

TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN SELF-UNDERSTANDING: EXAMINING
THE THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF A RELATIONAL
TRINITY IN RESPONSE TO FUNCTIONAL SUBORDINATIONISM

By

RACHEL G. BLANTON

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty
in the McAfee School of Theology
at Mercer University
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

Atlanta, GA

2023

TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN SELF-UNDERSTANDING: EXAMINING
THE THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF A RELATIONAL
TRINITY IN RESPONSE TO FUNCTIONAL SUBORDINATIONISM

by

RACHEL G. BLANTON

Approved:

_____ Date _____

Graham B. Walker, Ph.D.

Faculty Supervisor, John and Julia Zellars Chair of Theology

_____ Date _____

Angela N. Parker, Ph.D.

Director, Master of Theological Studies Program

_____ Date _____

C. Gregory DeLoach, D.Min.

Dean, School of Theology

© 2023

RACHEL G. BLANTON

All Rights Reserved

DEDICATION

Dedicated to my husband, Ashton, and my children, Sophia and Theodore.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am thankful for Dr. Graham Walker's guidance and the freedom in learning McAfee School of Theology has afforded me. I would also like to acknowledge my friends in theology, who have graciously allowed me the space to sharpen and define my theological understanding.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vii
CHAPTER	
1. An Introduction to two Opposing views of the Trinity	1
2. <i>Equal in Essence but Eternally Subordinate in Role: The Implications of a Subordinationist Evangelical Trinitarian Doctrine in a post-Roe World.....</i>	14
3. <i>He Was Made Man: A Hegelian Reading of Reconciliation and the Radical Implications of the Incarnation.....</i>	28
4. <i>Totus Christus: Examining a Trinity in Relation.....</i>	42
5. <i>The Eschatological Hope of the Trinity: Lessons from a Trinity in Relation.....</i>	56
REFERENCES.....	65

ABSTRACT

RACHEL G. BLANTON

TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN SELF-UNDERSTANDING: EXAMINING
THE THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF A RELATIONAL
TRINITY IN RESPONSE TO FUNCTIONAL SUBORDINATIONISM

Under the direction of Dr. Graham Walker, Ph.D.

In the conservative evangelical Church, a growing argument has been made for a hierarchical Trinity in which the Son is eternally subordinated to the Father in role and function, which pits itself against the trinitarian doctrine established by the early Church through the Nicene Creed. This conception of a hierarchical Trinity is often known as subordinationism or functional subordinationism, which brings into question the nature and role of Christ within the Godhead and in relation to humanity. The Council of Nicaea in 325 CE solidified and legitimated the beginnings of Trinitarian doctrine, established the nature of Christ, and yielded the Nicene Creed, which made the Church's stance on the Trinity permanent: the Godhead is of one substance. Subordinationism believes in tandem with Christ's subordinate role that women are to be subordinate to men, which has deep reverberations in the personal lives of Christians, the greater Church, and society. Two case studies will be analyzed: the 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson* ruling, which overturned *Roe v. Wade*, and evangelical "role relationship" theology. This thesis has both theological and philosophical goals. The theological goals are to firmly establish an understanding that the Triune God exists through the relationship of the three divine Persons by using the works of modern Protestant, Catholic, and eastern Orthodox theologians and to explore

the nature and soteriological work of Christ. Philosophically, this work looks to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel to understand the nature of Christ expressed through the Infinite's desire for reconciliation of the finite via the incarnation. This work finds overwhelming support for a relational Trinity established through theological and philosophical thought and connects the two through Christ to explain how our understanding of Christ's role in the Trinity reverberates into our own lives and that the Trinity acts as a model for human relations. Lastly, this work will look toward the eschaton and the missional role of the Triune God in reconciliation, which has profound implications for understanding our God in relation.

CHAPTER 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO TWO OPPOSING VIEWS OF THE TRINITY

Thesis Statement

While the traditional patriarchal model of the Trinity utilized by the reformed evangelical tradition continues to gain traction, legitimating a hierarchical representation of the Triune God which has detrimentally affected the relationship between men and women, it has become critical to examine the theological and philosophical implications that underlie a relational, or social, model of the Trinity. This work will examine the historical and cultural setting that has allowed evangelical subordinationism to take root by utilizing the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* as a case study and through the writing of modern theologians who offer a heuristic framework for thinking about humanity's relationship with the Triune God. This work will establish a philosophical foundation using the Hegelian philosophical structure to orient the argument toward identification and reconciliation. Hegel's belief that God desires to reconcile with humanity, made clear through the incarnation and salvation, will provide fertile soil for exploring a Trinity in relation. To better understand this radically consubstantial model of the Trinity and God's soteriological workings, Catherine LaCugna will be utilized to continue the dialogue on the Trinity and its reverberations into our lives, along with the work of Jürgen Moltmann and his theology of Christ's radical solidarity with humanity. Here, in this mystery of the Trinity and the Incarnation, we begin to grasp an understanding of the economy of salvation and God's relationality.

This thesis will attempt to plot a way forward from the perspective that the Trinity is *being in communion*, offered up as an alternative to the hierarchical understanding of the Trinity

in which Christ is eternally subordinate to the Father that has become prevalent in conservative white evangelical theology, based in part on a legacy of fundamentalism, literalism, and biblical inerrancy. In considering these opposing Trinitarian models (hierarchical vs. relational) and understanding that God acts as a mirror for human relations, it becomes clear that the hierarchical model leads to a faulty worldview and damaged relationships, while the relational model leads to a just and loving community-oriented Church that models the true inner nature of the Trinity. Through this, we begin to understand how deeply the inner relationship of the Trinity reverberates into our own lives and throughout the greater Church.

Statement of the problem

In the conservative white American evangelical church, there is a growing conception of the Trinity that is subordinating in nature, which pits itself against the Trinitarian doctrine of the early church. The Council of Nicaea in 325 CE solidified the beginnings of Trinitarian doctrine and yielded the Nicene Creed, which made the Church's stance on the nature of Christ permanent: Christ was begotten from one God of one substance (*homoousios*)¹. The Council of Nicaea convened for several reasons, but the most important to this argument is that it refuted Arianism and provided consensus on Christ's nature. Arianism, condemned as a heresy by the church, is the belief that Christ was created by God the Father and was, therefore, neither coeternal nor consubstantial, but God's first and most highly exalted creature. While this may sound like a minor technical issue, theology continues to experience the reverberations of this diversion in theological thought to this day. Evangelical Christians have entered a dangerous new era of subordinationism that distinctly places Christ below the Godhead, subordinate eternally in role and will, rather than three eternally co-equal Persons as the Trinity has been understood

¹ The Nicene Creed was revised in 381 CE and is also known as the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, which further defines the Persons of the Trinity and their relations to one another.

since late Antiquity. Through subordinationism, Jesus Christ becomes the Son ever willing to submit to the Father's will rather than the eternal and co-equal Person of the Trinity.

Subordinationism within the Trinity echoes into the Church, of which Christ is the head. In this new reimagining of the relationship and nature of the Trinity, a hierarchical system is set in place that opens the door for abuse and subordination of women and the marginalized, xenophobia, racism, and more. This view of the Trinity is most distinctly represented in the relation between the sexes and the permanent subordination of women to men, referred to as "role subordination," which is the idea that women are subordinate in role and function. The hierarchical model also wields incredible political and monetary power that cannot be ignored in the United States. Proponents of this dominance and submission view of the Trinity are quick to distance themselves from the word subordinationism because of the connotations of Arianism; however, the similarities and faulty theology must not be ignored.

Additionally, into the equation enters the fundamentalist and evangelical argument of biblical inerrancy, a modern fundamentalist understanding of the Bible in which scripture is, without error, totally infallible. Historically, it was understood that the Bible was divinely inspired but written and composed by human hands, so some discrepancies were expected (both Origen and Jerome held this understanding). When combined with biblical literalism and fundamentalism, this modern idea of the absolute authority of the Bible has been used as a tool, most bluntly since the late 1970s, trumping anything deemed contrary to evangelical thought. This includes women's rights, issues of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, the splintering of denominations, and much more. Biblical inerrancy and literalism, sola scriptura, and a disregard for tradition as an ethical source become the blunt object used to aggressively knock others out of the equation for total control of the Christian faith narrative.

