Toward an Ecumenical Consensus on the Trinity

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The Colloquy of the "Académie Internationale des Sciences Religieuses" held at Bethanien, St. Niklausen/OW (Switzerland), 18—21 March 1975, was based on a contribution by Karl Rahner on the Trinity[1]. This treatise was chosen for discussion because it seemed to offer the possibility of some real ecumenical convergence between East and West, Catholic and Evangelical Christians. The fact that we have not had any major disagreements seems to mean that this was justified, to some extent at least.

1.

The basic approach by Karl Rahner from God's saving revelation of himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in history, pivoting upon God's concrete and effective self-communication in the Incarnation, has the effect of making the Economic Trinity the norm for all our thought and speech about God, and therefore of destroying the isolation of the treatise *De Deo Trino* from the treatise *De Deo Uno*. The reconstruction of traditional Roman Catholic doctrine (as expounded in the text-books) in this way has meant the following: (a) A rapprochement between the systematic theology of the Trinity and Biblical teaching, not only in the New Testament but also in the Old Testament[2], which allows a closer relation between the presentation of Jesus Christ in the New Testament witness and the Church's worship and proclamation of the Triune God; (b) A rapprochement between the understanding of Latins and Greeks, of Western and Eastern Christians about the Holy Trinity, through a shift from a more abstractive or scholastic framework of thought to one intended to be bound up closely with the piety, worship and experience of the Church, and therefore with what Athanasius called 'the reverent use of reason'; (c) A rapprochement between Roman Catholic theology and Evangelical theology, especially as represented by the teaching of Karl Barth in his emphasis upon the self-revelation and self-giving of God as the root of the doctrine of the Trinity and in his restoration of the doctrine of the Triunity of God to its fundamental and structural place in the doctrine of God and therefore to a normative role in all our theology. It may well be that the ecumenical convergence at these points is actually deeper than appears in our relatively brief discussions in which we have not given the text of Rahner's treatise sufficient of sufficiently close attention, and in which we have understandably been concerned in the first place with difficulties and problems we have with one another as well as with Rahner.

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[1] K. Rahner, Der dreifaltige Gott als transzendenter Urgrund der Heilsgeschichte: Mysterium salutis, 2 (1967), pp. 317—401; French edition, Dieu Trinité, fondement transcendent de l'histoire du salut: Mysterium salutis, 6 (1971), pp. 112—135; English edition, The Trinity (1970), published as an independent monograph, translated by J. Donceel. — While the account of our "conclusions" presented here represents the general mind of the Colloquium, it has been subsequently rewritten and enlarged to take fuller account of the discussion and to give it some internal coherence. But it inevitably reflects the perspective of the author, especially in the notes.

[2] E.g. in the Old Testament doctrine of the Word of God going forth into history while remaining the Word of God even within the world, together with the understanding of the Word, Wisdom and Spirit of God which, while distinct from God, are not intermediate powers between God and the world.

The main difficulty we have had with Rahner's treatise is with the way in which he has posed and framed the following axiom: "The *'Economic'* Trinity is the *'Immanent'* Trinity and the 'Immanent' Trinity is the 'Economic' Trinity" (p. 22), and with the way in which he has set out the transition from the "Economic" Trinity to the "Immanent" Trinity, and grounded the former in the latter (pp. 99ff.); for in spite of the relation of *identity* between the Economic and the Immanent Trinity, Rahner is found expressing the Economic Trinity as immanent, that is, as it is in God, in such a way that is prescinds from God's free self-communication, and so a moment of abstraction appears to be introduced between what God is in himself and the mode of his self-revelation and self-communication to us (p. 101f.)[3]. There would appear to be some ambiguity in the course of Rahner's exposition between the doctrine of the Trinity and the Trinity. There are of course not two Trinities but only one Trinity, even though Rahner speaks, on the one hand, of three distinct ways of God's being there (in the economy of salvation), and, on the other hand, of three different ways of subsistence (immanently) for the one God. This way of speaking leads to problems in wich there is being confused a movement of logical thought from one doctrine of the Trinity to another doctrine, and a movement of understanding and devotion from God in his economic self-revelation to us in space and time to God as he eternally is in his inner divine life. The confusion between the two movements seems to be apparent when Rahner states that the "Immanent" Trinity is "the necessary condition of the possibility of God's free self-communication" (p. 102, n. 21). Is this not a confusion between a necessary movement of thought (a logical necessity) and the kind of "necessity" arising from the fact that God has freely and irreversibly communicated himself to us in the Incarnation once and for all in such a way as to make any other possibility unentertainable by us? If this is the case, then the element of "abstraction" which Rahner, in spite of his axiom of identity, has introduced between the "Immanent" and the "Economic" Trinity has to do only with a "logical" movement between sets of concepts taken from official declarations of the Church, and with an underlying desire on his part finally not to break with scholastic formulations of dogma[4]. On the other hand, it must be recognised, that Rahner poses the identity of the "Economic" Trinity and the "Immanent" Trinity, first only as a methodological principle, as an instrument to reveal and organise understanding of the material presentation of God's self-communication, which in the course of his argument results in the conviction that in reality there is only *one Trinity,* for the "Economic" Trinity is found to be not merely the means of giving knowledge of the "Immanent" Trinity, but to be the same thing as the "Immanent" Trinity. The Trinity *ad extra* and *ad intra* is identical, because the self-communication of God to us in the Son and in the Spirit would not be a self-communication of God to us, if what God is for us in the Son and in the

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[3] Cf. Henri Bouillard, Comprendre ce que l'on croit (1971), p. 144ff., and his Communication au Colloque de Bethanien sur la Trinité, submitted on March 20, 1975.

