripture; rather for the lack of appropriate language needed to accommodate the mystery of divine essence.

Unfortunately, some are critics of his use of the language of timelessness⁴⁸ are still grappling with a language that can characterize the divine essence in time and eternity. Contemporary theology holds that by decreasing the element of essence, and increased focus on the temporality an understanding of the divine

⁴² Gregory, *Orations* 28.

⁴³ Augustine, *The Trinity (De Trinitate)* ed. J. E., Rotelle, O.S.A. intro., Trans., and notes Edmund Hill, O.P. (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2002), see 65-68 in particular; then see 69ff.

⁴⁴ Augustine, *The Trinity*, 101.

⁴⁵ Peters, *God as Trinity*, 21; see *opera trinitatis ad intra sunt divisa, opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*.

⁴⁶ Augustine, *The Trinity*, 101; Augustine’s contemplation of the Trinity for each book is preceded by a devotion to the Triune God and absolute dependence on the Trinity in prayer.

⁴⁷ Augustine, *The Trinity*, Bk. II-IV; 97-177.

⁴⁸ Augustine, *The Trinity*, Bk. II/2:9; 103.

life may be understood. Nevertheless, the distinction should be shown that; classical theology is based upon a faith that is a spiritual if not a mystical understanding and fulfilling essence of the Christian life that hopes for the consummation of the same.

Biblically speaking and in the context of the Christian life, Augustine employs a number of analogies to explain the divine relations *ad intra* from *ad extra* to edify the Christian life which is *ad extra*. Prominent of these analogies is love; where there is a triad of love, lover and the loved. There is no way this love of Augustine could be construed as passion inasmuch as there is no sentimentality in the divine love but the unconditional love that is biblically known as *agape*.

BROTHER GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS (EASTERN CHURCH) AND BROTHER AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (WESTERN CHURCH) AGREE

A look at the works of Gregory and Augustine shows that the East and West dichotomy is superficial regarding the doctrine of the Trinity. The point is buttressed by the wonderful combination of Augustinian and Gregorian doctrines without seams in John Calvin's theological formulation of the doctrine.⁴⁹ The key issue raised as a means of sundering Gregory and Augustine who represent the Churches in the East and West is subordination of the Son and the Holy Spirit to the Father. This caveat is raised because subordination challenges the coequality and consubstantiality of the Trinity; essential for divine unity.

Far from it the import of Gregory's teaching is missed by most of his critics. This is because he carefully and emphatically explains himself when he declares that the Father has no beginning but the Son and the Holy Spirit has beginning. He states:

How then can the one who is begotten and the one who proceeds not be "without beginning." If they are eternal? It is because they are *from* the Father, but not *after* the Father...For whatever is without beginning is eternal, though whatever is eternal is not necessarily without beginning, so long as it may be referred to the Father as its origin. So the begotten one and the one who proceeds are not without beginning with respect to causation. But it is evident that the cause does not necessarily come before its effects, for the sun is not prior to its light."⁵⁰

What should be noted is that Gregory is dealing with beginning in eternity which is that the Son and the Holy Spirit were begotten and produced from the Father. And since they are from the Father they possess the very essence of God. Moreover, it is that essence that grants co-equality and co-eternality within the divine persons of the Trinity.

Augustine also clearly states the same position in a refutation when teaching that the procession of the Son and the Holy Spirit which is their being sent (mission) by the Father meant their subordination as:

Refuted here, they turn to another axiom: "The one who sends is greater than the one sent."

On this question the first thing I want to ask is where the Son was sent from and where to, I went forth from the Father, he says, and came into this world (John 16:28). So that is what being sent is, going forth from the Father and coming into this world. Then what about something else the same evangelist said of him: He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world did not know him (John 1:10)? Then he adds, He came into his own (John 1:11). Where he came to, of course, is where he was sent. But if he was sent into this world because he went forth from the Father and came into this world, and if he was already in this world, then where he was sent to is where he already was.⁵¹

⁴⁹ J Calvin, *Institutes*, Bk. 1:13

⁵⁰ Gregory, *Orations* 28.

⁵¹ Augustine, *The Trinity*, Bk. II/2:7;101.