Background and Need

According to Kevin Giles in his work, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God & the Contemporary Gender Debate*: Athanasius, the great opponent of Arianism, “saw, more than a thousand years before anyone else did, that as God's work in history moved forward and as culture changed, appealing to the Bible alone could not resolve the new questions of a new age” (Giles, 9). It would be too easy to ask if the Church has continuously operated based on a “chain of command” Trinity with little thought for the actual doctrine of the Trinity because of how much harm conservative evangelicals have done in such a short period of time, but, there has been a steady and careful examination of trinitarian doctrine by theologians, clergy, and lay people for nearly two millennia.

This careful work on trinitarian doctrine has yielded an alternative to this modern brand of evangelical heresy that has been present since the early Church. For centuries, Christian writers have explored God's relational and loving aspects that have formed a firm basis for modern trinitarian theology that explores the Trinity's perichoretic inner life.² There is a need to reclaim the relational Trinity that has been represented for centuries and correct the faulty understanding of subordinate roles within the Trinity that has recently become prevalent among evangelical protestants. In reclaiming a Trinity in relation, work is also done to balance relations between the sexes and to liberate women and the marginalized from patriarchal subordination in the Church.

² One point for orientation: The Cappadocian Fathers understood the Persons of the Trinity to share the same divine *ousia* and understood the Trinity to exist in perichoresis. These men were responsible for further enriching the Nicene Creed and trinitarian orthodoxy.

Purpose of the Study

This study's purpose is to better understand the problem: a current trend of subordinationism in modern white conservative evangelical thought and how it leads to a fractured Church life and a faulty worldview. In a careful examination of this ideology, a greater picture will emerge in hierarchical trends of the Church and society, specifically regarding subordination. This work will then attempt to identify and correct this faulty ideology by illustrating an alternative through an opposing viewpoint: a relational, egalitarian Trinity that has existed since the formation of trinitarian doctrine in the days of the early church. By first examining the cultural environment in which subordinationist thought has taken root and then exploring the theological and philosophical implications of the Trinity, this work will cast forth to modern trinitarian theologians like Catherine LaCugna and Jürgen Moltmann to illustrate the author's point concerning what we understand to be true about the Trinity and how it intimately affects our lives.

Significance of the Study

It is essential to understand that while the references offered in this thesis will be strategic and cannot possibly encompass the entirety of trinitarian thought, it will serve as a strong and measured response to the rising trend in faulty ideology regarding a hierarchical understanding of the Trinity that has developed in conservative evangelical theology. While the way we view the internal structure of the Triune God may seem insignificant, the perceived inner life of the Trinity ripples out into more significant reverberations in daily life. If the Persons of the Trinity can be subordinated, then so can women, minorities, and other marginalized individuals. For white conservative evangelicals, this is felt most explicitly in the subordination of women's roles in marriage and the barring of women from ordination, but it extends far beyond this into

American culture, society, and laws that govern us. It is critical to examine this trend and respond, offering a more relational, Christ-centered way forward as the greater Church that liberates women and the marginalized from subordination.

Research Questions

Question:

- What are the theological and philosophical implications of a subordinationist evangelical trinitarian theology, and what is the response from the perspective of a relational Trinity?

Sub-Questions:

1. What is the hyper-masculine/hierarchical reading of the Trinity put forth by Christian evangelicalism, and what have been the repercussions of this faulty thinking?
2. What are the theological and philosophical implications of both the hierarchical and relational Trinity utilizing arguments made in favor of Nicene orthodoxy and the Hegelian understanding of reconciliation?
3. What does this relational Trinity highlighted in this thesis by modern theologians such as Catherine LaCugna and Jürgen Moltmann teach us about how the Trinity mirrors our lives?

Hypothesis

White evangelical Protestantism utilizes the notion of biblical inerrancy to inform a view of a subordinated Trinity in which Christ is no longer co-equal or consubstantial as the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed has proclaimed. It is evident in examining larger cultural trends that this modern theology produces a worldview that is not only heretical in its thinking but is damaging to women and marginalized individuals. In examining the co-equal, co-eternal Trinity represented in the Creeds, it becomes clear that a Trinity in relation has been persistent

throughout the centuries and is still relevant today. This work will give a voice of support that this relational Trinity is not just possible but fruitful and doctrinally orthodox, and through it show that there is a reason for trinitarian theology focused on relationality and equality. This work will also address the white conservative Christian tendency for purity and harm and show that this tendency is indicative of the hierarchical Trinity in evangelical theology.

Research Design

- This thesis will rely upon several modern theologians across Christian faith traditions to provide a firm theological basis for social trinitarianism.
- This thesis will rely upon Hegelian dialectics as a philosophical, theoretical framework and will serve as a lens through which the research can be interpreted.
- This work will also rely upon the strategic analysis of church doctrine.
- This work will seek to uncover deep currents, trends, and themes in society and faith.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis will offer an alternative to the current evangelical hierarchical understanding of the Trinity by utilizing theology and philosophy. In addition to the theoretical framework provided by modern theologians, this work will utilize the philosophical tradition established by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, specifically his theories on the incarnation of Christ and reconciliation. Using the theologies of Jürgen Moltmann, Catherine LaCugna, and the philosophy of Hegel, a strong case for a Trinity in relation will come to light, fixed specifically on the salvific acts of the Trinity through Christ. An argument will be made that Christ's identification with humanity and the soteriological acts of the Trinity enfold humanity and reverberate deep into the Christian's life. In examining the opposing views of the

Trinity (relational and hierarchical), a firm refutation of functional subordinationism will be established.

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope

Due to the vast nature of trinitarian doctrine, it will be next to impossible to paint a complete picture of the delicate interplay of the Church and the government, theology, and philosophy against the ever-growing backdrop of conservative evangelical power and dominance. This work will attempt to present the reader with an alternative to this evangelical hierarchical view of the Trinity by illustrating a strong and measured call for the relational model of the Trinity. This work will only enter into dialogue with a limited selection of voices concerning the nature of the Trinity – this will be a strategic undertaking to illustrate the greater point being made that supports, even exhorts, a relational Triune God.

By using several key voices of theology and philosophy as illuminating points, the scope of this work will be selective, but I trust that it will soundly describe a persistent and doctrinally orthodox view of the Trinity, one that has been represented since the early church. It is easy to believe that the evangelical view of the Trinity is not of much concern, but this thesis will show how faulty theology can have real ramifications for daily life. What is seen in the evangelical church today is the rise of an age-old problem, Arianism, and similar subordinationist heresies, ushered in by favorable conditions similar to those of Rome – mainly extreme wealth, political power, patriarchy, and modern ideological tools like fundamentalism and literalism.

Definition of Terms

Subordinationism (Functional Subordinationism) – This is a faulty Trinitarian doctrine that Christ and the Holy Spirit are subordinate to God the Father in various ways. This term covers a variety of explanations, including the Son being of a different substance from the Father, the Son

eternally submitting to the Father's will, and the Trinity operating as a descending chain of command. This term becomes more tenebrous as one examines ontological subordination and relational subordination, in which the Trinity teaches the evangelical that, like Christ, women are to be eternally subordinate in role to men. Suffice it to say that all forms of subordinationism have been declared heretical by the Church.

Arianism – Arianism is a Christological doctrine that holds Christ was neither coeternal nor consubstantial with the Father. Instead, Christ was the highest, most exalted first creature of God. Arius refused to believe that the Godhead's divinity could be split in any way and that God was incapable of suffering. The Council of Nicaea was convened in 325 A.D. to refute Arianism and formally establish the nature of Christ as the same substance as the Father.

Social Trinitarianism – The social doctrine of the Trinity hinges solely upon being in relation and is often characterized as three persons in a loving relationship. Social or relational model(s) of the Trinity allows us to conceptualize God as not only social analogies like Father, Son, and Holy Spirit but as various unities of three and their ability to enfold and reconcile humanity. This serves as a model for human relationships and emphasizes the social and relational essence or nature of God.

Perichoresis – A term that describes how all three Persons of the Trinity occupy the divine space where one cannot comprehend God without comprehending all three Persons of the Trinity simultaneously. This term is a foundational tenet of a relational Trinity, first referenced by Gregory of Nazianzus as *perichoreo*. *Circumincession* is a similar concept of reciprocal existence within the Trinity.

Economic Trinity – The economic Trinity is the one yet threefold agency of Father, Son, and Spirit in the economy of salvation. This is a functional Trinity represented through the life of Jesus Christ and his relationship with God. Its sole emphasis is on soteriology.