[4] Rahner (n. 1) points out rightly that the essential difference between Protestant and (Roman) Catholic theology is to be found in the fact that for the Catholic theologian the "logical explanation" of the word of Scripture by the Church can become a statement of faith, an unchangeable dogma, while admitting that "logical explanation", unlike "ontic explanation", has to do only with statements and not with states of affairs. It is much the same difference, however, that characterises that between Roman Catholic and Orthodox theologians – see the essay by G. Dejaifve, East and West. Two Theologies, One Faith: Rediscovering Eastern Christendom, ed. by A. H. Armstron and E. J. B. Fry (1963), pp. 51–62.

Spirit were not proper to God in himself. Conversely it is because God is in himself and for himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that he is free to communicate himself as Triune in the economy of salvation.

Thus when the confusion in Rahner's thought, or in our reading of him, is cleared away, the question must be raised how far we have any serious disagreement with him. It would seem to be a mistake to think of Rahner's treatise as another effort at speculative theology, although it may well be the case that he is still, up to a point, a prisoner of a scholastic metaphysical framework. Nevertheless what he seems to be intending in his own way is basically in agreement with St. Athanasius on the one hand and Karl Barth on the other hand, and if so he does provide the possibility for an ecumenical convergence in thought. Everything hinges, as in the classical Catholic tradition, on the reality of God's self-communication in and through the Incarnation of his Son in Jesus Christ, which is not to be confused with something produced by God in the world through efficient causality, some cosmic power intermediate between God and the world, for, as Rahner like Barth insists, the self-communication of God in his revelation and the self-giving of God in his Being are one and the same. If God is not in himself as triune God what he is toward us in Christ and in the Spirit, if there is no relation of absolute fidelity between the act of God in his revelation and the being of God eternally in himself, then God in his own reality as God is not the object of our knowledge and devotion. Conversely, detached from God's economic condescension and self-revelation in history, a doctrine of the Trinity is nothing but a speculative projection. Hence the immense importance of the Incarnation as the real self-communication of God, in which there is an indissoluble hypostatic connection between the mission of Christ and the inner life of the eternal God. That is central and normative significance of the homooúsion: In Jesus Christ God has committed himself unreservedly to us in his own triune Being. As such the homooúsion helps us to discern and makes us regard the Incarnation as falling within the life of God himself and as thus providing the real ontological ground on which we think inseparably together the doctrine of the One God and the doctrine of the Triune God[5].

This would seem to demand a rethinking of the relation between the Incarnation and the creation, but Rahner does not spell that out, although his argument seems to demand it. From this point of view it would appear that he has only given a formal-historical account of the reason for the split between the De Deo Uno and the De Deo Trino, and has not probed into the deeper reason which would seem to lie in a profound dualism in Augustinian and Western theology between God and the world, most evident in the scholastic concepts of the "immutability" and "impassibility" of God: "Deus non factus est aliquid", as Peter Lombard maintained. Thus the real problem in the separation of the doctrine of the One God and the doctrine of the Triune God may be rooted in epistemological and in cosmological dualism in the traditional framework of thought in post-Reformation no less than in pre-Reformation Western theology, which has played such havoc with our interpretation of the historical Jesus Christ. As Rahner has argued, if the De Deo Uno is to be real theology it cannot speak of one God and of his nature without speaking of history and historical experience of him (the God of saving history revealed in the Incarnate Son) and therefore in separation from the De Deo Trino.

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[5] The effect of this is also to call in question a psychological approach to the doctrine of the Trinity on the ground of some Hellenic notion of participation (méthexis) or natural kinship (syngéneia) attributed to man apart from the Incarnation. Contrast St. Augustine, De Trinitate, VIII.11.

There are implications of this way of uniting the doctrine of the One God with the doctrine of the Triune God, in respect of what we mean when we speak of *God the Father*, which Rahner has not raised, and in which he appears at times to be trapped in ambiguities. We have to remember, as Hilary has said, that revelation is not of the Father manifested as God, but of God manifested as the Father[6]. This may well provide us with a further point of ecumenical convergence, as it might serve to cut out the false problematic which gave rise in different ways in East and West to the difficulties in respect of the procession of the Spirit: if we could agree that while the Son is from his Father, i.e. from God who is his Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds not from God his Father but only from God who is Father, then we might come closer together. For the Orthodox, however, that would mean accepting Cyril of Alexandria's rejection of the Cappadocian modification of the Athanasian doctrine of the Trinity, when in their determination to reject any tritheism that might be apparent in the formulation, "one ousía, three hypostáseis", they spoke of a causal priority or superiority of the Father over the Son and the Spirit[7].

