

The Social Trinity and the Southwest: Toward a Local Theology in the Borderlands

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Many have investigated Western society's growing mistrust of expert systems and institutions, including the theological.¹ While too large a project for these few paragraphs, one theological response is to re-embed theological reflection into context.² While classical theology has two *loci theologici* (scripture and tradition), contextual theology includes a third—"present human experience."³ Sedmak describes this theology as "waking up," "being attentive," and being "mindful."⁴

Historically, Christianity has "presented a unique way of universalizing people without destroying their localized identity . . . [while] breaking down the psycho-sociological barriers that kept nationalities separate and apart from each other...[affirming] rootedness while destroying ghettoishness."⁵ As Sedmak reminds, "whenever we do theology, we do theology 'from somewhere.'"⁶ Theology happens most appropriately in the local congregation because "much of what congregants do—bring an offering, visiting a homebound friend—embraces

¹See, e.g.: Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); George Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge, 2004); Zygmunt Bauman, *The Individualized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2001). Regarding theological systems, see: Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 317-28; Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); Barry A. Harvey, *Another City: An Ecclesiological Primer for a Post-Christian World* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1999), 95-134; and Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

²Miroslav Volf challenges academic theologians to do theology "to serve a way of life." Miroslav Volf, "Theology for a Way of Life," in *Practicing Theology*, eds. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 245-63.

³Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 3-4. Contextualized theology complements scripture and tradition, understanding that both interpret and are interpreted within a context. *Ibid.*, 9-15.

⁴Clemens Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology: A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 1-3. As "contextualized" theology: Robert J. Shreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 1-6; Justo L. González, *Santa Biblia: The Bible through Hispanic Eyes* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 11-21. See similar themes in: Anderson, *Shape of Practical Theology*; Ray S. Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry: Forming Leaders for God's People* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997); Henry T. Blackaby, *What the Spirit is Saying to the Churches* (Atlanta: Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Lay Evangelism Department, 1988).

⁵Virgilio Elizondo and Timothy M. Matovina, *Mestizo Worship: A Pastoral Approach to Liturgical Ministry* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1998), 24-25.

⁶Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 4.

specific notions about who God is and who we are in relation to God.”⁷ This article is incremental toward a local theology, investigating how social Trinitarian theology relates to the Southwestern U.S.

Social Trinitarian Themes

Many are considering anew how Trinitarian theological reflection informs the church and society regarding ethical living.⁸ In Trinitarian theology, relationality becomes a prominent theme by the late twentieth century.⁹ Relational or social Trinitarian thought derives its name from emphasis on the threeness of God as the starting place for understanding God’s being.¹⁰ By conceiving of a God “who is both one and three” and “whose being consists in a relationality that derives from the otherness-in-relation of Father, Son and Spirit,”¹¹ social Trinitarians perceive of God through the inter-relational connectedness of the Father, Son, and Spirit—a perception necessary for understanding the fullness of Deity.¹² Such diverse and impressive thinkers as John Zizioulas, Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Robert W. Jenson, Leonardo Boff, Miroslav Volf, Paul Fiddes, Colin Gunton, and Stanley Grenz contend that in relationality the Father, Son, and Spirit are one God.¹³ They also argue that such Trinitarian thinking has implications for the church and its mission in the world.

These implications stem from belief that the nature and character of the triune God has meaning for God’s creatures, especially those created in God’s image. Just what is that meaning and to what extent it applies is, of course, part of the discussion. Finding a tenable middle ground, Volf contends that, while copying God in all respects is impossible, it is “odd to claim that there are no

⁷Dorothy C. Bass, “Practicing Theology in the Congregation,” *Congregations* 30:1 (Winter 2004): 23-26.

⁸See Joy Ann McDougall, “The Return of Trinitarian Praxis? Moltmann on the Trinity and the Christian Life,” *JR* 83.2 (April 2003): 177. Humorously, Cunningham calls this renewed interest in Trinitarian thinking, “not so much like a renaissance as a bandwagon.” David S. Cunningham, *These Three are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1998), 19. I thank my colleague William Whitney for bringing Cunningham’s statement to my attention.

⁹Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Trinity: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 117. According to Cunningham, belief “that God is relational” is a key area of agreement for several of the most influential Protestant theologians of the twentieth century. Cunningham, *Three are One*, 26; emphasis in original.

¹⁰See Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 77-97. Notably, Grenz does not demonstrate and describe the Tri-unity of God (Ibid., 53-76), but proceeded in chapter three to speak of “The Relational God” relating to God’s inner-life as Father, Son, and Spirit.

¹¹Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 7.

¹²Gunton, *One, Three, and the Many*, 214.

¹³See John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 40-49, 83-89; John Zizioulas, “Communion and Otherness,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 38.4 (1994): 347-361; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 162-70, 172; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 1:322-25; Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology: The Triune God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1:75-161.

analogues to God in creation” all the while maintaining “that human being are created in the image of God.”¹⁴ He states “between ‘copying God in all respects’ ... and ‘not copying God at all’...lies the widely open space of human responsibility which consists of ‘copying God in *some* respects.’”¹⁵

Social Trinitarian thinkers delve into issues regarding anthropology, ecclesiology, ecology, leadership, gender, and other “variegated dimensions.”¹⁶ Pursuing this agenda, they draw out ethical implications of such thinking. For example, Boff states, “... as long as the present social inequalities remain, faith in the Trinity will mean criticism of all injustices and a source of inspiration for basic changes.”¹⁷ He makes correlations between Trinitarian theology and economic, political, and ecclesial social institutions.¹⁸ Similarly, Moltmann writes that the triune God who lives in community and fellowship “issues an invitation to his community and makes himself the model for a just and livable community in the world of nature and human beings.”¹⁹ In highly individualized western culture, Trinitarian thinking speaks to numerous areas of human relationality. Cunningham comments:

If the claim that “these three are one” applies not only to God but, *mutatis mutandis*, to the created order as well, then it has dramatic implications for the kinds of lives we are called to live.... The doctrine of the Trinity is a challenge to the modern cult of the individual; it teaches us to think in terms of complex webs of mutuality and participation.²⁰

Gunton sees ethical implications for social urban interaction extending to our love of driving cars²¹ and sexual morality.²²

The social Trinitarian agenda clearly extends beyond academic and theological speculation, contending that what is mined from understanding God as Father, Son, and Spirit in relationship bears directly upon our social existence.²³ But, how so? With this question, I review several social Trinitarian themes most often considered in ecclesial and ethical issues. I then demonstrate how these themes inform the particularities of the Southwestern U.S.

Perichoresis and Diversity

Traditional Christian theological methods begin with God’s unity, and then, because of the incarnation, consider how God is also three.²⁴ Contrastingly,

¹⁴Miroslav Volf, “‘The Trinity is our Social Program’: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement,” *Modern Theology* 14:3 (July 1998): 404.