Immanent Trinity – The immanent Trinity is the eternal distinctions of Persons within the being of God and designates the relationship of the three consubstantial hypostases.³ The immanent Trinity is the ontological ground of the economic Trinity – this is how the eternal nature of God is to be understood. The immanent and economic Trinities are not separate from each other but rather describe the *what* and *how* of the same Trinity.

Person – The definition of person is essential to trinitarian doctrine. Boethius defines person as an individual substance of a rational nature. Similarly, orthodox theologian John Zizioulas argues that personhood is an ecstatic and hypostatic mode of existence. Understanding person in this more impersonal manner is vital for considering the Persons of the Trinity and the Personhood of Christ

Eschatology – This is a part of theology concerned with last things or the destiny of creation. For Moltmann, eschatology is radically hopeful and transformational. Because speaking of the economy of the Trinity or soteriology is missional in nature, it is also eschatological and working toward a point of fulfillment.

Summary

This work will answer essentially one question: *Why is it important to define the relationship of the Trinity?* Of course, one question spawns many more, so this work will attempt to draw conclusions from philosophy and theology that considers the Triune God as a response

³ Markus Mühling. Immanent/Economic Trinity, in: *Religion Past and Present*. 2011. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1877-5888_rpp_SIM_10307.

to a recent evangelical trend toward subordinationism. Our God is relational, so this must be considered in every aspect of the Christian's life: from how we relate to God, ourselves, and others, to how we are to do church. The role of the Church since the early days has been to correct faulty ideology, and so this must be done considering the rise in subordinationism in the evangelical church. This ideology, that God created Jesus, therefore, being lesser than the Father, ripples out into how evangelical Christians express themselves and relate to others. The Trinity is the basis of our own self-understanding. This thesis will define a Trinity in relation through an examination of philosophy, theology, and church doctrine to define how the Trinity is perichoretic in nature while showing the reader that this view of the Trinity has existed since the early church. It is not a novel idea, so this work is one of reclamation, an attempt to correct faulty ideology and reorient toward the true nature of our Triune God.

Chapter 1 serves as a roadmap for the reader to acclimate themselves to what the author will accomplish in the thesis. It will provide context for the opposing views of the Trinity (hierarchical vs. relational), define subordinationism and several other key terms, and provide the necessary framework to undergird the argument

Chapter 2 will outline the problem represented in this thesis by tracking the rise of modern evangelical subordinationism by using the recent overturning of *Roe v. Wade* as a case study. It will look to understand better how the fundamentalist idea of biblical inerrancy, especially in the case of the *Haustafeln*, has played a part in perpetuating the power structure Trinity in the evangelical mind, along with the political rise of the evangelical right. It will also lean heavily on Kevin Giles' work *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* to survey the evangelical church and modern subordinationism. Further context will be provided on the state of conservative evangelicalism

from Kristin Kobes du Mez's work *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*, and several evangelical theologians will be used to present a counterargument.

Chapter 3 will examine the impact Hegelian thought has on theology by looking at Hegel's understanding of the incarnation and soteriological workings of Christ, which will work to set a firm basis on the role and nature of Christ to refute the modern evangelical understanding of functional subordination. This chapter will utilize the Hegelian Christology of Hans Küng's *The Incarnation of God: An Introduction to Hegel's Theological Thought as Prolegomena to a Future Christology* and examine the importance of tradition as an ethical source.

Chapter 4 will use the Hegelian understanding of the Incarnation to build upon and examine a Trinity in which extreme solidarity undergirds the intratrinitarian relationship and God's relationship to humanity. This chapter will utilize Jürgen Moltmann's *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, which rethinks the Trinity in light of human suffering and God's own solidarity with humanity, and Catherine LaCugna's *God for Us: the Trinity and Christian Life*, which provides a practical understanding of a relational God as/in community and an emphasis on the economy of the Trinity. The overall focus will define a Trinity in relation through examination of the economic and immanent Trinity, Christology, define and situate Arianism in the argument, and leverage perichoresis as a crucial aspect to understanding the Trinity in relation.

Chapter 5 will summarize what has been learned, offering a theologically and philosophically sound refutation of functional subordinationism. This chapter will also find an ally in eastern Orthodox trinitarian theology through John Zizioulas' *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* and ground the overall argument in eschatology. Above all, this work celebrates the profound mystery of a God that is active throughout history and in

our daily lives. By examining a God in relation, we understand that the Trinity offers a practical model to the ecclesial experience of life.

CHAPTER 2

**EQUAL IN ESSENCE BUT ETERNALLY SUBORDINATE IN ROLE: THE
IMPLICATIONS OF A SUBORDINATIONIST EVANGELICAL TRINITARIAN
DOCTRINE IN A POST-ROE WORLD**

Introduction

This chapter will set out to provide a modern benchmark for the real-life ramifications of the social subordination of women and how this ordering of society (man as master of woman) is reflected in the white evangelical imagining of a hierarchical Trinity. This chapter will utilize the June 24, 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson* Supreme Court decision to overturn the *Roe v. Wade* precedent as a prime example of how faulty evangelical theology has grave effects on women – not just in the home but in laws that govern a woman’s body and autonomy. In order to thoroughly examine the theology of a relational Triune God throughout this thesis, one must first examine white evangelical subordinationism, which starkly contrasts the Trinity expressed in the Nicene Creed.

Roe v. Wade was the landmark Supreme Court decision made in 1973 that upheld a woman’s constitutional right to privacy, supported by the liberty guarantee of the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Of course, *Roe* is most widely known to protect a woman’s right to reproductive autonomy; however, this court ruling highlights liberty and privacy – two standards necessary for placing women in a more equitable standing to men. Therefore, the 2022 court overturning of *Roe* via *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* demarcates a fraught new era America has entered concerning not just women’s privacy and liberty but that of the individual. These implications are far-reaching and extend into every facet of American life. The reverberations will be felt acutely in American religion and

Christian theology. In this chapter, I will chart the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, an act that signals the return to a centralized power dynamic of male dominance, once at least partly decentralized through *Roe*, which legally supported a woman's right to choose and upheld her autonomy and privacy. While *Roe* originally answered the question of self-determination in the realm of women's reproductive healthcare, this 2022 overturning of the *Roe* precedent further solidifies the white evangelical desire for the subordination of women to men in realms of gender roles, power, and bodily autonomy, which further supports and legitimates a subordinationist view of the Trinity. This chapter will examine *Roe's* legacy and its importance regarding women's fight for equality and bodily autonomy, examine subordinationism, outline the interplay between subordinationist theology and politics, and probe the biblical foundations of subordinationism.

***Roe v. Wade* – A Landmark Decision for Bodily Autonomy and Women's Privacy**

Roe v. Wade was the benchmark decision that upheld a woman's right to privacy and liberty, specifically concerning procuring an abortion and the barring of a state's interference in this decision. The Supreme Court ruled that, at the time, Texas laws which criminalized abortions were unconstitutional and violated a woman's right to privacy under the due process clause. Privacy was declared a fundamental right, and states could not limit or prohibit such fundamental rights of citizens. The viability of the pregnancy was also considered in this ruling, along with maternal health and the health of the pregnancy. Though the ruling made abortion accessibility the law of the land, states could restrict gestational limits after the first trimester. Prior to *Jackson*, all states in America allowed terminations from 6 weeks ("heartbeat bills") to over 24 weeks or fetal viability (Colorado, Oregon, etc.). Despite *Roe* taking effect in 1973, there have been several attempts to chip away at the ruling. These challenges to *Roe* include *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey* (1992), which established that abortion

restrictions were unconstitutional if they placed an “undue burden” on the woman, *Gonzalez v. Carhart* (2007), which upheld the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act, *Whole Woman’s Health v. Hellerstedt* (2016), which invoked *Casey* to strike down the need for admitting privileges and surgical care center certification, and the 2020 *June Medical Services L.L.C. v. Russo*, which was similar to *Whole Women’s Health* in that it struck down admitting privilege requirements in Louisiana (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022).⁴ The point of each of these cases was to challenge the legitimacy of *Roe* and to continue to restrict abortion access; each represents an outpouring of evangelical moral outrage. With the June 24, 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* ruling, there is no longer a constitutional right to abortion, so it is expected that in the coming years, half of all states will roll back their abortion access, with more states likely following suit.⁵ This ruling is egregious and will likely amount to crushing outcomes, detrimentally affecting women’s health and wellbeing, maternal care, infant and maternal mortality rate increases, and more.⁶ Even after the original ruling of *Roe*, women still frequently find themselves in the position of second-class citizens, with few rights protected by law. Case in point: it was only in 1993 that all states finally removed the marital rape exception from rape laws.⁷

⁴ The requirement of admitting privileges to a local hospital for abortion providers is considered an undue burden to procuring an abortion.