To return to Rahner's direct argument and the outright identification of the "Economic" and the "Immanent" Trinity: if God is eternally in himself independently of us what he is quoad nos in the Son and in the Spirit, and if as such he has communicated and imparted himself in his own triune Being to us through the Son and in the Spirit, then must we not press Rahner to follow through the full implication of this in terms of the kind of concretions he intended, and which have been further emphasised by E. Jüngel in respect of the self-giving of God in the Cross, where he finds the real ground for Christian belief in the Trinity[8]. By his use of a theologia crucis, and his appeal to Rahner's statement that "the Trinity is a mystery of salvation" (p. 21, cf. 39ff.), Jüngel evidently puts Rahner in a position where it is no longer possible to rest satisfied with a traditional theologia gloriae, without avoiding the scandal of the fact that in becoming flesh for us the Son of God became cursed under the law and in his death the love of God identified itself with the crucified. Can one both deny the fact that Jesus Christ died "as God" and affirm that God gives himself in self-communication to man? The doctrine of the hypostatic union holds those inseparably together. But if we move seriously towards an understanding of the "pathos" of God, does this not call, as Jüngel indicated, for a reinterpreting and redefining of "God"? All this would amount to a demand for a fresh understanding of the being of God in relation to his saving activity in the crucifixion of Christ, and thus a radical change in our understanding of *being* and *becoming* in respect of God[9]. This would be in line with Karl Barth's teaching about God's being in his act and his act in his being, which he seems to have developed from the teaching of St. Athanasius, e.g. in his doctrine of the one activity of God as intrinsic to his being[10]. It is such a rethinking of a traditional presentation of the doctrine of the being of God that allows us to reach a deeper understanding of the incarnate Sonship of Christ through an integrated grasp of different New Testament statements and emphases which might otherwise have to be interpreted in somewhat modalistic or adoptionist ways. But it would make even more possible for us Rahner's claim that the only possible way to

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[6] Cf. St. Anselm, De processione Spiritus Sancti, I and II: S. Anselmus, Opera omnia, ed. F. S. Schmitt, 2 (1940), pp. 178f., 189. If the Holy Spirit proceeds from the ousía of God, who is Father, he proceeds from what is common to the Father with the Son and the Holy Spirit.

[7] Cyr. Alex., Dialogus de Trinitate: Patr. lat. 75, 435.

[8] E. Jüngel in his paper, Das Verhältnis von "ökonomischer" und "immanenter" Trinität, read in Jüngel's absence on March 19; published in Zs. f. Theol. u. Kirche 72 (1975), pp. 353–364.

[9] See E. Jüngel, Gottes Sein ist im Werden (1965); Engl. transl. by H. Harris, The Doctrine of the Trinity. God's Beeing is in Becoming (1975).

[10] This is the concept of enoúsios enérgeia, Athan. Contra Arianos II.2; cf. II.28; III.65; IV.1f.

interpret the New Testament witness is to say that the concrete Jesus Christ is the presence of God for us and still is not the Father, and that far from being a created intermediary between God and man, he is one with the Father while distinct from him. Had Rahner spelt out the consequence of the identity of the Trinity ad intra with the Trinity ad extra in respect of the basic New Testament presentation of the historical Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit mediated through him, his account of the doctrine of the Trinity would have achieved more pointedly what he wanted, not isolation from, but a profound integration with the living faith of God's people in Christ and their worship of the Father with and through him in the unity of the Spirit.

On the other hand, again, the more concretely the "Immanent" Trinity and the "Economic" Trinity are really one, the more there arises in the movement of our thought from a knowing of God in his economic condescension to us in the Incarnation and in the Passion of Christ to a knowing and worshipping and loving of him in his own intra-divine life, a need for a real measure of *apophatic theology* grounded in the homoousion. That is to say, in making the mouvement of understanding: what God is toward us and for us in the Incarnation and Passion of Christ he is antecedently and inherently in himself, we must learn what is proper to "read back" into the eternal Being of God and what is not proper. This should not be the kind of apophatic theology which gives the "negative" priority over the "positive", for that would ultimately lead, as it apparently did with the Pseudo-Dionysius, to a movement beyond the economic condescension and relevation of God to us in this world, to some transcendent supertrinitarian Deity who is neither Filiation nor Paternity nor anything else accessible to our understanding[11]. Apophatic knowledge of that kind implies that the economic condescension of God in revelation and salvation is only of a temporary or transient nature, one "by way of reserve" or "economy"[12] and not one identical finally with the abiding reality of God – i.e. it operates with a pre-Christian static concept of being in respect of God, and has not allowed the intrinsic relation between God's act and his being, or his Logos and his being, revealed in the Incarnation to change the fundamental concept of being in respect of God. If, however, with Athanasius we take seriously that both the Logos of God and the activity of God are internal to the Being (enoúsios) of God, then we cannot but hold that the economic condescension of God in revelation and salvation through Christ and in the Spirit mediates to us knowledge of God in his own internal relations, for through the Son and in the Spirit God does not remain ultimately closed to us but has opened up for us knowledge of *God in himself*[13]. That implies of course the identity of the "Economic"

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[11]   Ps. Dionys., De mystica theologia, V. It should be said, however, that even the "unknowing" of Pseudo-Dionysius is due to the excess of the uncreated divine light over all created light, so that his apophatic deconceptualising even of our knowledge of the Holy Trinity follows from a sublime "knowing" of him in his superessential transcendence. It is an unknowing due not to ignorance but to an excess of knowledge.