¹⁵Volf, “‘The Trinity is our Social Program,’” 405; emphasis in original.

¹⁶Grenz, *Rediscovering*, 3.

¹⁷Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1988), 13.

¹⁸Boff, *Trinity*, 148-54.

¹⁹Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), xii-xiii.

²⁰Cunningham, *Three are One*, 8.

²¹Gunton, *One, Three, and the Many*, 177-78.

²²Colin Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 223-24.

²³See further Volf, “‘The Trinity is our Social Program.’”

²⁴Grenz, *Rediscovering*, 11-32.

Moltmann suggests that “if the concept of person comes to be understood in trinitarian terms—that is, in terms of relation and historically—then the Persons do not only subsist in the common divine substance; they also exist in their relations to the other Persons.”²⁵ A biblical theology of God requires beginning with the Trinity and then working toward unity through *perichoresis*.²⁶

Perichoresis is “the mutual indwelling and coinherence of the persons of the Trinity....”²⁷ Discussing the difficulties of this term in a highly isolated modern context, Cunningham suggests that while “coinherence” and “interpenetration” most often describe *perichoresis*, they do not fully help modern understandings of over-individualized personhood.²⁸ However, Boff, Moltmann, and others appeal to this individuated understanding. Boff sees in *perichoresis* three persons, who

...emerge as three Subjects who engage in mutual dialogue, love one another and are intimately related. Each person is *for* the others, *with* the others and *in* the others. The everlasting love that pervades them and forms them unites them in a current of life so infinite and complex as to constitute the unity between them.... They are not the embodiments of One (nature or substance or absolute Spirit or Subject) but three Subjects in eternal (and therefore essential) communion, always united and interpenetrating one another.²⁹

Gunton perceives that *perichoresis* “is the foe, not the agent, of homogeneity.”³⁰ In distinctiveness, these persons find constitution through their inter-

²⁵Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 174. Moltmann boldly asks, “what unity?” *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 148. Moltmann contends that starting with a “biblical testimony...as point of departure, then we shall have to start from the three Persons [because] of the history of Christ. If philosophical logic is made the starting point, then the enquirer proceeds from the One God.” *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 149.

²⁶I begin with *perichoresis* as it supports other themes for most social Trinitarian theologians. See Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, 86-87. Moltmann defines *perichoresis* as: “An eternal life process takes place in the triune God through the exchange of energies. The Father exists in the Son, the Son in the Father, and both of them in the Spirit, just as the Spirit exists in both the Father and the Son. By virtue of their eternal love they live in one another to such an extent, and dwell in one another to such an extent, that they are one.” Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 174-75. Pseudo-Cyril first used *perichoresis* regarding the Trinity. Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church in the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 208-10; Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 71. The Latin church translated *perichoresis* with “*circumcessio*” and “*circumincessio*.” Collins contends that *circumcessio* carries the more “dynamic connotations” of the original term *perichoresis* emphasizing the reciprocal nature of the term. Paul M. Collins, *Trinitarian Theology: West and East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 209-15. See also Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 240-42; Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 168-202.

²⁷Gunton, *Father, Son and the Holy Spirit*, 44; also see Cunningham, *Three are One*, 180-81; Collins, *Trinitarian Theology*, 209-10.

²⁸Cunningham, *Three are One*, 180-81.

²⁹Boff, *Trinity*, 138-39.

³⁰Gunton, *One, Three, and the Many*, 172.

relatedness.³¹ This is Zizioulas' meaning when he contends, "substance *possesses almost by definition a relational character*."³² Thus, in *perichoresis*, distinctions and differences between persons of the Trinity become the source of unity.³³

Emphasis on relationality raises the charge of tritheism.³⁴ *Perichoresis* is the answer to such charges. Moltmann writes, "The perichoretic concept of trinitarian unity gets over the dangers of tritheism and modalism equally."³⁵ *Perichoresis* is expressed relationally, complementarily, and equally among the three persons.³⁶ Boff claims that Christianity views God as having "distinctions without multiplying God and falling into tritheism or polytheism."³⁷ A perichoretic understanding of God—who is uniquely three and distinctly one—critiques modernity's fragmentation.³⁸ To a fragmented and disconnected world, Gunton conveys that *perichoresis* offers creation hope for an integrated existence:

...A God conceived trinitarianly, a God who contains within himself a form of plurality in relation and creates a world which reflects the richness of his being, can surely enable us to better conceive something of the unity in variety of human culture... [I]f the triune God is the source of all being, meaning and truth, we should be able to develop a theology of the unity of culture without depriving each of its dimensions of its distinctive approach and validity.³⁹

Wholeness and distinction are themes held in tension; *perichoresis* makes the holding possible.⁴⁰

Mutuality

³¹Gunton, *One, Three, and the Many*, 172.

³²Zizioulas, *Being*, 84 (emphasis in the original).

³³Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 175. Moltmann states, "The unity of the trinitarian Persons lies in the circulation of the divine life which they fulfill in their relations to one another. This means that the unity of the triune God cannot and must not be seen in a general concept of divine substance. That would abolish personal differences. But if the contrary is true—if the very difference of the three Persons lies in their relational, perichoretically consummated life process—then the Persons cannot and must not be reduced to three modes of being of one and the same divine subject. The Persons themselves constitute both their differences and their unity." *Ibid.*; also Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, xii.

³⁴Letham, *Holy Trinity*, 307-09, 377; Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002), 97, 232-33; Richard Neuhaus, "Moltmann vs. Monotheism," *Dialog* 20:3 (Summer 1981): 239-43.

³⁵Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, 86.

³⁶Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, 86.

³⁷Boff, *Trinity*, 139.

³⁸Gunton, *One, Three, and the Many*, 155-79.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 177.

⁴⁰"Wholeness" and "distinction" are titles in Torrance's discussion of *perichoresis*. See Torrance, *Christian Doctrine*, 173-80. Letham, without discussing *perichoresis*, points to the unique peculiarity of Trinitarian Christian witness as cultural critique. Letham, *Holy Trinity*, 439-57.

Mutuality, distinct from *perichoresis*, explores how each Trinitarian person *willingly* gives fully of oneself and receives fully to oneself the other without diminishing their own person.⁴¹ While human relationships often are marked by separation and distance created by fear of rejection, in the Trinity there is no separation.⁴² The nature of Trinitarian relations makes them mutually constitutive. The Father is not Father without the Son, or the Son a Son without the Father.⁴³ Within the Godhead, mutuality prevents any one person from being deity's source: "The relations between the persons are constitutive not merely for their distinctions but also their deity."⁴⁴ Pannenberg regards mutuality as essential for understanding relations between Father and Son regarding power, rule, and lordship:

In the handing over of lordship from the Father to the Son, and its handing back from the Son to the Father, we see a mutuality in their relationship.... By handing over lordship to the Son the Father makes his kingship dependent on whether the Son glorifies him and fulfils his lordship by fulfilling his mission. ...[H]is [the Father's] kingdom and his own deity are now dependent on the Son.⁴⁵

Boff's understanding of mutuality suggests that within the mutual relationships of the Godhead, everything is triadic.⁴⁶ Mutuality is defined as

⁴¹ Many theologians use similar terminology discussing *perichoresis* while speaking of "mutual" indwelling. While related, I am more interested in mutual giving and receiving of self. See Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, 84-87.