Earlier on Augustine states that, “This then is the rule which governs many scriptural texts, intended to show not that one person is less than the other, but on that one is *from* the other.”⁵² In his third oration on the Son, Gregory first of all states the three most ancient opinions concerning God as Anarchy, Polyarchy, and Monarchy. He then dismisses the first two as those to be associated with Greek metaphysics.⁵³ He asserts his position clearly that “It is Monarchy that we hold in honour – but not a Monarchy that is contained in one single person...”⁵⁴ The Eastern church like the West is not subordinationist in as much as the Monarchy is thought of as a tri-unity. In agreement, Augustine declares that:

The purpose of all the Catholic commentators I have been able to read on the divine books of both testaments, who have written before me on the trinity which God is, has been to teach that according to the scriptures Father and Son and Holy Spirit in the inseparable equality of one substance present a divine unity; and therefore there are not three gods but one God; although indeed the Father has begotten the Son, and therefore he who is the Father is not the Son; and the Son is begotten by the Father, and therefore he who is the Son is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but only the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, himself coequal to the Father and the Son, and belonging to the threefold unity.⁵⁵

Taking stock, there is no doubt that these two theologians of the East and West respectively form the foundation of all the classics. They agree in terms of their devotional approach to dealing with the topic of the Holy Trinity. Thus they both proceed from the Christian life in experience which is linked to the economic Trinity and authenticated in scripture. Therefore, the wanton application of human knowledge including Greek metaphysics is eschewed. Their search for understanding regarding the faith which is fundamentally established by the work of the Trinity leads them to defend the faith both in warding off heretics but most importantly for devotional edification. Therefore, the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity are held together not in the Greek metaphysical idealistic sense. However, wherever they lacked the language to express their thoughts and it was available in the Hellenistic culture they borrowed with the greatest caution. For me it was their sense of providing theological formulations which concretize the Christian faith among the faithful.

This ensured that they also stayed within biblical grounds of the unconditional essence of God that is expressed in unconditional love (1John 4:18; Ephesians 2: 4-10). It is that which is also truth and is the fountain of all divine and creaturely relations. It is the type of love which animates the Christian to love the neighbour who is a fiend because it is *unconditional or not sentimental*. It is that love which loves in death because it is unconditional. This *love* (Holy Spirit) flows from the *lover* (Father) through the *loved* (Son) to all creatures (revelation of the *oikonomia*) which is what the world should emulate. This is the Trinitarian love which edifies the church and transforms our world. It is not the love that is not received as grace, in faith and thus not received in hope because it is conditional - the love of this world.

AN APPRAISAL OF CONTEMPORARY TRINITARIAN THEOLOGICAL POSITION AND CONCLUSION

In order to end this discussion, it is important to state that the claims of contemporary theology against classical theology may be seen to be hyperbolic. The demur against classical doctrine as starting from Greek metaphysics is unproven. And similar to the above, their criticism of the classical formulation as dubious is unfair because perhaps unlike some contemporary theologians the starting point of these

⁵² Augustine, *The Trinity*, Bk. II/1:3; 99.

⁵³ Gregory, *Orations* 28.

⁵⁴ Gregory, *Orations* 28.

⁵⁵ Augustine, *The Trinity*, Bk. I/2:7; 69.

classical theologians we have discussed are on point. They begin with the Christian experience stay in it and contemplate the divine economy of the Trinity in the immanent Trinity. These Fathers of the church were careful to ensure contemplation is immersed in the life of the church and scripture.

Furthermore, Gregory and Augustine are agreed regarding the understanding given of the Trinity in essence and notwithstanding the *filioque*. Moreover, the consolidation of the agreement in Protestantism through Calvin's affinity to Gregory of Nazianzus and to Augustine of Hippo is evidenced in the seamless Trinitarian formulation of Calvin.

Unfortunately, the key issue of the divine relations which is advanced by contemporary theologians are unbiblical and speculative. They plunge into temporality and passion assuming that naturally guarantees relationality but inasmuch as that passion is based upon passionate love; it is sentimental, conditional and not the love that indwells the divine Trinity *ad intra* and *ad extra*. This is the weakness of contemporary theology that it is not very much immersed in the church although it claims to be devotional.

Its tragedy is that although its starting point is from Christian experience and endeavours to struggle against the human predicament;⁵⁶ it fails to acknowledge the genuine spirituality of many Christians all over the world and in particular, Africa.⁵⁷ For me contemporary theology seeks to understand God biblically, it was influenced much by its emphasis on temporality to its detriment. Therefore, it was caught unawares by the temporal sense of love which is not the love of God. On that note, we maintain the classical position on the basis that the demur by contemporary theology is unfair; it is also on the basis that there is renewed interest in bringing back the immanent Trinity in tandem with economic Trinity as it was with classical theology.

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⁵⁶ Grenz, *The Triune God*, 75.

⁵⁷ See J Moltmann, "An Autobiographical Note," in A. J. Conyers, *God, Hope, and History: Jürgen Moltmann and the Christian Concept of History* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1988), 204. Moltmann states that "I am not so much concerned with correct but more with concrete doctrine; and thus not concerned with pure theory but with practical theory." Quoted in Grenz, *The Triune God*, 74.; Note that in early Christianity the essential reality animated the existential; hence the theologia of the apostles in interpreting the Christ event in the New Testament. Such form of spirituality that existential realities are contemplated in the essential realities form the basis of African Christian spirituality in the past and in the present.

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