[12]   This unfortunate way of interpreting the kat 'oikonomían of Patristic thought, which was given wide currency through J. H. Newman, contrasts with the Athanasian identification of kat 'oikonomían with alēthôs.

[13]   The question must be asked how far the Byzantine elaboration of the Cappadocian distinction between the uncreated energies (enérgeiai or dynámeis) and the essence or being (ousía) of God retreats from this Athanasian position as to the intrinsic knowability of God, and how far it bars the way in any intelligible movement from the "Economic" Trinity to the "Immanent" Trinity – even when that intelligible movement is not any logico-rational or speculative intrusion into the ineffable sanctum of the Mystery of God. The Byzantine thesis that all we can say positively of God manifests

Trinity with the "Immanent" Trinity, and makes the doctrine of the Holy Trinity absolutely basic and essential in the Christian understanding of God. If, however, God has made himself intelligibly accessible to us in this way, through the Son and in the Spirit, the knowledge of God thus mediated, precisely because it is a knowledge of God in his unlimited and eternal reality, is one in which we know that He infinitely transcends our conceptions of him. Precisely in apprehending him we know him to be incomprehensible. It was this Athanasian rather than the Cappadocian position that was taken over by Hilary in the West.

Nowhere more than in the doctrine of the Trinity is theological truth situated beyond the concepts we use in that to which the concepts refer and which they help us to entertain in our thought, but which cannot be defined within the limits of our concepts. Such is the truth of the mystery of the Triune God before which all our forms of thought and speech break off as inadequate, but they are not for that reason false[14]. They are inadequate because of their truth, i.e. because the sheer reality of the Triune God resists our formalisations and does not allow his transcendent Mystery to be trapped within them.

That then is the kind of apophatic knowledge that arises out of and is controlled by the homooúsion, the positive ineffability of God who in making himself known through the Son and in the Spirit reveals that he infinitely transcends the grasp of our minds, but who through the Son and in the Spirit lifts us up to the level of participation in God where we are opened out for union and communion with him far beyond the limits of our creaturely existence — which is another way of describing théosis. It is precisely there and in that way, however, that we are restrained by the sheer holiness and majesty of the divine Being from transgressing the bounds of our creaturely being in inquiring beyond what is given through the Son and in the Spirit, and therefore from thinking presumptuously and illegitimately and unworthily of God.

That is the way in which fundamental questions have to be raised about what is proper and what is not proper to "read back" into the Being of God, or rather into the Being of God who has for ever become man among us without ceasing to be eternal God. As we have already seen, that is a question forced on us by the identification of the love of God with the crucified Christ, in which the love of the Father and the love of the Holy Spirit, which are one undivided love, are fully involved. But take another exampel, from Cyril of Alexandria in respect of the concept of causality. Was he right in claiming that to speak of "causality", which implies the superiority of cause over effect, in respect of the relation of God the Father to the Son, or of God to the Spirit, is highly improper? Thus, with all due weight given to apóphasis, we must ask how this affects the traditional idea of the "impassibility" of God on the one hand, and the traditional relic of "supordinationism" in the doctrine of God on the other hand. If we are to follow

not his nature but the things about his nature (Gregory Nazianzen, Oratio XXXVIII. 7; John of Damascus, De fide orthodoxa I.4) seems to put a question mark before any doctrine of an "Immanent" or "Ontological" Trinity, yet Orthodox theology does not rest content merely with an "Economic" Trinity, for the uncreated energies through and in which God makes himself known to us are proper to and are inseparable from the divine essence which nevertheless remains unapproachable and unknowable.

[14]   Cf. Calvin, Institutio I.13.18f.; II.16.2f., where the same point is made with regard to the doctrines of the Trinity and of Atonement: Though theological statements are inadequate and may even have a measure of impropriety about them, they are not for that reason false.

through the implications of Rahner's identity between the "Immanent" Trinity and the "Economic" Trinity, must we not be prepared for this kind of reconstruction of some of our basic concepts of God as they have been formulated in dogmatic tradition? If we are not prepared to do this, are we not after all retreating into the division between the De Deo Uno and the De Deo Trino, and therefore into the kind of isolation of the Trinity which is absolutely locked within itself, which Rahner, no less than Barth, clearly deplores (p. 18f.)?

The identity between the Trinity of the economy of salvation and the Trinity of God as he is in himself has further *consequences* which, when explored, press upon us additional questions about Rahner's exposition, especially regarding the concepts of *propriety* and *person.*