⁴² As Erickson captures: "They are eternally and permanently one with the others." Millard J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 226.

⁴³ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:311-12. Pannenberg's argument concurs with Augustine's that the Spirit is the bond between the Father and the Son. *Ibid.*, 1:316-17. While implying mutuality, it constitutes the Spirit's personhood through the Father and Son's relationship rather than as a "living realization of a separate center of action." *Ibid.*, 1:319. Nonetheless, according to Letham, in Pannenberg, "The Father's deity is dependent on the Son, and so all three persons are fully reciprocally related, although in different ways." Letham, *Holy Trinity*, 317.

⁴⁴ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:322-24, quote from 323. Jenson suggests that the Father speaks the Word as an act awaiting response even as breathing the Spirit is the Father's entry into the Spirit's "communal freedom." Each act has a reciprocal and mutually required act. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:119. See also, Zizioulas, *Being*, 40-49. However, this implies an ontological hierarchy that is philosophically tenuous and theologically inconsistent.

⁴⁵ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:308-19. Likewise the Spirit; *Ibid.*, 1:315-18.

⁴⁶ Boff, *Trinity*, 146. In provocative terms, Boff turns *Filioque* on its head suggesting also a *Patreque* and *Spirituque*: "Consequently, we should say that the Father reveals himself through the Son and the Holy Spirit.... The Father reveals the Son as his Word with the participation of the Spirit, who is always the Spirit of the Son and the Father. The Son is 'begotten' by the Father in the Holy Spirit.... [T]he Father 'begets' the Son virginally in the maternal-virginal womb of the Holy Spirit. In trinitarian terms: the Father 'begets' the Son *Spirituque*, that is, in communion with the Holy Spirit.... [T]he Son reveals the Father in the light of the Holy Spirit.... The Son is also revealed to the Holy Spirit as co-related to the Father since the Father will be eternally the Father of the Son. He also reveals to the Spirit the unfathomable mystery of the Father in his overflowing outpouring of love and self-bestowal.

“relationship[s]...of reciprocal participation...of correlation and communion.... Each person receives everything from the others and at the same time gives everything to the others.”⁴⁷ Thus, Boff overcomes the language of procession through “communication and communion.”⁴⁸

Moltmann contends that each Trinitarian person “comes to himself by expressing and expending himself in others” by means of “self-surrendering love.”⁴⁹ This not only eliminates subordinationism,⁵⁰ but is how “they bring one another mutually to manifestation in the divine glory.... The Persons of the Trinity make one another shine through that glory, mutually and together.”⁵¹ As Gunton maintains, the “*reciprocal* eternal relatedness” of the Father, Son, and Spirit “constitute one another’s being,” protecting a “particular kind of relational diversity.”⁵² No person is served by or is servant to others through compulsion—each serves the others freely and mutually.⁵³ Thus, we see the absence of a hierarchical relationality.

Egalitarianism

Although disputed among social Trinitarian thinkers, David Cunningham declares that “one of the central claims of classical trinitarianism is that the Three are radically equal to one another; none is in a position of superiority over the others.”⁵⁴ How we comprehend this reality is not always consistent as the limited nature of language makes it difficult to develop a consistent theology of God’s relational equality.⁵⁵ While most social-Trinitarian thinkers contend for essential equality, Zizioulas, Jenson, Fiddes, among others denote either a func-

The Spirit... ‘proceeds’ from the Father and rests on the Son, being thus *ex Patre Filioque*.”
Ibid. 146-47.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 147.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Moltmann contends that each person “receives the fullness of eternal life from the other.” Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 173-74.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 175.

⁵¹ Ibid., 176. See also Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 58-59. Moltmann suggests that “mutuality and community [within the Triune Godhead] proceeds from the Holy Spirit” as a sort of third movement in the unified Godhead. The Father is the person through whom the “‘monarchical’ unity of the Godhead” is formed; the Son is the center around which the Godhead is concentrated; and the Spirit is the divine luminary of Trinitarian unity. Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 177-78. However, this promotes hierarchy within the Trinity, which Moltmann feverishly attempts to overcome. Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 191-222.

⁵² Gunton, *One, Three, and the Many*, 164; emphasis added. Gunton discusses mutuality under “*Perichoresis*” (chapter six, subheading three) demonstrating the relation between *perichoresis* and mutuality. Ibid., 163-66.

⁵³ Not all social Trinitarians hold to this perspective. Zizioulas and others hold to the primacy of the Father, contending that mutuality is elemental to the inter-relatedness of the Trinity and a sub-theme of love.

⁵⁴ Cunningham, *Three are One*, 111-14.

⁵⁵ Ibid. *Contra*: see J. Scott Horrell, “Toward A Biblical Model of the Social Trinity: Avoiding Equivocation of Nature and Order,” *JETS* 47:3 (September 2004): 399-421.

tional or an ontological subordination of the Son and Spirit to the Father.⁵⁶ For these, the Father is the Monarch deity in relation to the Son and Spirit.

Maintaining the Father's primacy,⁵⁷ Gunton moves from language of procession or source (the Father as the 'mon-arche') to the language of interrelation and community.⁵⁸ Gunton seems mindful of distinctions between the Father's economic priority and ontological equality.⁵⁹ Believing the Father is "origin of the Godhead," Moltmann contends that *perichoresis* banishes "all subordinationism in the doctrine of the Trinity."⁶⁰ Accordingly, the Father's monarchy relates to the constitution of the Trinity, but has "no validity within the eternal circulation of the divine life and none in the perichoretic unity of the Trinity. Here the three Persons are equal..."⁶¹ Ultimately, Moltmann's position seems contradictory. If the Father's monarchy constitutes the Trinity, how can a triune God exist without the Father's pre-existence in eternity past?

Volf similarly embraces Trinitarian egalitarianism in his argument for egalitarian ecclesial structures.⁶² Against "hierarchical constructions of the Trinitarian relations," Volf's adamant claims that "hierarchy is not necessary to guard either the divine unity or the distinctions between divine persons" finding such arguments "unintelligible" for a "community of perfect love between persons who share all divine attributes."⁶³ However, while contending, "Persons and community are equiprimal in the Trinity,"⁶⁴ Volf maintains the Father as primal source of deity.⁶⁵ Volf attempts to justify equality of the three Persons regarding source, stating, "with regard to the immanent Trinity, salvation histo-

⁵⁶ See Zizioulas, *Being*, 39-49, specifically 44-49; Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:322-327; Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, 73-74; Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:115-24, 156; Fiddes, *Participating*, 79, 89-96.