⁵ According to the Guttmacher Institute: “As of January 12, 2023, abortion is banned in 12 states with very limited exceptions and is unavailable in an additional two. 29% of the total US population of women of reproductive age are living in states where abortion is either unavailable or severely restricted. Half of states are certain or likely to eventually enact abortion bans now that *Roe v. Wade* has been overturned.”

<https://www.guttmacher.org/2023/01/inequity-us-abortion-rights-and-access-end-roe-deepening-existing-divides>

⁶ The United States currently does not have the infrastructure in place to appropriately care for women who would have chosen abortion and their children. This relates to healthcare systems, Medicare and Medicaid, social support, welfare, parenting support, and much more.

⁷ To this day, in some states marital and non-marital rape are treated differently in regard to prosecution and punishment.

It is critical to share a Supreme Court case highlighting *Roe's* wide-ranging applicability that does not directly relate to reproductive healthcare. *McFall v. Shimp* (1978) ruled that no person could be compelled to participate in the medical treatment of another person, even if it was lifesaving. While this case explicitly dealt with bone marrow transplants, “*McFall v. Shimp* set a legal precedent that an individual is not under compulsion to aid another person at their mental or physical expense, upholding the right to bodily autonomy found at the center of the debate on the legality of abortion” (Ingram, 2021). At the center of *Roe* is the concern for the citizen's bodily security, self-determination, and privacy. The fight for bodily autonomy and equality has stretched on for the entirety of American history and has deep reverberations within not just American politics but religion as well.

The Political Rise of the White American Evangelical

What is an American Evangelical, and how has this religious notion become entangled in the political? Conservative evangelicals regularly claim that their views come solely from the Bible (e.g., *sola scriptura*, biblical inerrancy, fundamentalism) and that this informs their social and political views, adopting what is referred to frequently as a “biblical worldview.” However, starting in the 1970s, right-wing conservative leaders saw a great opportunity in evangelicals and fundamentalists as an untapped market for political philosophy (Flowers, 155). A political strategy was launched to get evangelical Christians involved in the political arena, aiming to vote in born-again elected officials who shared their “biblical worldview” for a “Christian America” (Flowers, 157). Similarly, this new market was being courted by new evangelical publishing empires like Tyndale House, which further reinforced the melding of marketing, politics, religion, and traditionalism.⁸

⁸ Focus on the Family is another important point of reference.

In her book *Jesus and John Wayne*, historian Kristin Kobes Du Mez states, “evangelicalism must be seen as a cultural and political movement rather than as a community defined chiefly by its theology” (Du Mez, 5). The fact that Christian Evangelicalism now equates to Christian nationalism explains the paradigm shift in the 1970s toward outright subordinate roles both for Christ in the Trinity and for women in society. Similarly entangled in this Christian nationalism is the notion of a Christian masculinity that dominates, forces submission, and coerces with the strong arm of patriarchy. As one begins to examine the astroturfed roots of American evangelicalism, it becomes clear how conservative evangelical Christianity and right-wing politics have become so deeply enmeshed. According to Du Mez, “for conservative white evangelicals, the ‘good news’ of the Christian Gospel has become inextricably linked to a staunch commitment to patriarchal authority, gender difference, and Christian nationalism, and all of these are intertwined with white racial identity” (Du Mez, 9). This inextricable link resulted from a slow influence creep over roughly the past century. However, with the vast political power this group currently holds in America, we are now watching the rollback of constitutional rights that protected both women’s liberties and preserved the separation between church and state and free speech, like in the ruling of *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District* (2022).⁹

In the book *Church, State, and Public Justice*, P.C. Kemeny highlights the resurgence of the Religious Right, mainly through fundamentalist Jerry Falwell and his founding of the Moral Majority. This organization worked to merge the interests of Christian fundamentalists and right-wing conservatives, giving a significant voice to policy concerns such as the Equal Rights Amendment and the legality of and access to abortion care (Kemeny, loc. 236). Despite the

⁹ A case that dealt with prayer in school in which the Court voted in favor of the defendant, a football coach who prayed with students before games despite the school district asking him not to.

fundamentalist overtones, the Moral Majority was also supported by evangelicals and more conservative mainline protestants, all of whom had a common interest in social reform, specifically when it came to issues surrounding the family and sexuality. After *Roe*, fundamentalists and evangelicals rallied together in a significant way based on their outrage in light of the Court decision. Pat Robinson, a Pentecostal televangelist, formed the Christian Coalition, a conservative evangelical lobbying organization that voices its concern over social reform (Kemeny, 254). These are only a few examples of the merging of religion into the political, and vice versa; however, it serves to illustrate the point that directly due to *Roe* (and the Equal Rights Amendment), Christian outrage over and against society has boiled over into a culture war.

Subordinationism in Evangelical Theology

The point of these rulings is to consider whether a woman's body is her own or whether she is property – either of the state or her husband. As this chapter makes a critical shift toward the theological and religious, the reader will find deep intersections between the politics that seek to restrict and regulate women's bodies and the flawed theology that teaches that women's bodies *should* be restricted and subordinated. Kevin Giles, whom I will cite at length from his work *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God & the Contemporary Gender Debate*, has written extensively on the damage subordinationism does not only to evangelical theology but to the relationship of men to women, and the work needed to reclaim or return to, a Nicene orthodoxy for conservative evangelicals. For reference, subordinationism is a faulty theological doctrine claiming the Son is subordinate to the Father and the Holy Spirit is subordinate to the Son, forming a chain of command based on dominance and eternal submission

rather than a perichoretic inner relationship of the Trinity.¹⁰ Subordinationism, functional subordinationism, or neo-subordinationism, also serves as the vital analogy for a functional and permanent subordination of women to men in role and function based upon the prescriptive ordering within the hierarchical Trinity.¹¹

Nineteenth-century theologian Charles Hodge (1797-1878) was a firm proponent of distinction and subordination within the Trinity. Hodge was also under the understanding that enslaved men and women were subordinated “in perpetuity” to their enslavers, which he claims was supported by scripture (Giles, 82). Hodge was not alone in this thinking when we consider many male theologians and pastors of his time that taught that there was biblical support for chattel slavery. Individuals like James Henley Thornwell and Richard Fuller believed that enslaved people had a perpetual inferiority to those who enslaved them. This is critical for understanding the ontological basis of the perceived perpetual subordination of women to men, which theologians have also found apparent biblical support. Hodge wrote: “order and subordination pervade the whole universe, and [they are] essential to its being.” In Kevin Giles’ analysis of subordinationist theology, specifically concerning Hodge, he writes: “We are thus not surprised that with these social and political commitments, Hodge read back into the Trinity the fixed hierarchical ordering of his cultural setting” (Giles, 82). Additionally, evangelicals who promote the permanent subordination of women to men often use the words of Louis Berkhof (1873-1957), an early twentieth-century American Dutch Reformed theologian, who wrote about a “certain subordination as to the manner of personal subsistence” in the Trinity (Giles, 82). This

¹⁰ Subordinationism stems essentially from Arianism, which was refuted at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. Subordinationism was condemned in the 6th century along with writings from Origen, due to his views on the matter. Origen himself was later anathematized.

¹¹ Matthew Tinkham. *Neo-Subordinationism: The Alien Argumentation in the Gender Debate*. Andrews University Seminary Studies, Vol. 55, No. 2, 237–290. 2017.

reading of politics into religion and its significant theological ramifications is just as relevant today in consideration of the overturning of *Roe*.

The evangelical notion of biblical gender roles coupled with the subordination of the Son to the Father is a modern advent that was not spoken of in this manner prior to the 1970s, as the seventies marked a distinct turning point regarding complementarianism which involved attention being turned toward the Trinity.¹² George W. Knight III (1931–2021) wrote in 1977 about the relations of the economic and immanent Trinity, focusing on the relationship between the Father and Son and the Trinity’s analogy for ideal male-female relations in the evangelical world (Tinkham, 6).¹³

Giles writes, “Knight, famous in conservative evangelical circles for developing the novel argument that women and men are equal in being yet subordinated in role, explicitly speaks of the ‘ontological’ subordination of the Son. His view is that the Bible teaches a ‘chain of subordination’ within the Godhead—which must mean a hierarchical order” (Giles, 82). To this extent, evangelicals who follow this chain of subordination reasoning expand on this to their own lives: when two or more people live or work together (marriage, church, community), one person must naturally be in charge. This establishes the dominant/subordinate role dichotomy within the evangelical marriage (Giles, 82).