<div align="center">2.</div>

It is one of the merits and the ecumenical advantages of Rahner's treatise that he seeks to determine more specifically the intrinsic *proprieties* of the personal self-communication of God, which has been seriously neglected in the West where the concept of what may be appropriated to one divine person from another (idíōma hypostáseōs) has too often done duty for what is ontologically proper to him (idíōma hypostatikón). That is a habit that may well have been encouraged in Roman Catholic theology by the common employment of a distinction between *notional,* to speak of the distinctiveness of the persons in terms of their relations, as in the abstract qualities of unoriginatedness, paternity, filiation, spiration, and *essential,* to speak of the one essence of God in distinction from his personal modes of subsistence, which is to be affirmed fully of each person as well as of God as a whole (p. 77f.)[15]. Rahner seeks to take Western thought further, and here in line with the second Vatican Council moves closer to the intention of Eastern Orthodox theology. Starting from the mission of the Incarnate Son, which is not merely appropriated to him but is proper to him, for the Incarnation falls within the life of God, he points out that here we have something which belongs to the Logos alone which is the history of one divine person in contrast to the other divine persons (p. 23). There is a peculiarity in this self-communication of God in Christ which is determined by the peculiarity of the second person. Thus Rahner returns to the classical Greek patristic view that it is only the Son or the Word who in accordance with his proper nature precisely as Son or Word of God might become incarnate. It belongs inalienably to the hypostatic union that Christ really is in himself waht he is in revelation, and that what he is as Son and Word in revelation he is, and is exclusively, in the triune God, the one Son and Word of the Father, for the hypostatic union "outwards" *is* the corresponding divine hypostasis (pp. 24–33). Since the hypostatic union constitutes the paradigm case in which the general principel for a doctrine of the Trinity is verified, Rahner then goes on the show on that ground that the three self-communications of God as Father, Son and

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[15] Cf. the papers read to the Academy by J. Lecuyer, Les relations trinitaires, and S. Dockx, La doctrine trinitaire, both on March 19. See St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica Ia, q. 32, a. 3. St. Thomas defines "notion" as: id quod est propria ratio cognoscendi divinam personam – this is apparently a rendering of the Greek gnórisma or idíoma gnōristikón.

Holy Spirit are the self-communication of the one God in the three relational ways in which God subsists, and so establishes the idiótēs gnōristikē or idíōma gnōristikón, as the Greeks call it, of each person ontologically in the "Immanent" as well as in the "Economic" Trinity. However, in the development of his exposition, Rahner's way of specifying the distinctive proprieties of the two missions of the Son and of the Spirit in terms of the two basic modes of truth and love (replacing the Augustinian-Thomist intelligence and love)[16] does not seem to fit adequately the way in which he seeks to establish their ontological ground in the one divine self-communication of the Father through the Son and in the Spirit, while his use of the Anselmian principle of the "opposition of relation" in justifying this did not satisfy the Orthodox or even seem to convey very well what he intended by it. When we compare the Anselmian principle, "In God all is one except where an opposition of relation exists"[17], with the Athanasian principle, "Since they are one, and the Godhead himself is one, the same things are said of the Son, which are said of the Father, except his being said to be the Father"[18], the divergence may appear to be little more than terminological. But if so, "the opposition of relation" needs more than a logical clarification, for rather more is indicated in the property-relations of the divine persons than can be formally expressed[19]. That is to say, the distinctive proprieties within the "Immanent" Trinity cannot be derived by way of logical explanation even of biblical statements, independently of any consideration of the different states of affairs in the actual missions of the Son and the Spirit, without lapsing back into abstract notional relations and qualities. This seems evident, for example, in Rahner's analysis of the ideas of "mutuality" and "utterance", which leads him to hold that, since "mutuality" presupposes two acts, there is no mutual love between the Father and the Son (p. 106), and that since only the Logos is "uttered", there is no reciprocal "Thou" within the Trinity (p. 76). But in both instances he is misled by a rational analysis of merely inter-human connections, and then allows connections of that kind to dictate what can and cannot be within the interpersonal relations in God. Moreover this empties into mere abstractions the New Testament revelation which speaks of a mutual knowing and loving between the Father and the Son, the Son and the Father, which is clearly not limited to the economic inhomination of the Son. The fact is that here in the "Immanent" Trinity as in the "Economic" Trinity we have to do with realities of a religious and transcendent and not just a logical order, namely, the distinctive properties and operations of each person, ontologically grounded in his *incommunicabilis exsistentia*

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[16]   From the account of this by S. Dockx (n. 15): "Cette essence divine, comme terme immanent de l'intelligence, se retrouve identiquement dans les trois personnes et, de plus, personnellement dans le Verbe. De même l'essence divine, comme terme immanent d'amour, se retrouve identiquement dans les trois personnes mais, de plus, personnellement dans l'Esprit-Saint. C'est de la sorte que la mission du Verbe se distingue réellement de la mission de l'Esprit. La distinction des deux missions résulte de la distinction réelle des personnes et de la distinction réelle du don de sagesse d'avec celui de la charité."

[17]   Anselm, De processione Spiritus Sancti, I: Schmidt (n. 6), p. 180f.; Concilium Florentinum XI: Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta, ed. J. Alberigo et al. (³1972), p. 570f.: omnia sunt unum, ubi non obviat relationis oppositio.

[18]   Athanasius, Contra Arianos I.22; De decretis XXIII.

[19]   Cf. the "antinomic thinking" in Orthodox, especially Palamite, theology, which proceeds by way of oppositions of contrary but equally true propositions. Far from involving a logical movement of thought, however, this kind of antimonic or oppositional thought is intended to point beyond to real if ineffable distinctions in God's Being. See V. Lossky, In the Image and Likeness of God (Engl. transl. 1974), pp. 51ff.