⁵⁷ Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, in the Edinburgh Studies in Constructive Theology Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 157-62, especially 159. Here and following, Gunton demonstrates modalistic tendencies, promoting the "two hands of God" concept in a Trinitarian view of the creation, losing the mutual agency of the three persons. Also, Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 166-70.

⁵⁸ Gunton, *One, Three, and the Many*, 163-64, 214-15. See also Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, 72-73.

⁵⁹ Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 166, 167. Again, my thanks to William Whitney for bringing this reference to my attention.

⁶⁰ Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 175-76.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 176. See also *Ibid.*, 177.

⁶² Part II of *After our Likeness* is a "free church" response to the Trinitarian/ecclesial hierarchies of Roman Catholic Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) and Greek Orthodox John D. Zizioulas. Volf's states that "an appropriate understanding of the Trinity suggests a more nuanced and promising model of the relationship between person and community in the Church." Volf, *Likeness*, xi. Volf promotes an egalitarian ecclesiology from Trinitarian themes: see especially chapter VI "Structures of the Church"; *Ibid.*, 221-257.

⁶³ Volf, "Social Program," 407. Volf passionately critiques hierarchical arguments stating: "They [hierarchical constructions of the Trinity] seem to be less inspired by a vision of the Triune God than driven either by a nostalgia for a 'world on the wane' or by fears of chaos that may invade human communities if hierarchies are leveled, their surface biblical justification notwithstanding." *Ibid.*, 407-08.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 409.

⁶⁵ Volf, *Likeness*, 217.

ry thus allows us to infer the fundamental equality of the divine persons in their mutual determination and their mutual interpenetration.”⁶⁶ Troublesome is the economic language of procession to explain the immanent Trinitarian inner-life—an application A. Okechukwu Ogbonnaya avoids.⁶⁷

Ogbonnaya, reinterpreting Tertullian into the African context, argues that Tertullian understood an ontological equality but a temporal and historical subordination.⁶⁸ Similarly, Fiddes recognizes that the nature of fatherhood and sonship in divine relationship is historically bound in the historical Jesus.⁶⁹ Hence, filial subordination of the Son to his Father is historically mediated, but not ontologically necessary.⁷⁰ Boff insists that Trinitarian persons are co-eternal, having “*their* origin from all eternity” and creating a “relationship of reciprocal participation rather than hypostatic derivation, or correlation and communion rather than production and procession.”⁷¹ *Perichoresis*, which is a “complete circulation of life and a perfect coequality between persons,” makes this possible.⁷²

This *perichoretical* relationship “ruled out of consideration any conception of trinitarian relations arising out of a prior unity, and any conception of a unity deriving from the underived Person of the Father.”⁷³ Hence, Torrance’s position is that the monarchy is found in all of the Trinity.⁷⁴ As Boff states:

This formulation [of *perichoretical* relationships] avoids the danger of subordinationist hierarchization in God (first the Father, then the Son, then the Holy Spirit) or of unequal subordination: the Father has everything, receives nothing from the others; the Son receives only from the Father, while the Holy Spirit receives from the Father and the Son, or only from the Father through the Son. It also avoids theogonism or modalism....⁷⁵

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ A. Okechukwu Ogbonnaya, *On Communitarian Divinity: An African Interpretation of the Trinity* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon, 1994). The counter argument asks how can we know the immanent Trinity other than by the economic Trinity. Perhaps we cannot; however, something unique even for God occurs in the incarnation. The “God become flesh” moment is distinct and to sustain a primal placement for the Father based on how the God/man responds seems untenable. Jesus’ response to his Heavenly Father was as much a human response to the creator as it was relational God to God. See Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, 223. Thus, Ogbonnaya’s contention for a distinction between the temporal and the ontological seems to account for this distinction, preserving both the humanity and the deity of Jesus the Son. I do not suggest that Ogbonnaya’s whole approach be embraced.

⁶⁸ Ogbonnaya, *Communitarian Divinity*, throughout, but especially 85-86.

⁶⁹ Fiddes, *Participating*, 89-90.

⁷⁰ See also William W. Stevens, *Doctrines of the Christian Religion* (Nashville: Broadman, 1967), 121.

⁷¹ Boff, *Trinity*, 146; emphasis added. “Mutual origination” (or any “origination”) within the eternal Godhead denotes significant difficulties not discussed here, but worthy of investigation.

⁷² Ibid., 93. Also, Torrance, *Christian Doctrine*, 179-80.

⁷³ Torrance, *Christian Doctrine*, 179.

⁷⁴ Letham, *Holy Trinity*, 377; see Torrance, *Christian Doctrine*, 180-85.

⁷⁵ Boff, *Trinity*, 146.

Thus, Trinitarian relations are “the source of the utopia of equality—with due respect for differences—full communion and just relationships in society and in history.”⁷⁶

Openness to Other

Relational existence demands openness to the other. As indicated, *perichoresis* allows for the in-dwelling of each person in the others. Critical to this understanding are the two-fold realizations of diversity within social Trinitarian thinking and the resultant of openness to other within the Trinity. Moltmann focuses on this idea, emphasizing the distinctness of the Three.⁷⁷ Central to understanding *perichoresis* is that within the Godhead’s indwelling of one another each of the three lose none of their distinctiveness.⁷⁸

Pannenberg expounds that the three exist as “separate centers of action” each relating “to the others as others and distinguishes itself from them.”⁷⁹ This is Volf’s meaning with his “mine/not mine” dialect.⁸⁰ For the Son as Son to love the Father and the Spirit, he must maintain his own boundaries to avoid self-negation.⁸¹ However, boundaries are not for keeping others out, which Volf (reflecting on Zizioulas) notes is also self-negation.⁸² Openness to other within the Godhead is the essence of existence; without relationship, there is no personhood just as personhood is the uniqueness of identity.⁸³ Rather than losing distinctiveness, the perichoretic love for other within the Triune God is how God opens to other.⁸⁴ He states:

We have understood the unity of the divine trinitarian history as the open, unifying at-oneness of the three divine Persons in their relationships to one another.... For this trinitarian history is nothing other than the eternal perichoresis of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in their dispensation of salvation, which is to say in their opening of themselves for the reception and unification of the whole creation.⁸⁵

While God experiences the self-love of like for like (the Father’s love of the Son and the Spirit, the Son’s love of the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit’s love of the Son and the Father), God’s ability for self-love opens God to loving other—creation.⁸⁶ According to Grenz,

⁷⁶ Ibid., 93.