Building upon this, for theologian Wayne Grudem (b. 1948), his “equal in essence but eternally subordinate in role” imagining of the Trinity underlines his understanding that men and

¹² According to Tinkham: “Since the 1970s, this group of evangelicals has been referred to as “patriarchalists,” “hierarchalists,” “traditionalists,” and, their preferred self-designation, “complementarians.” Triggering their opposition to form the Christians for Biblical Equality, complementarians organized the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) in 1987 in Danvers, Massachusetts, and published their manifesto on gender roles in 1988, which was called the “Danvers Statement” (Tinkham, 5).

¹³ George W Knight III. *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women*. Grand Rapids. Baker Books. 1977.

women are equal but must conform to different, gender-specific roles. Grudem is also the founder of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, which espouses the idea of complementarianism (different but complementary gender roles). For Knight, Grudem, and other evangelicals, the Son was consubstantial in *essence* but eternally subordinate in *function*, and the literal interpretation of scripture allows for women to be eternally subordinate to men.

Concerning church governance, Giles writes, “Grudem again concludes that his understanding of the Trinity confirms and endorses his view of the differing role of women and men in the church. Men have been given the ruling role, and women have been given the subordinate role—they are to submit to male ‘headship.’” (Giles, 89). Additionally, Giles states: “in regard to human beings, the permanent and necessary role subordination of one sex, race or social group implies that they are in some way inferior in ‘being,’ and this is true on the divine level as well. If the Son must always obey the Father, then he must in some ways be less than the Father. He lacks something possessed solely by the Father” (Giles, 92). This is shockingly in disagreement with the Nicene Creed confirmed in 325 A.D., which states that the Trinity is consubstantial. Upon considering the inner life of the Trinity and human relations, they act as a mirror to each other. Thus, if human relations are subordinate in nature, then theology will mirror this, and Christians will be left with a distorted image of God. What was agreed upon in the Nicene Creed – *homoousios* or the same substance – is no longer found to be valid in the evangelical imagining of the Trinity. Thus, if Christ can be subordinate to the Father based on the argument of different function and role, then so can women be subordinate to men in their chronological creation or her ‘incomplete’ creation, and therefore find no constitutional protection for her privacy or liberty.

In the Evangelical mind, woman was created second in Genesis 2, and therefore she ranks inferior to man. This chronological creation has permanently determined her status and freedom

to great detriment. According to the early patristic writer John Chrysostom (~347-407), “God made man first to show male ‘superiority’ and to teach that ‘the male sex enjoyed the higher honor . . . having pre-eminence in every way” (Giles, 164). To further corroborate this inferiority of woman, Giles states “[in regard to] Genesis 3 and 1 Timothy 2:14...these passages were taken to mean that Eve is to be blamed for all evil and death and that she and all her sex are more prone to sin and error than are men. Women are subordinated as a class or race because Eve is responsible for the Fall” (Giles, 165). In light of this, it is often encouraged of evangelical women to accept their position in life, this idea that women are somehow not equal image bearers and that they are secondary, weaker, and more prone to sin. These ideas feel highly antiquated; however, this is to emphasize a long trajectory of thought that has led to where we are today. Women as a class are believed to need men’s protection and leadership, so women are not trusted with their own bodily autonomy, and self-determination is therefore denied. Similarly, the subordination of evangelical wife to husband is not only necessary but mandated by God, for women are to be set under men (Giles, 167).

Ethical Implications for the Subordination of Women

In *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*, Stanley Hauerwas (b. 1940) calls the Household Codes (Haustafeln) explicitly into question regarding their moral authority as scripture. As a tangible example, I would specifically like to draw attention to 1 Peter 3:1-6:

Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to

their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

Each of the passages from the Haustafeln, which are located in Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Timothy, 1 Titus, and Peter, build off each other in how a Christian household is to behave, but in the case of white evangelical subordinationism, only the passages relating to the wives seem to be relevant. Peter follows this passage (Peter 3:7), reminding husbands that wives must be treated with respect.¹⁴ It is important to contextualize these codes and understand that this notion of male power was borrowed from Greek and Roman culture and ethics in which the writers of the New Testament were immersed.¹⁵ This world held a shallow view of women, and women were virtually always under the control of a father or husband within a household system. Woman was closer to property than person.

The Haustafeln are vital passages often treated as evangelical proof texts when read literally for upholding complementarianism and “biblical manhood/womanhood.” Concerning the Household Codes, Hauerwas raises the argument: “[the Haustafeln] strike many today as not only morally irrelevant but morally perverse. The common strategy for dealing with such statements is to dismiss them as the product of the limitations of the early church's culture, which had not yet been sufficiently subjected to the searching transformation of the Gospel. But that strategy suffers from being too powerful, for why should the Haustafeln be singled out as culturally relative and texts more appealing to modern ears such as 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:28) be exempted?” (Hauerwas, 8). When read literally and without historical or cultural context, the reader can immediately identify these passages as wrong or

¹⁴ It can be considered that this passage is a radical break from the total power and authority of the *pater familias*, in which it demands the head of the household to pay respect to those lower in the family hierarchy.

¹⁵ *Pater familias; Patria potestas*

right, depending on the hermeneutics used. For white American evangelicals and fundamentalists, the *Haustafeln* make it resolutely clear that the man is the head of the household, rather than utilizing the hermeneutical tools to read these passages, which are nearly two thousand years old with an understanding that each of the *Haustafeln* mandate mutual respect and responsibility within the family structure.

Just as the *Haustafeln* can suggest that women are subordinate to men in role and function, so can we turn our attention to the ethics of eternal functional subordination of the Son to the Father in the Trinity. Eternal functional subordination, as explored earlier in this chapter, is a theological concept upheld by conservative evangelical theologians who seek to understand the *eternal obedience* of the Son. If there is obeisance, then there is no Trinitarian agency within the persons of the Trinity¹⁶. The persons of the Trinity must act inseparably, so one cannot separate or order the divine persons. On the intra-Trinitarian level, this dissection creates disunion and offers Christians a disjointed understanding of the Trinity. If our own God, who is trinitarian in nature, can have ordering requiring obedience within, then so can our own relationships require dominance and submission. This further drives home the fact that the divine relations of the Trinity act as a blueprint for human relations. Paul calls us to imitate the Trinity in Ephesians 5:1-2: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”¹⁷ The Trinity offers the Christian “a covenantal relation with the triune God that provides model, motivation, and ground for human imitation” (Johnson, 2011). Furthermore, with this ability to imitate the divine inner relationship comes the responsibility to act accordingly, favoring egalitarian relations rather than

¹⁶ In this understanding, the Trinity is ontologically equal, but functionally subordinate in role.

¹⁷ One can debate that this is imitation of the economic Trinity in regard to working toward salvation rather than the immanent Trinity specifically in regard to the writing of Paul, however the immanent Trinity offers Christians a relational blueprint as well.

hierarchical and reliant upon power and discipline. This desire to imitate the inner workings of the Trinity reaches all facets of the Christian's life: from marriage and family life to societal laws enacted and upheld.

Reclaiming a Relational Trinity

As American Christians move forward in a world post-*Roe*, it is very easy to feel disheartened by the interwoven complexity of conservative evangelical theology (and theological illiteracy) married to overwhelming right-wing political power, along with the deeply enmeshed belief in women's subordinate roles to men. Where once *Roe* upheld women's privacy and bodily autonomy, now we are left to reckon with the ruling that women's bodies are not their own and their right to privacy is null. It is critical to understand that the seemingly unlimited power wielded by the Christian right is a minority-held view among American Christians and represents a historic period of distinctly disproportionate minority-rule.

When considering that evangelical theology continues to uphold the faulty understanding that the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father, deep-seated issues of patriarchy, hierarchy, and subordination come to rise. It is no accident that this faulty theology goes hand in hand with how conservative evangelicals imagine the world for women. This understanding of a hierarchical Trinity is diametrically opposed to the orthodox teaching of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, which states that the Son is consubstantial with the Father. Since the early Church and initial development of trinitarian doctrine, Arianism has been refuted, and the Trinity has been understood as three Persons in relation – a perichoretic, egalitarian relationship. The total dependence on a literal reading of scripture and political might has led American evangelicals into a quagmire of their own making.