(in Richard of St. Victor's sense), which cannot be attributed to the other persons, although they all share inseparably, equally and fully in the communis exsistentia of the one God in such a way as mutually to indwell and coinhere in one another[20]. Here then something more akin to what Rahner calls "ontic explanation" is needed, that is, one in which a true and in part a deeper apprehension of the reality indicated by divine revelation is reached and language is used which is moulded by that reality, and not vice versa. That is precisely what happened, for example, as Athanasius has shown so clearly in several works, in the paradigm case when the Nicene Fathers developed the homoousion from their exegesis of and reflection on the biblical revelation and what it has to say about the relation of the Son and the Father, and then used a non-biblical term adapted for the purpose to express it.

Even Rahner's schematism which involves the relating of love to the propriety of the Spirit would seem to point to the need for a more adequate development of the mutual relation in love between the Father and the Son — and that in turn would radically affect the concepts of person and of relation, carrying them beyond the logical derivation and explanation of these concepts which Western, and especially Roman Catholic theology, has been caught up in the Boethian-Thomist tradition. It may well be that a combination of the teaching of the Greek Fathers with that which stems from Richard of St. Victor (who was highly critical of Boethius) might offer more scope for transcending our difficulties and divergences, in offering us a concept of the person which is (not logically) but ontologically derived from the intra-trinitarian life of God as a communion of love. But even within the field that Rahner himself moves, however, the difficulties he creates through his logical approach to the doctrines of relations and distinctive proprieties could be modified considerably, if they could not be overcome, through a fuller and deeper deployment of the doctrine of perichôrēsis which takes our thought up onto a different level altogether from that of the opposition of relations as Rahner explains and uses it[21].

3.

A cognate point at which there was recurrent criticism of Rahner's thought is his treatment of the "modern" concepts of the *person* as "a centre of consciousness and activity" which he considers no longer suitable to express the internal relations of Father, Son and Holy Spirit to one another, and, behind that, the logical status and function of basic concepts, such as "person" and "essence" in Trinitarian dogma. Presupposing that since these concepts belong to the dogma of the Church they intend only a logical and not an ontic explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity, Rahner claims that it is not a priori impossible that this kind of explanation of primitive revelation may be presented also by means of other concepts (pp. 54ff.). Legitimate as this may be[22], it allows Rahner to replace the concept of "person" with a "distinct manner of subsisting" in speaking of the Trinity ad intra, while also employing the concept of "person" to speak of the trinitarian relations of God with us in Christian life and worship, where precisely because

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[20] Richard of St. Victor, De Trinitate IV.8−25: Sources chrétiennes, 63 (1959), pp. 247ff. It should be noted that Rahner (n.1) himself prefers St. Thomas' concept of person (subsistens distinctum in natura rationali) to that of either Boethius or Richard of St. Victor, The Trinity, p. 104.

[21] Cf. John of Damascus, De fide orthodoxa I.8: Patr.lat.94, 828f.

[22] Cf. the paper of J. Lecuyer (n. 15).

the self-communication of God aims at the innermost centre of the human person and is active there in a "person-constituting way", interpersonal relations between God and man are very much in place in our understanding. There we cannot but think of God as intensely personal. Is this then what Rahner means by prescinding or abstracting from the free self-communication of God when we make the passage from the "Economic" to the "Immanent" Trinity? If so, then has he not severely damaged his basic axiom that the "Immanent" Trinity is the "Economic" Trinity and vice versa? Granted that there are modes and images in which we speak of personal relations between creaturely human beings which we cannot legitimately read back into God, nevertheless the basic lines of connection in Christian theology would be cut if we could not speak of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as "persons" within the "Immanent" Trinity as well as within the "Economic" Trinity. If we cannot use "person" to speak of the intra-trinitarian relations of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then we cannot use it to speak of real personal distinctions within the economy of God's self-communication to us in salvation history either, without driving a wedge in between God's self-revelation and his self-impartation. Yet Rahner undoubtedly holds that the self-communication of God in Jesus Christ in the dimension of salvation history is a real mediation of God's inner life, for that is the pivotal significance of the hypostatic union upon which everything else rests. At the same time Rahner's argument has put him into a position where the weight of emphasis is apparently thrown back again upon the De Deo Uno, and upon the Latin tendency to begin with the one essence of God as a whole, and then to go on to the distinction or persons, which is precisely what Rahner intends to break away from in taking a more Eastern and indeed a more Evangelical approach through the "Economic" Trinity (p. 17).

What then of the "modern" concept of the individual person? According to Rahner, when we speak of persons in the plural, we inevitably think of several spiritual centres of activity, of several subjectivities and liberties, but we cannot think in this way of God — "not only because there is only *one* essence, hence *one* absolute self-presence, but also because there is only *one* self-utterance of the Father, the Logos. The Logos is not the one who utters, but the one who is uttered. And there is no *mutual* love", as Rahner claims, "between the Father and the Son, for this would presuppose two acts" (p. 106). Hence in order to safeguard the doctrine of the Trinity from tritheistic tendencies, the reading into God under cover of "three persons" multiple essence and multiple subjectivity, Rahner offers some fresh forms of speech, although he admits that the best way of dealing with the problem is to speak in the context of salvation history naming the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and bearing in mind that one God is spoken of throughout. He proposes, however, that instead of speaking of three persons in a formal context, we might speak of "three distinct ways of being there" (in the economy of salvation) and "three different ways of subsistence" (immanently) for the one God. As to the term "ways", it could be used to suggest that "the persons are there as in relation to one another, this relationship, where one of opposition, constituting the difference in God".[23]