⁷⁷ Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, 87; Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 105-28; Moltmann, *Church in the Power*, 52-60.

⁷⁸ Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 150, 175. See also Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:273.

⁷⁹ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:319-20

⁸⁰ Volf, “Social Program,” 410.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 410-11. See also Zizioulas, *Being*, 48-49.

⁸³ Zizioulas, *Being*, 46-48; Fiddes, *Participating*, 81-89.

⁸⁴ Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 158.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 157.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 106. Also, Moltmann, *Church in the Power*, 50-65.

The world exists out as the product of the outflow of the divine love, the eternal relationship between Father and Son which is the Spirit. The Father intends that the creation share in his existence and enter into the relationship the Son enjoys with him. Thus, as a product of God's essence (which is love) and as God's counterpart, the world exists in order to participate in the life of the social Trinity. We may summarize God's intention for the world by employing the term "community." Just as the triune God is the eternal fellowship of the trinitarian members, so also God's purpose for creation is that the world participate in "community."⁸⁷

As Boff states, "by their own inner dynamic, the three divine Persons spill over outwards, creating other different things and beings (the cosmos and human-kind) for them to be receptacles of communicative love and the boundless ocean of trinitarian life."⁸⁸

Love

Trinitarian themes are formed in the belief that divine love binds the divine Persons to one another. Love establishes the perichoretic divine community as a mutual, equal, and open community. Love is the "unity of the divine being of the Father, Son and Spirit."⁸⁹ Pannenberg writes, "They [the Trinity] do not merely have love as a common quality or mind; they are love in the 'unity of free persons' that can never be separated."⁹⁰ There is a careful distinction in that "if, however, the one loves self in the other instead of loving the other as other, then love falls short of full self-giving which is the condition that the one who loves be given self afresh in the responsive love of the one who is loved."⁹¹ Love is manifest in the reciprocal relation of those bound together; it is a means of giving one's self to others.⁹² Thus, in *perichoresis*, divine relations are "not merely logical but existential," wherein through the "mutuality of their ec-static indwelling the life of the divine Spirit fulfils itself as love."⁹³ This leads Pannenberg to a particularly difficult conclusion: love as the Spirit of God.⁹⁴

⁸⁷ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 112.

⁸⁸ Boff, *Trinity*, 147. Regarding Trinitarian creation, see Gunton, *Triune Creator*.

⁸⁹ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:422-48.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 427.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 426.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 428.

⁹⁴ He correlates the statements "God is Spirit" and "God is love" as the "same unity of essence by which Father, Son and Spirit are united in the fellowship of the one God." *Ibid.*, 427. Unclear is whether Pannenberg means the Holy Spirit, or a divine essence permeating all three Persons. *Ibid.*, 427-432. Pannenberg states: "On the one side the Spirit and love constitute the common essence of deity, and on the other they come forth as a separate hypostasis in the Holy Spirit." *Ibid.*, 429. This implies that this Spirit-third Person or permeating essence—is source of the divine Godhead: "Both Father and Spirit in their different ways represent the Godhead as a whole. . . . [T]his is least true of the Son, because he partakes of eternal deity only through his relation to the Father and as filled by the Spirit of the Father." *Ibid.*, 429. This is problematic ontologically, and contradicts his earlier statement that "Love is no more a separate subject than the Spirit apart from the three persons." *Ibid.*, 428. Similarly, see Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 489. For a critique of Pannenberg's "monarchy of the Spirit" as source of Godhead see Anselm K. Min, "The Dialectic of Divine

Whatever his intention, love is the source of mutuality and unity and divine love opens God to the world.⁹⁵ Similarly, Boff echoes that love reflects the ontological essence of the triune Godhead.⁹⁶ Differently, Boff uses relational language of ontology rather than processional language and therefore avoids the confusion created by Pannenberg's "God is Spirit"/"God is Love" equation. Love makes *perichoresis* tenable for Boff.⁹⁷

Moltmann demonstrates that for God to be love he must be Triune, as "love cannot be consummated by a solitary subject."⁹⁸ Erickson likewise contends that "love, to be love, must have both a subject and an object."⁹⁹ Love without the other is merely narcissism, thus for God to be love and not just "loving" had to exist in multiplicity.¹⁰⁰ Regarding personhood, love is the "self-communication of the good" through the giving of self to other while remaining other.¹⁰¹ Like Zizioulas, Moltmann's insists that personal existence requires that the one exist in relation to the other(s).¹⁰² Yet, in their Tri-unity, Father, Son and Spirit are one "by virtue of their eternal love."¹⁰³ In their relations, "they also realize themselves in one another by virtue of their self-surrendering love."¹⁰⁴ It is a mutually sustaining cycle.

Consider Gunton's proposal regarding Trinitarian love: "the three persons who make up the being of God; who, together, are the one God, are bound up together in such a way that only one word can be used to describe their relation: love."¹⁰⁵ God's Triune love compels God to create and to open God's self to loving and being loved by other.¹⁰⁶ Yet, the modern tragedy is that "many have rejected God because the God of the Church seemed the source of unfreedom and oppression rather than of love."¹⁰⁷ The church has often reflected a god of the world rather than "the God of the Bible, who is a God of love." If

Love: Pannenberg's Hegelian Trinitarianism," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6:3 (July 2004): 262-64.

⁹⁵ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 444-48. He states, "If the unity of God thus finds nuanced and concrete form only in the work of diving love, then the other attributes of the divine being may be shown to be either manifestations of the love of God or to have true meaning only insofar as their concrete manifestation is taken up into the sway of divine love." *Ibid.*, 445.

⁹⁶ Boff, *Trinity*, 144-46. He states, "God is eternally, without beginning, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the inner reciprocity of their love." *Ibid.*, 144.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 145. Boff writes, "This understanding excludes the monarchy of One...in favour of the eternal communion of a simultaneous Three who are always one in, by, with, through and for the others, interpenetrating one another in love...." *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 57.

⁹⁹ Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, 221.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* Neither he nor Moltmann explain why three as opposed to more or fewer. Gunton offers that two realize mutual love only when loving a third. Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 92.

¹⁰¹ Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 57. Moltmann insists that self-giving must not be "self-destruction" as it "presupposes the capacity for self-differentiation." *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 172-73.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹⁰⁵ Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, 17.

¹⁰⁶ Gunton, *Triune Creator*, 9-10.

¹⁰⁷ Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, 18.