Chapter two of this thesis has set out to explore the concrete cultural and historical ramifications of subordinationism by examining the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and through a cursory look at the white American evangelical, both in its theology and political power. Chapter three will dig deeper and explore the Trinity's ethical and philosophical roots – both in relation and prescriptive hierarchy. The following chapter will look at the importance of tradition in Christian ethics, Christology, and the role of Hegelian reconciliation through the incarnation, which will set the basis for chapter four and the extreme identification of God to man through Christ, which offers the crux of understanding Trinity in relation.

CHAPTER 3

HE WAS MADE MAN: A HEGELIAN READING OF RECONCILIATION AND THE RADICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE INCARNATION

Introduction

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) was a post-Kantian idealist who envisioned a systematic philosophical system focusing on a teleological account of history and devised a dialectic for all relations. Hegel envisioned his system and the Absolute Spirit functioning as a universal mind that further articulates through time and history. While Hegel is not explicitly Christian, his work has laid a firm foundation for Christian theology, which will be explored in this chapter through Hegel’s understanding of reconciliation via the incarnation. For Hegel, God is the Spirit actively working in human subjectivity, and the Trinity is not relegated to numerical abstractions but rather active via *oikonomia* – in relationship and through history (Küng, 384). In describing his understanding of Christ and His relation to humanity, Hegel writes: “The son of God is also the son of man; the divine in a particular shape appears as a man. The connection of infinite and finite is of course, as ‘holy mystery,’ because this connection is life itself.”¹⁸ This extreme desire to reconcile the finite (creation) with the infinite (Absolute) is made concrete through the incarnation. This chapter will examine the impact Hegelian thought has on theology by looking at Hegel’s understanding of the incarnation and resurrection of Christ, which will work to refute the modern evangelical understanding of functional subordinationism or “Neo-Subordinationism.”¹⁹

¹⁸ From a fragment of Hegel’s writing termed *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*, 1798.

¹⁹ Neo-subordinationism is a prescriptive, hierarchical ordering of the immanent Trinity. Tinkham, Matthew. *Neo-Subordinationism: The Alien Argumentation in the Gender Debate*. 2016. <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/863/>

The Hegelian Philosophical Structure and Christianity

For Hegel, because Christianity is concerned with history and telos, there is an affinity between faith and Hegel's philosophical system. History itself is the progressive self-unfolding and self-realization of the Absolute, and through the passage of time, the Absolute becomes more articulated and defined. In this understanding of history as progress, the incarnation and resurrection become concrete moments in history in the life of God. According to Hans Küng, writing in *The Incarnation of God*, "Hegel intended his entire thought to be historical thought, his historical thought to be religious thought, and his religious thought to be interpreted in light of the—albeit philosophically conceived—incarnation of God" (Küng, 383).

Hegel developed the idea of a unity or identity, which is dialectical, an identity that includes within its own unity what is its negation or opposite. The synthesis, created through meeting the thesis and antithesis, is dialectics. Diogenes Allen writes in *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*: "Hegel posits that an absolute with a dialectical unity in which it, as Spirit (Geist) becomes other than itself in history or time and then rises above the opposition between itself and the other by knowing itself in the other and by developing itself in the other" (Allen, 224). Additionally, Allen writes, "The final absolute dialectical unity consists in the act of knowing (in absolute knowledge) in which opposition is included within the Absolute Spirit in its knowing and overcoming of the other" (Allen, 224). Nature and history have a progressive unfolding and realization of an inner telos of which essentially everything, including our own self-realization, is a part. Telos is inherent in reality itself, and the act of history is a dialectical process and self-revelation of the Absolute (Küng, 386).²⁰

²⁰ Telos refers to fulfillment or completion.

According to Georges van Riet, perfectly summing up the Hegelian understanding of Christianity in his work *The Problem of God in Hegel*: “True being is identity with oneself in difference. It is spirit. God himself includes finiteness and death and surpasses them. Man is God’s image, God’s son – reconciliation. He knows that not only the history of Jesus but also his own history, grasped in all the depth of their meaning, are the manifestation of the eternal history of the trinitarian God” (van Riet, 82). According to Peter Hodgson in *Hegel and Christian Theology, Narrowing in on the Trinity*: “At the abstract level God [for Hegel] is defined as ‘universal spirit that particularizes itself.’ This is what Christian theology calls ‘the Trinity’—the doctrine describing how God differentiates Godself but remains self-identical. The Trinity constitutes the mystery of God....” (Hodgson, 143). Hodgson also writes of Hegel on the Trinity: “Similarly, in the 1831 lectures we find this provocative statement: ‘The abstractness of the Father is given up in the Son—this then is death. But the negation of this negation is the unity of Father and Son—love, or the Spirit’” (Hodgson, 144)

In Hegel’s writing, and in congruence with classical theology, he finds two versions of the same Trinity: the economic and immanent, though he never writes about them exclusively. Hodgson writes: “the economic Trinity is the outward re-enactment (not simply repetition) of the inward trinitarian dialectic—a re-enactment that is necessary to the self-realization of God and that is already implicit in the trinitarian play of love with itself. God is ideally (logically) complete apart from the world yet needs the world for the real (existential) completion....” (Hodgson, 141). It is best to think of the versions of the Trinity as *ad intra* and *ad extra*, both contributing to the divine life holistically and inclusive of external relations (creator to creation). To further elucidate Hegel’s understanding of the Trinity and also the reconciling work of Christ, I will highlight a quote from Hegel’s *Lecture of 1827*:

“The history of the resurrection and ascension of Christ to the right hand of God begins at the point where this history [of Jesus’ death] receives a spiritual interpretation. That is when it came about that the little community achieved the certainty that God has appeared as a human being.

“But this humanity in God ... is natural death. ‘God himself is dead,’ it says in a Lutheran hymn, expressing an awareness that the human, the finite, the fragile, the weak, the negative are themselves ... within God himself, that finitude, negativity, otherness are not outside of God and do not ... hinder unity with God... [D]eath itself is this negative, the furthest extreme to which humanity as natural existence is exposed; God himself is involved in this.

“... For the community, this is the history of the appearance of God. This history is a divine history, whereby the community has come to the certainty of truth. From it develops the consciousness ... that God is triune. The reconciliation in Christ ... makes no sense if God is not known as the triune God, if it is not recognized that God is, but also is as the other, as self-distinguishing, so that this other is God himself..., and that the sublation of this difference, this otherness, and the return of love, are the Spirit.”²¹

Hegel’s Christology: The Reconciling Work of the Incarnation

This section will rely heavily upon the writing of Diogenes Allen in his work *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* which provides a succinct primer on Hegel’s Christology. There is a distinct focus on reconciliation between the finite and Infinite in and through the historical person of Jesus Christ, referred to by Hegel as the God-human.

The problem that religion attempts to solve is reconciliation. Usually, we think of reconciliation as a transaction between the holy and profane, but for Hegel, it is that God is infinite and the creature is finite, a rift that must be healed (Allen, 234). According to Hodgson: “Reconciliation is possible simply because God is an eternal process of reconciliation—the dynamo of positing otherness and sublating estrangement that makes God to be God” (Hodgson, 169). All of separate existence as the entirety of creation being gathered together into a single unity is reconciliation. Here, human beings become conscious of their unity with the divine or

²¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: The Lectures of 1827*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 468-69.

the Infinite. This is God realizing divine selfhood in the concrete, and therefore is the reconciliation of the finite and Infinite. In this manner, salvation is reconciliatory.

For Hegel, whatever is real must become concrete and manifest in this world. To be real, God must become manifest; He must become revealed and be knowable. God has absolute freedom, and to make this concrete, God grants independent existence to something that is not divinity. This other thing is the world, which expresses to the fullest the absolute freedom that is in God. It is the realization of God's own nature, and the world becomes God's other. This means God must reconcile this other to the divine—it must be restored in unity (Allen, 235).

Hegel understands finitude, or humanity's state, to be evil due to the *potential* for fellowship with God, and humans stay in this imperfect state until the destiny of fellowship with God is fulfilled via reconciliation (Allen, 234). Finitude is only evil because it contrasts with the telos of God's process—it must be united or reconciled to the Infinite. This relates to humanity's fallen state, in which the fall is a necessary stage in the life of God and humanity's salvation (Allen, 235). Without finitude, God's richness and diversity remain unrealized, along with God's freedom. God only remains potential, not actual, without revelation. Nevertheless, through creation's finitude, God's richness becomes actual. Yet even in our fallen state, an underlying continuity exists between God and us.