When the economy of salvation has to be propounded in more formal terms, he puts forward such formulations as these: "The one God subsists in three manners of subsisting;

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[23] Taken from Rahner's article on Divine Trinity: Sacramentum Mundi, Engl. transl., 6 (1970), p. 302. The word "ways" in this translation corresponds to the word "manners" in the treatise on the Trinity, pp. 109ff.

the manners of subsisting of Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct relations of opposition; hence the 'three' are not the same one; the Father, Son and Spirit are the One God each in a different manner of subsisting and in this sense we may count 'three' in God" etc. (p. 113f.). He explains that a manner of subsisting is distinct from another by its relation of opposition, and is real by virtue of its identity with the divine Being. "He who" subsists in such a way is truly God. The point of formulations like these, he claims, is that they tell us just as much as those in which the word "person" is used, but without falling into modalism, and at the same time they avoid tritheism.

While there was uniform rejection in the Colloquium of the individualistic notion of the person as a separate centre of consciousness and will with which to speak of the distinctive persons of the Holy Trinity, it was felt that too much was being thrown out by Rahner, damaging the classical understanding of the consubstantial communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as distinct persons co-existing and coinhering in mutual love and life and activity. Rahner's use of "manner of subsisting" might well fit the Old Testament accounts of Wisdom, Word and Spirit, and might even refer fittingly to the Spirit in the New Testament, but it is hardly adequate for the relation between the Father and the Son in the New Testament, where a relationship is implied which is not limited to the incarnate life[24]. Moreover the concrete personalisation of God's self-communication to us in Jesus Christ and in the distinct identity of the Holy Spirit requires us to give *consciousness* some real place in the notion of person as applied to the three persons in God. Not only is the divine consciousness proper to the nature of the One God common to Father, Son and Holy Spirit alike, but each divine person in virtue of his distinctiveness shares in it differently and appropriately, so that we would have to say that while Father, Son and Holy Spirit constitute one indivisible God they do so as three conscious Subjects in mutual love and life and activity. That is to say, *coinherence* applies fully to the three divine persons as conscious of one another in their distinctive otherness and oneness[25]. Such a view could only be taken along with the idea that we must think of God himself as Person, but of this one Person as existing and meeting us in the triunity of persons in one God[26]. God is three persons but he is the infinite and universal Person in three distinct modes of subsistence, a fullness and communion of personal Being in himself who as such is essentially and creatively personalising, or person-constituting, in his activities toward us through the Son and in the Spirit[27].

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[24] Cf. the paper of W. A. Wainwright, The Roots of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament with reference to Karl Rahner's The Trinity, read to the Colloquium on March 18. See also the article by Rahner (n. 23), pp. 295ff.

[25] This is similar to the view of B. Lonergan, Pater, Filius et Spiritus Sanctus per unam conscientiam realem sunt tria subiecta conscia tum sui tum cuiusque alterius tum actus sui tam notionalis quam essentialis: De Deo Trino, 2 (1964), p. 186.

[26] This seems to be the implication also of Anselm's teaching that "the one God *is* three persons, and the three persons *are* one God", and that "God does not exist apart from person", De processione Spiritus Sancti, XVI: Schmidt (n. 6), p. 218f. – although Anselm himself did not draw it. To speak of God himself as Person, as well as of God as three Persons, does not of course imply that there is a quaternity of persons in God – see Lonergan (n. 25), p. 163f. – but that in turn does not imply that we cannot say of the Godhead that he is also the infinite and universal Person in three "modes of existence" – see D. M. Baillie, God was in Christ (1948), p. 114; C. Welch, The Trinity in Contemporary Theology (1953), p. 209.

[27] This line of thinking would be consonant with the views of Richard of St. Victor, De Trinitate IV.22,24, and Duns Scotus, Ordinatio I. 23.1, in the distinction between the Trinity as communis exsistentia and the incommunicabilis exsistentia of each person of the Trinity. God, the Triune, is a fullness of personal being and as such is the creative source of all other personal being.

This requires much fuller use of the patristic concept of perichórēsis than Rahner seems to make (p. 79), if a richer concept of personal being involving consciousness is to be appropriate and helpful, and not to lead in the tritheistic direction which he fears. It would bring into the concept of the person a deeper ontology in which a person precisely as person is free to go outside of himself while remaining in himself in relation to others what he distinctively is. In other words, it helps to build into the basic concept of the person inter-personal relations making the person an onto-relational concept which by its very nature unlike the static concept of "individua substantia", is not amenable to logical manipulation. This is much closer to the understanding of person in modern Orthodox theology in its rethinking of the line of development in trinitarian and anthropological doctrine from the Cappadocians to Maximus[28]. An aspect of this understanding of personal being is that it appears to overcome the heavy psychological slant in the modern notion of consciousness, and so makes it more possible to employ it in this revised form in a doctrine of the Trinity.