God's Trinitarian relationality is our example—remembering God's being is the love relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit—then in contexts as difficult and diverse as the Southwestern U.S., it is critical that we, social creatures made in God's image, must reflect God's love.¹⁰⁸

Social Trinitarian Critique in the Southwestern Context

The Southwestern U.S. is a vast region of cultural variety and convergence.¹⁰⁹ It was for millennia home to the Apache, Navajo, Hopi, Pima, Papago, Zuni, and other indigenous peoples. The 15th century arrival of the Spaniards in Central America and Mexico began European colonization of the region. By the arrival of the first English settlers to North America, the *mestizo* peoples of Mexico (mixed-race descendants of Spaniards and indigenous peoples) had pushed into California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and beyond, establishing presidios, missions, and haciendas, and utilizing existing indigenous trade routes for commerce. When conflict between the U.S. and Mexico began in the 1830's, Mexican dominance extended to California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, and parts of Wyoming.

With changes in North America due to wars of independence for the U.S. (1775-83) and for Mexico (1810-21), along with the U.S.'s public religion of Manifest Destiny and southern slaveholders pushing expansion westward, confrontation and conflict ensued. The Spanish and later Mexican governments viewed northern territories as *la frontera*—a frontier buffer region against aggressive Euro-Americans. The U.S. viewed borders as lines of demarcation separating “us” and “them.” These differences added to the cultural conflicts between the two countries.

With incursion (aggression from the Mexican perspective) first into Texas, then later into the rest of the region, the U.S. wrested the region from Mexico and settled it as Euro-American territory—displacing some 100,000 Mexican nationals and numerous native peoples. Since Guadalupe-Hidalgo (1848), Euro-Americans citizens have largely presumed non-Euro Americans as immigrants or boorish, ignorant savages. Current discussions on immigration, border control, economics, language, and cultural adaptation and accommodation closely relate to this history. Historical religio-political conflict in the U.S. between the Roman Catholics and Protestants also fueled conflict. Additionally, African American and Asian communities (Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, etc.) have settled in the Southwest in large numbers.¹¹⁰ Borderland

¹⁰⁸ Gunton's chapter 8, in *One, the Three and the Many*, 210-31.

¹⁰⁹ Borderland studies of the Southwestern U.S. is a vast academic area inadequately represented in these few paragraphs. For fuller studies, see: Rodolfo F. Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, 5th ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2004); Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999); Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987); Carlos G. Vélez-Ibáñez, *Border Visions: Mexican Cultures of the Southwest United States* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996).

¹¹⁰ Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993).

scholars use various metaphors to discuss these realities: cultural bumping,¹¹¹ *mestizaje*,¹¹² border/frontier,¹¹³ and conquest.¹¹⁴ To these metaphors and social realities, social Trinitarian theology can and must speak. As Volf states, “a genuinely Christian reflection on social issues must be rooted in the self-giving love of the divine Trinity...”¹¹⁵ Following the same thematic pattern as above, social Trinitarian themes speaks truth into this context and moment. Sometimes these speak positively into the situation in the Southwest; at other times, these themes criticize the situation.

Perichoresis and Diversity

Volf, analyzing *perichoresis* and human interconnection, notes, “There can be no correspondence to the interiority of the divine persons at the human level. Another human self cannot be internal to my own self as subject of action.”¹¹⁶ However, some similarities apply “at the ecclesial level (and at the creaturely level in a broader sense)...each person gives of himself of [sic] herself to others, and each person in a unique way takes up others into himself or herself. This is the process of mutual internalization of personal characteristics...”¹¹⁷ He further suggests that, “Like individual persons, so also do entire communities have their specific identifying characteristics, acquired either by way of the cultural context in which they now abide or through exceptional personalities active among them; they now transmit these characteristics to other[s]...”¹¹⁸

In the Southwest, *perichoresis* correlates in two ways. First, the *mestizo* identity reflects an interiority of cultures held by people in the region. Anzaldúa, Acuña, José Vasconcelos,¹¹⁹ among others, capture this concept, but theologi-

¹¹¹ Vélez-Ibáñez, *Border Visions*, throughout, but especially 3-11.

¹¹² Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983); Virgilio Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo: Life where Cultures Meet* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer Stone Book, 1988); Rafael Pérez-Torrez, *Mestizaje: Critical Uses of Race in Chicano Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

¹¹³ Daisy L. Machado, *Of Borders and Margins: Hispanic Disciples in Texas, 1888-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3-22.; Pablo Vila, *Crossing Borders, Reinforcing Borders: Social Categories, Metaphors, and Narrative Identities of the U.S.-Mexico Frontier* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

¹¹⁴ See Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*.

¹¹⁵ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 25.

¹¹⁶ Volf, *Likeness*, 210.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 211.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 213. Volf concludes “to other churches” but has been changed to fit context. Although Volf speaks of “interecclesial relevance,” this concept is applied broadly elsewhere, as noted in the previous citation.

¹¹⁹ Vasconcelos sees mixing people and cultures as achieving a “definitive race, the synthetical race, the integral race, made up of the genius and the blood of all peoples...capable of true brotherhood and a truly universal vision...” At the heart of Vasconcelos’ thesis, the races of the world come to mutual indwelling and accept the best of each other in a final “cosmic race.” Missing is how differentiation remains in mutual indwelling *mestizo* heritage: Indian and Spaniard. Jose Vasconcelos, “The Cosmic Race,” in *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, eds. Gilbert M. Joseph and Timothy J. Henderson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 18. The editors note that Vasconcelos’ theory is at heart a racist theory. For a “third race” critique from a Christian perspective, see Justo Gon-

cally none as well as Virgilio Elizondo. Elizondo suggests that persons in *la frontera* perpetually cross the borders between the Mexican/*mestizo* culture and the dominant Euro-American culture, enabling them to embrace and reject, as well as to be embraced and rejected by both cultures.¹²⁰ He writes:

Between the school years at the seminary and the summers at the store [his job at home], I gradually became more and more aware of many things I was not: I was not and would never be, even if I wanted to, a regular U.S.-American. Yet neither would I be a *puro mexicano*. There were identities that I knew that I was and was not at the same time: U.S.-American, Mexican, Spanish, Indian. Yet I was! My very being was a combination. I was a rich mixture but I was not mixed-up! In fact, I was more and more clear that my own inner identity was new and exciting.... I was *not just* U.S.-American and *not just* Mexican but fully both and exclusively neither.... Of the new identity—neither this nor that but fully both—there was no doubt what so ever.¹²¹

Elizondo captures the *perichoretic*-esque existence of Mexican and Mexican American individuals. This is not a splitting into multiple selves (split personality), but the carrying of differing centers of self within the same person.¹²² This appears to correspond to Pannenberg's understanding of Trinity's "separate centers of action."¹²³ Others conceptualize the polycentric concept of self that people carry within themselves.¹²⁴ For instance, Jacqueline Lewis notes that gender, race, faith, nationality, culture, and numerous other factors are part of her "complex storied self."¹²⁵

Second, *perichoresis* relates to communal life in the Borderlands. Communities of various ethnicities are found throughout the region. Within that diversity, many find ways to live culturally and ethnically distinct lives, while engaging and participating with others who have their own cultural and ethnic distinctions. Elizondo writes:

In the borderlands...peoples who have never really met before are today meeting one another, intermingling, and becoming a new and united people. Difference are not being destroyed, but they are being transcended and celebrated as together we usher in the beginning of the new race of humanity.¹²⁶

zalez, *Out of Every Tribe and Nation: Christian Theology at the Ethnic Roundtable* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 110.