This continuity is representative of the ontological ground of the reconciling work performed by Christ—for Hegel, the incarnation is a necessary event in the life of God. The incarnation had to happen because divine and human natures are not actually alien or dissimilar, but whatever is true of God's nature must be concrete in the world of time and space. The truth that the Infinite and the finite are identical requires an instance of a God-human, a concrete instance of the union of the Infinite and finite natures. The incarnation shows that finite nature is

compatible with divine nature and proves the underlying continuity. It shows that reconciliation between the two is possible (Allen, 236). As God-human, Christ is the major step in the historical process whereby opposition between the Infinite and finite spirit is overcome.

In Christ, we see the divine fully identifying itself with the human by living a human life. Christ's death shows identification with humanity to the fullest degree, as death is the crucial mark of humanity and the finite. Christ endured death to show the total identification of the divine with the human. The incarnation and Christ's life and death bring out the full extent of the bond and essential unity of the Infinite and the finite (Allen, 237). Christ's death has another aspect that becomes apparent through the resurrection; the resurrection shows that the finite is destroyed in the death of the God-human—all the natural aspirations and personal ends of the individual existing in independence for himself are given up. Selfish goals are destroyed and taken into the higher truth about our nature. Divinity, or the Infinite, is shown to be our true nature (Allen, 238). When these events (the incarnation and resurrection) are viewed in light of objective truth, they are seen as moments in the divine life. These moments were not just an accident of history but were deliberate moments as a realization or revelation of parts of God's nature – they are historical events with ontological importance (Allen, 238).

Hans Küng's Hegelian Christology

For Hans Küng's understanding of Hegel in his work *The Incarnation of God: an introduction to Hegel's theological thought as prolegomena to a future Christology*, the entirety of world history is a single universal act of *Heilsgeschichte* (salvific history with no division of the sacred and profane) wholly centered on the incarnation (Küng, 384). Rather than the incarnation being relegated to personal faith or salvation, it was a historic act for the reconciliation of all humanity. The 'monstrous' and base public death of Christ becomes the

most exalted act in divine history. The death of Christ is instead the death of death in an extreme reversal and destruction of finitude (a negation of a negation).

Küng writes: “the living God is for him the one who moves, changes, and undergoes a history, who does not rigidly remain what he is, but becomes what he is. And He is the God who does not stubbornly remain within Himself in a lofty posture of splendid isolation above the world, but who comes out of himself and externalizes himself in the becoming of the world, a movement which comes to a climax when God Himself becomes man” (Küng, 433). For Hegel, this is the true Christian God, which, as all-encompassing Spirit, contains all antitheses in His fullness. This is an active God who suffers and reconciles in solidarity with creation. The pinnacle of this realization is made clear through the incarnation and crucifixion. For Hegel, the true God is both finite and Infinite, man and God in unity (Küng, 434).

Hegel wrote as such in *Phenomenology of Spirit* of the dialectic within God: “the absolute Being which exists as an actual self-consciousness seems to have come down from its eternal simplicity, but by thus coming down it has in fact attained for the first time to its own highest essence...thus the lowest is at the same time the highest; the revealed which has come forth wholly on to the surface is precisely therein the most profound. That the supreme being is seen, heard, etc. as an immediately present self-consciousness, this therefore is indeed the consummation of its Notion; and through this consummation that Being is immediately present qua supreme Being” (Hegel, 460). The life and death of Christ represent moments in divine history and the ‘externalization of the divine.’ In this externalization, we see that the finite, weakness, and frailty are included in the divine as well, and that finitude does not exist outside of God, nor does it hinder God’s own divinity (Küng, 458).

For Küng, Hegel's gift to Christology is through the historicity of God and Jesus – God is not apathetic, floating in a ghostly manner above the world unconcerned, but is actively involved and in motion, sharing in becoming through the application of His being, prepared to suffer in and with the world (Küng, 462). Though man and God cannot be fully separated, Küng's warning to Christology is that God must never be dissolved fully into the world so that man usurps God's throne: this is the trap of pantheism. Only through God are the world and history possible. Thinking prophetically of faith and the future, Küng writes: "the effect of the cross and of the divine future definitively inaugurated by Jesus' resurrection to new life is thus not to confer matter of fact knowledge on man, but rather to challenge him to a trusting faith and, in virtue of this faith, to love, to response and responsibility, to eschatological hope and to involvement in the world here and now" (Küng, 463). I want to drive this home further with an extended quote from Küng, which calls to light what God is and what God does:

"He is no longer just a God of the gaps, invoked when human enquiry and science run out of steam, and therefore increasingly superfluous as humankind makes more intellectual progress. He is no longer an entity that dispossesses man of what is truly his own, that causes him to eke out a drowsy existence in this world in a state of pious passivity, an entity that is but a reflection of conscious-unconscious human anxieties and longings, an opium for escaping reality and social responsibility, and therefore increasingly superfluous on the emotional level as man becomes progressively more human. On the contrary, this God is a God who is absolutely relevant to us in all the relativities of human life and common humanity, who, as the reality which upholds preserves and embraces all things, is both infinitely remote from the superficial life of man and yet nearer to man's heart than he is to himself, and who is thus able to confer breadth, depth and ultimate meaning on the life of man and of humanity by liberating man for prayer intercession and praise, for sacrifice and for all-embracing love. This this God does not exist behind the flux of history but is known as the God of history" (Küng, 464). He is the coming One who humankind awaits who will make all things new.

The Ethics of Christian Tradition

For Küng, concepts and images of God can and will change throughout time; however, humanity will cleave to faith in God – this is a constant. Despite the change in concepts, tradition

will preserve the continuity and identity of Christianity. Tradition has a profound significance for our understanding of God. For Jeffrey Stout, writing in *Tradition in Ethics*, we understand that tradition can either be what is handed down or the act of transmission itself (Stout, 61). Ethicists have raised the question of whether tradition harms or is inessential, and some protestants posit that sola scriptura outweighs any need for an inherited tradition that can be inconsistent or corruptible. This raises a philosophical question of reality and reason regarding the rationality of tradition. In a more dynamic examination, one can lean upon the Hegelian continuum, which allows tradition to proceed through history into the future, having the ability for the synthesis of innovation and rediscovery as it becomes further articulated, rather than the Kantian “pure reason” approach of an unmoving moral system.

Douglas F. Ottati writing in *What it Means to Stand in a Living Tradition* focuses on the extreme variation of Christ – explicitly calling into question the crisis of Christology (which has deeper trinitarian reverberations). Modern Christology has lost its coherence and historical context due to the untethering from tradition; however, too narrow of a tradition leads to mere repetition, which loses its dynamic ability to adapt to the present (and future). In contrast, a living tradition offers a “distinctive identity” that offers the basis for the root metaphor to be reappropriated by each new generation (Ottati, 81). A living tradition is also a common identity that offers a guiding orientation that we carry forth in time (Ottati, 81). The key here is that tradition is a malleable heritage that can be interpreted and reinterpreted – it offers the possibility of constructive selection moving forward in time. When a literal reading of scripture is favored over and above a malleable and living tradition, faith becomes rigid and unbending (and in this hardness, a concrete hierarchy becomes impossible to topple). It has been up to the interpreters since the days of the early Church to draw out polarities and make sense of the occasionally

contradictory nature of the biblical text (Ottati, 83). According to Ottati: “to stand in the living tradition of the Christian community, then, means not only to attend to what one has received in its original and subsequent expressions, and not only to attend to present challenges and resources, but also to select constructively from the totality of the historical tradition those themes and strands that seem best” (Ottati, 83). We are both heirs and caretakers of tradition; in this position, we can shape our Christian tradition's future.

Tradition is critical to this conversation because tradition is rooted in history, becoming more articulated as history progresses. For Hegel, religion and politics were intrinsically tied, and this becomes apparent through his fascination with revolution and the transitional periods between revolutions throughout history. Specifically for the early Christian and French Revolutions, these events were marked by a zeal for morality and for Hegel, “a flight...into the void” (Bourke, 2022). Each revolution was a period of longing for transformation, and with them came increasing incremental change and following in pursuit, adaptation, and reorientation, as history is impossible to transcend – it must unfold over time (Bourke, 2022).