Something of the same effect is evident in Rahner's account of God's self-impartation to us in the Spirit whereby he creatively brings about within us acceptance of that self-impartation in faith, hope and love. That is to say, through Christ and in the Spirit God freely steps outside of himself in a movement of self-communication which creates a counterpart in the human coefficient of his revelation in which we freely go beyond ourselves in a movement of love and decision in reception of that divine self communication (pp. 63, 66, 88f., 91ff., 96ff.). Behind this lies Rahner's fundamental thesis as to the concentration of the concrete self-giving of God in grace, not vicariously by other realities through their transcendental relation to God, but directly through the Incarnation and in the Spirit. That is a self-communication which includes the human subject in a real-ontological relation with God established on the ground of the hypostatic union in which God really enters into our human situation and assumes it to himself, and thereby grounds and embraces the answering knowledge and love of the believer in free interpersonal union and communion with himself[29]. The intense personalisation of man's relations with God in the mediation of grace only through the Son and in the Spirit, in which what is given remains sovereign in its identity with the Giver, sets aside created intermediations between God and man, for that kind of indirect sharing of himself with the creature not only falls short of a genuine self-communication but implies that God as he is in himself still remains at a distance, and holds himself back from us even in the economy of salvation[30]. The detailed stress that Rahner lays upon the person-constituting self-communication of God to the personal recipient is an indication of the determination

[28]   See Lossky (n. 19), 6, The Theological Notion of the Human Person, pp. 111ff.; J. Zizioulas, Human Capacity and Incapacity. A Theological Exploration of Personhood: Scott. Journ. of Theol. 28 (1975), pp. 401–447.

[29]   This is basically the same as the earlier teaching of Karl Barth, that the Holy Spirit is God in his freedom to be present to the creature and to realise the relation of the creature to himself through his own presence to it in the form of a relation of himself to himself. In revelation, then, the Spirit is God coming to man, being in him, and opening up man, making him capable and ready for himself, and thus achieve his revelation in him: K. Barth, Church Dogmatics, 1, 1 (new transl. 1975), p. 450f.

[30]   It is in this context that Rahner's (n. 1) critical question to the notion of "created grace" is to be appreciated, pp. 13, 22f., 26ff., etc. A different view is taken by S. Dockx (n. 15), who contrasts to Rahner's limitation of the mission of the Word through his incarnation in human nature, "the visible mission" of the Word in the world, St. Thomas' wider view of "the invisible mission" beyond the visible mission, in the understanding of the believer in a state of grace, which leaves room for mystical experience.

he has to recover the doctrine of the Trinity from its isolation so that it may be grounded in a living experience of Father, Son and Holy Spirit within the life and worship of the Church. However, the principle that it is the "Economic" Trinity that must guide and control our thought and speech of God does seem to mean that the relation of the Incarnate Son to the Father in personal communion through love and prayer and worship should play a more significant part in our understanding of "person", not only in God's interpersonal relations with us, but in the interpersonal relations within God himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thus instead of being given up because of its modern difficulties, the concept of the person should rather be remoulded and redefined through a development of trinitarian theology, and thus be charged with a fullness of Christian meaning also for use outside the Church.

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Rahner's fundamental position is clear: The *"Economic"* Trinity is already the *"Immanent"* Trinity, because the basic event of the whole economy of salvation is the self-communication of God to the world through the incarnation of the Son and the sending of the Spirit, and because all that God the Father is to us in Jesus Christ the Son and in the Holy Spirit would not really be the self-communication of God if the two-fold mission were not intrinsic to him, as "processions" or "outgoings" of his being bringing with them the distinction of the three persons in God himself. The formal thesis ran: "The 'Economic' Trinity is the 'Immanent' Trinity, and the 'Immanent' Trinity is the 'Economic' Trinity." Most of his discussion appears to relate to the second part of that axiom, the Trinity *ad intra* is the Trinity *ad extra;* but much more attention must be given to the first half of the axiom, the Trinity *ad extra* is the Trinity *ad intra.* The effect of that would be to make for closer rapprochement with Orthodox and Evangelical theology because it would mean that theological statements about God are essentially doxological statements of intrinsically open structure just because they derive from and intend the Triune Mystery of God, and therefore resist the kind of logico-rational thinking which appears to offend against the understanding of God as greater than we can conceive and to detract from his sublime ineffability. In other words, the doctrine of the Trinity must be so stated that it is not controlled from behind by a prior conceptual system, such as one finds in scholastic metaphysics, or in an independent and antecedent De Deo Uno, but only in such a way that it reconstructs and transforms the framework of thought we bring with us. That is indeed the powerful implication of Rahner's point, also made so strongly by Barth, that the Incarnation of the Son of God in our world falls within and not without the inner life of God (p. 23), for that forces us to operate with the essential openness of the world, created and upheld by the Son in the Spirit, to God the Father. Hence the movement from the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit requires a corresponding movement in the Spirit and through the Son to the Father. That is significantly applicable to our understanding of the creation as well as the Incarnation, so that the creation must be regarded, in a certain way, as in God and our understanding of it have a trinitarian structure. When we approach the Triunity of the ineffable God we are on holy ground where the Cherubim and Seraphim hide their faces and theologians must take the shoes off their feet and fall down in wonder, worship and praise before the incomprehensible Majesty of the Eternal God. That does not simply mean that this is the right way to end up an account of the Holy Trinity but that all our statements about the

Trinity from beginning to end must arise out of and remain rooted in a continuity of eusébeia and theosébeia. That must be the case of the whole economy of salvation and the whole of our liturgical life have a trinitarian structure. This is what *theologia* really is.

Thomas F. Torrance, Edinburgh