¹²⁰ Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 16-18, especially 18.

¹²¹ Elizondo, *Future is Mestizo*, 26.

¹²² Krebs, *Edgewalkers*, 10.

¹²³ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:319.

¹²⁴ Regarding ecclesial structures, see: Volf, *Likeness*, 217. Regarding personhood, see: Harvey, *Another City*, 17; Mark Lau Branson, *Intercultural Church Life and Adult Formation: Community, Narrative, and Transformation* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1999), 141-42; Gonzalez, *Santa Biblia*, 77-90. From a socio-psychological perspective, see: Nina Boyd Krebs, *Edgewalkers: Defusing Cultural Boundaries on the New Global Frontier* (Far Hills, NJ: New Horizon, 1999), 9.

¹²⁵ Jacqueline J. Lewis, "Living on the Border," *Congregation*, 29:3 (Summer 2003): 23-26, quote from 24.

¹²⁶ Elizondo, *Future is Mestizo*, 110-11.

Elizondo describes one human community sharing life together as distinct communities. For many, this is an ecclesial vision. Ortiz suggests that a multi-ethnic church empowers people to be ethnically as God created them, while also surrendering themselves to unity in Christ.¹²⁷ It is reminiscent of Gunton who states:

. . . perichoresis helps us to rethink [the polarity found between individualist in separation vs. collectivists without particularity]...by virtue of the fact that, although it envisages close relatedness, it never does so to the detriment of particularity. Rather, it teaches us that, as made in the image of God, we are closely bound up, for good or ill, with other human beings. . . . *Our particularity in community is the fruit of our mutual constitutiveness: of a perichoretic being bound up with each other in the bundle of life.*¹²⁸

Eric H. F. Law and Beverly Daniel Tatum describe an important limitation in the human experience. Minority persons living in ethnically dominant cultures—i.e., Latinos, Asian Americans, African Americans, and others living in the Euro-American dominated Southwestern U.S.—experience a socio-psychological need to occasionally withdraw in order to maintain their ethnic identity and to rediscover their voice.¹²⁹ This is not unlike Trinitarian *perichoresis*, which does not undermine distinctiveness but anticipates it.

Mutuality and Interdependence

Experience teaches that in the Borderlands we are interconnected economically if not socially, spiritually, and otherwise. However, human beings are created to live in social interdependence. Sociologist Mary Clark highlights that “social embeddedness is the essence of our nature.”¹³⁰ Psychologist Christopher Mitchell indicates that “association” is a basic human necessity.¹³¹ Elizondo states

¹²⁷ Manuel Ortiz, *One New People: Models for Developing a Multiethnic Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996). See also Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multicultural Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Brad Christerson, Kori L. Edwards, and Michael O. Emerson, *Against All Odds: The Struggle for Racial Integration in Religious Organizations* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

¹²⁸ Gunton, *One, Three, and the Many*, 169-70; emphasis added.

¹²⁹ Eric H. F. Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community* (St. Louis: Chalice, 1993), 67-69; Beverly Daniel Tatum, “Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?”: *A Psychologist Explains the Development of Racial Identity* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

¹³⁰ Mary E. Clark, “Meaningful Social Bonding as a Human Need,” in *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*, ed. John Burton (London: MacMillan, 1990), 34-59; emphasis in original.

¹³¹ He lists three necessities: basic resources, self-determination, and *association*. Christopher Mitchell, “Necessitous Man and Conflict Resolution: More Basic Questions about Basic Human Needs Theory,” in *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*, ed. by John Burton (London: MacMillan, 1990), 159; emphasis added.

that mutual cross-cultural confrontation is how we experience “the personal interdependence that will give [us] the intimacy and belonging we all want.”¹³²

Being human makes us interdependent. However, race and ethnicity are constructed as tools of division. In-group bias and out-group prejudice are used to establish power and dominance. Trinitarian self-donation or mutuality critiques institutional racism and hatred masked in arguments about borders and resources. Within the Trinity, there exists a form of self-giving which “coalesces with receiving” in a “circular movement of the eternal divine love.”¹³³ This is,

A form of exchange of gifts in which the other does not emerge as a debtor because she has already given by having joyfully received and because even before the gift has reached her she was already engaged in a movement of advance reciprocation.... [T]he perfect cycle of self-donation must start moving simultaneously at all points.¹³⁴

In the Borderlands, ethical questions abound concerning undocumented immigrants so desperate to earn a living that they leave their homeland, make a perilous journey through hazardous territory, to work impossible hours for little pay in constant fear of being discovered by *la migra*¹³⁵ and returned to their homeland without pay.¹³⁶ Reflecting mutuality and self-donation, we consider how to create situations that eliminates such desperation. How can we minimize globalization’s destructive force on poor, communal societies and provide access to life’s necessities? Do we believe that as we give, so shall we receive?

Egalitarianism and Equal Participation

Southwestern history is one of exclusion for minority communities. Rosales demonstrates this in the political history of San Antonio, Texas for Latinos/Latinas.¹³⁷ Takaki tells similar stories regarding Native Americans, Asians, and African Americans as well as Latinos.¹³⁸ As an example, many contend that the answer for Mexican Americans and other “poor” minority groups is education. However, access to mechanisms (political, economic, etc.) controlling resources for education, safety, health, and the like, are often out of reach.¹³⁹

Fiddes contends that “involvement in the triune God” should guide pastoral and political leaders to “involve people in their own spiritual and social liberation.”¹⁴⁰ The danger in a hierarchical system, like Fiddes’, is that failure to achieve “liberation” could become another form of “blaming the victim.”¹⁴¹

¹³² Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 107-11.

¹³³ Volf, ““Social Program,”” 412.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 412-13.

¹³⁵ *la migra*: Tr. Boarder Patrol.

¹³⁶ See Acuña, *Occupied America*, 286.

¹³⁷ Rodolfo Rosales, *The Illusion of Inclusion: The Untold Political Story of San Antonio* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

¹³⁸ Takaki, *Different Mirror*.

¹³⁹ Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 62-83; Acuña, *Occupied America*, 159-60.

¹⁴⁰ Fiddes, *Participating*, 100.

¹⁴¹ Acuña, *Occupied America*, throughout, but especially 354, 365-66.

Boff states that mutual indwelling is the “source of the utopia of equality—with due respect for differences—full communion and just relationships in society and history.”¹⁴² If social structures reflect the triune God, then they must be comprised of “the community of men and women, without privileges and without subjugation.”¹⁴³

In the Southwest, this should mean that Euro-American, Latino, African American, and Asian children all have equal access to quality education, equally resourced, and mutually beneficial. The guarantee of this is a community where “people are defined through their relations with one another and in their significance for one another, not in opposition to one another, in terms of power and possession.”¹⁴⁴ In a community reflective of the Trinity, access to resources and power is available to all.

Openness to Other and Friendship

In Borderland discussions, much is made of the border itself. For Anzaldúa and other Chicanos, the U.S.-Mexico border is an arbitrary line that separates family, friends, and communities.¹⁴⁵ It also becomes a metaphor for separation and isolation in U.S. culture. For most U.S. citizens, it is a legal boundary delineating who is in and who is out. It clarifies who has access to the rights, safety, privileges, and responsibilities of citizenship. Since the border is not going away, how might social Trinitarian thought help us here?

Volf indicates that boundary maintenance is important.¹⁴⁶ Neither the Father, Son, nor Spirit is subsumed. Each, while perichoretically indwelling the others and indwelt by the others, remains wholly self. To give oneself to the other, a boundary must be maintained to allow both giving and receiving.¹⁴⁷ He states forcefully, “‘no boundaries’ means not only ‘no intelligent agency’ but in the end ‘no life’ itself.... The absence of boundaries creates nonorder, and nonorder is not the end of exclusion but the end of life.”¹⁴⁸ The maintenance of healthy boundaries promotes identity formation, and no identity exists apart from relation to the other.¹⁴⁹ However, these borders are permeable, even porous and shifting.¹⁵⁰

The border between the U.S. and Mexico may be necessary, but if it is an impermeable and impenetrable wall, national selfhood is at risk. The existence of a border creates an environment wherein immigrant populations might find financial empowerment and opportunity. The entrance of such groups adds to our cultural richness and reminds citizens of our great responsibility to the poor beyond our borders. Elizondo suggests that a prophetic word can be spoken culturally from community to community and is necessary for the survival

¹⁴² Boff, *Trinity*, 93.

¹⁴³ Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 198.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 25.

¹⁴⁶ Volf, “‘Social Program,’” 410.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 412

¹⁴⁸ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 58-68.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 410-11; Zizioulas, *Being*, 27-65.

¹⁵⁰ Volf, “‘Social Program,’” 410.

of each.¹⁵¹ This is possible because of the existence of and openness to distinctiveness.

Moltmann describes the friendship extended to humanity by the Trinity through Jesus Christ.¹⁵² Class, domination, privilege, and repression destroy human fellowship while the absence of these creates a space for friendship.¹⁵³ Many Borderland scholars have shifted from discussing the physical U.S.-Mexico border to discussing social borders of class, race, age, and gender. Elizondo and Lewis suggest that the Borderlands offer a unique insight into border crossing as freeing human beings from the social traps of those who dominate and enslave.¹⁵⁴ Elizondo reminds the Christian community that we follow a *mestizo* savior who ultimately crossed the greatest boundary and extended God's friendship to us.¹⁵⁵

Love

Lastly, the Christian community should realize and witness to this theme in the Southwest: love is our mandate. So many things clue us into the fact that love is at our core: Jesus commands to love as he loved, to love our enemies, to care for the poor, destitute, imprisoned, orphaned, widowed, and sick. This becomes possible because of God's own love one for another. In the Borderlands, the question of love is critical. Responding in love allows us to see difference not as something to be feared, but embraced. This love for other is achieved only when we have gotten our first love right. In Jesus' admonition to love the Lord our God, then to love our neighbor as ourselves we are reminded of Gunton's formula that three are necessary. Otherwise, our love is not truly God's kind of love.¹⁵⁶ In our failure to love the other, is it really the other we have failed to love, or have we actually failed to love our God?

The Critique of Human Conflict

Mark Chapman critiques social Trinitarianism as model for human sociality in relation to the role of conflict.¹⁵⁷ If some conflict is normal to human existence, and if the Trinity is our model, how do we reconcile the discrepancy between the perfect communion of the Trinity with our conflictual social existence?¹⁵⁸ This is an intriguing question as the overwhelming majority of psychologists, sociologists, and others contend that human conflict can be normal and

¹⁵¹ Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 107-11.

¹⁵² Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 114-21.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁵⁴ Elizondo, *Future is Mestizo*; Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*; Lewis, "Living on the Border," 23-26.

¹⁵⁵ Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 49-125, particularly 54.

¹⁵⁶ Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 92.

¹⁵⁷ Conflict is "two or more objects trying to occupy the same space at the same time" where space is defined in terms of land, time, concepts, etc. See Speed Leas and Paul Kittlaus, *Church Fights: Managing Conflict in the Local Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973); G. Douglass Lewis, *Resolving Church Conflicts: A Case Study Approach for Local Congregations* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

¹⁵⁸ Mark D. Chapman, "The Social Doctrine of the Trinity: Some Problems," *ATR*, 83:2 (Spring 2001): 248-54.

healthy.¹⁵⁹ There are cases where this is not always true. Speed Leas, describes conflict as occurring on a spectrum from collaborative attempts at mutual resolution to violent attempts to destroy the other.¹⁶⁰

Volf's suggested limitations on Trinitarian analogy are again helpful: our createdness limits our ability to be like God.¹⁶¹ The natural outworking of conflict in healthy and collaborative ways is a reminder of our creaturliness. In the Borderlands, protest, discussion, even passionate argument are means to negotiating our existence together. It reminds us of our interconnectedness, of our having been made in God's image. As Cunningham suggests: "God is capable of being internally conflicted, but chooses otherwise."¹⁶² Regarding unhealthy conflict, Volf reminds us that we are also fallen creatures.¹⁶³ This reminder is helpful as in the Borderlands we often see hatred and anger escalate into horrible violence. It reminds us that we need a God who is perfectly community to rescue us into himself.

Social application of the Trinitarian inner-life is a tricky thing. However, as creatures made in God's image, we cannot ignore what we are: socially interconnected persons. God's perfect communion may be unattainable in this life, but it guides us into mutuality, equality, openness, and love. Moreover, with God's help we might just be able to see our common humanity that indwells the other, even in the Borderlands.

¹⁵⁹ See David W. Augsburger, *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures: Pathways and Patterns* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 18-20; John Paul Lederach, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 9.

¹⁶⁰ Speed Leas, *Moving Your Church through Conflict* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1985, 2002).

¹⁶¹ Volf, "'Social Program,'" 404-05.

¹⁶² Cunningham, *Three are One*, 241-42, quote from 242.

¹⁶³ Volf, "'Social Program,'" 404-05.