However, as experienced through revolution, there can be swift categorical change. Tradition, in this sense, is susceptible to reconstruction and reshaping, for better or worse. While Küng understands faith in God as constant, the expression of this faith has been subject to great variation. The core of the Christian faith also remains a constant; however, the work of evangelicals is attempting to rewrite history and redirect the future (and even the Nicene Creed).²² The work of subordinationist evangelicals represents an attempt to revolutionize theological doctrine, so the work to reclaim an orthodox understanding of the Trinity based on tradition is also revolutionary.

²² Wayne Grudem. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids. Zondervan Academic. 1994.

The Radical Implications of the Incarnation

Hegel's God of history comes into conflict with secular society, informed by markets and capitalist desires. With these modern secular desires comes the powerful rise of evangelical theology. This form of theology has coupled with political prowess, which commingles the religious with the political. While Hegel saw politics and religion (church and state, sacred and secular) as intrinsically tied (most acutely through Protestantism), there is preeminence given overall to Christianity. The Reformation for Hegel represents the synthesis of politics and religion.²³ Following suit, the Reformation represented a shift that brought the idea of "every man a priest," and one could find a vocation in the secular world (among the economic and political – a harmony between church and state, at least in theory) (Beck, 65). There is in this understanding new, unmediated access to God, which is representative of unmediated access to scripture, and with this, unmediated exegesis. As religious authority became decentered, widening circles of exegetical thought came into play, leading to where we are now concerning functional subordinationism. This is indicative of an extreme subjectivity in the approach to and expression of objective truths of the Christian faith and speaks of the malleability of tradition as well.

In following the subjectivity of evangelical thought, functional subordinationism negates the universal aspect of salvation/reconciliation because it states that functionality is different economically and therefore cannot be universal. This holds the same for intra-trinitarian relations and male/female relations.²⁴ If the roles of the Persons of the Trinity and male and female are of a different essence because they are found only in domination and submission, then it is

²³ According to Merold Westphal writing in *Proceedings of the Hegel Society of America*, 1984, the Reformation represented the "Spirit's path to freedom" and was of world-historical import.

²⁴ Grudem makes an argument for "ontological equality but economic subordination" within the Trinity in his work *Systematic Theology*.

questionable whether reconciliation can ever fully occur because there can be no underlying continuity. Reconciliation only occurs when there is an underlying continuum between two disparate entities, and through reconciliation, we understand that there is an inherent unity between creation and creator. Similarly, for Hegel, God contains negation and finitude; it is a part of His eternal character and without prescriptive order.

Functional subordinationism is refuted by and through the Hegelian philosophical structure – Hegel’s understanding of history and reconciliation – because subordinationism refuses to account for the very real and radical possibility of reconciliation of a fallen humanity to God that is made concrete through the incarnation. The inner work of the Trinity is sublation, echoed through the incarnation, and made clear in the reconciliation between the Infinite and finite. For Küng, God’s salvific act is universal, and man and God can never be separated.

Overall, we must consider the radical implications of the incarnation. According to Slavoj Žižek in *The Monstrosity of Christ*, taking the incarnation to a genuinely radical end, through the incarnation, humanity loses a truly transcendent God, or “God as the hidden Master pulling the strings,” God has abandoned the separate, transcendent position and thrown Himself headfirst into creation. In this deep identification with creation, humanity loses the higher Power which watches over us. Through the incarnation, “He was made man,” and humanity assumes the “terrible burden of freedom and responsibility for the fate of divine creation” (Žižek, 25). This speaks to the quoted portion from *The Lectures of 1827*, in which Hegel states that God contains the negative of finitude in addition to the Infinite – it is extreme solidarity and recognition with creation, made concrete through the incarnation.

According to Hyo-Dong Lee writing in *Spirit, Qi, and the Multitude: A Comparative Theology for the Democracy of Creation*, “the entire system of Hegel’s philosophy, from logic to

history of philosophy, is an effort to make the whole range of reality intelligible precisely in terms of the trinitarian logic thus ‘read off’ the pattern discerned in the narrative unfolding of Christian salvation history...Hegel sees Jesus Christ as the one who has decisively overcome the naturalness of the world in the sense that the consummate religious consciousness to which he elevates human beings offers universal, divine, and absolute reconciliation” (Lee, 301). I want to stress one additional quote from Lee: “Jesus’ teaching of the kingdom of God denotes not God alone as the universal essence but a ‘divine community’ permeated by a ‘living, spiritual life’ that is, a community of God and humanity in which humanity is freed from its selfishness in and through its true self-knowledge” (Lee, 302). Overall, Lee stresses universality and community in his reading of Hegel. God is represented as an “all-encompassing universal” that contains differentiation, yet the differentiation is the unity of the universal, the “positing of self as other” – “God is love...[which] consists in a unity the internal distinctions of which are mutually inclusive of each other” (Lee, 312). Through the inner life of the Trinity, mirrored by the kingdom of God, we see an emphasis placed upon perichoresis rather than a rigid ordering of dominance and submission.

This chapter examined Hegel's impact on theology, specifically through his understanding of the reconciliation of humanity to God through the incarnation. This refutes functional subordinationism through its universality and extreme identification of humanity, which will lay the groundwork for the following chapter. Chapter 4 will use the Hegelian understanding of the incarnation to build upon and examine a Trinity in which extreme solidarity undergirds the intratrinitarian relationship and God’s relationship to humanity. The following chapter will utilize Jürgen Moltmann’s *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, which rethinks the Trinity in light of human suffering and God’s own solidarity with humanity, and Catherine

LaCugna's *God for Us: the Trinity and Christian Life*, which provides a practical understanding of a relational God as/in community and an emphasis on the economy (for LaCugna, the *oikonomia*) of the Trinity.

CHAPTER 4

TOTUS CHRISTUS: EXAMINING A TRINITY IN RELATION

Introduction

The social doctrine of the Trinity hinges solely upon being in relation. Jürgen Moltmann (b. 1926), writing in *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, describes his own social doctrine of the Trinity: “God is a community of Father, Son, and Spirit, whose unity is constituted by mutual indwelling, dwelling, and reciprocal interpenetration. If this is correct, then we find the earthly reflection of this divine sociality, not in the autocracy of a single ruler but in the democratic community of free people, not in the lordship of the man over the woman but in their equal mutuality, not in an ecclesiastical hierarchy but in a fellowship church” (Moltmann, loc. 66). Social or relational model(s) of the Trinity allows us to conceptualize God as not only social analogies like Father, Son, and Holy Spirit but as various unities of three and their ability to enfold and reconcile humanity, offering a mirror for our own human activity and relations as well. If we understand God as being in relation, then we understand that God is incapable of hierarchy as we humans have defined and enacted it. This view of the Trinity is often criticized by Reformed theologians who are either reading in a literal manner or not fully understanding the ontological meaning of person²⁵; a relational Trinity does not negate the eternal continuity or *homoousios* (*hypostasis*²⁶ and *ousia*) of the Trinity, but rather highlights the intratrinitarian

²⁵ “If we take Boethius’ definition [of Person], the trinitarian Persons are not ‘modes of being’; they are individual, unique, non-interchangeable subjects of the one, common divine substance, with consciousness and will. Each of the persons possesses the divine nature in a non-interchangeable way; each presents in its own way,” (Moltmann, loc. 2501).

²⁶ For Moltmann: *hypostasis* is the individual existence of a particular nature rather than mode of appearance (Moltmann, loc. 2497).

interdependence and God's distinct workings, both in an immanent and economic sense.²⁷ A social Trinity further verifies Nicene trinitarian doctrine and opens the doors to a greater fellowship with creation and a deeper understanding of (and empathy with) the neighbor, widow, and outsider. Allowing the Triune God's perfect perichoresis to inspire our own relations can only better inform us as Christians.²⁸

The last chapter discussed the Hegelian impact on theology, specifically through reconciliation through the incarnation of Christ, which is based on an extreme identification with creation. This continuum between God and humanity (Creator and creation) opens the door to understanding a Trinity in relation in which humanity is explicitly enfolded through the person of Christ and His salvific, communing activities, and the radical implications of this divine Person and activity upon how we understand the Trinity and God's relationship with humanity. Once more, soteriology becomes a fundamental understanding for reconciliation with the divine; the economy of the Trinity and the work of Christ become crucial in this next step.

This chapter will rely primarily on two works: *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* by Jürgen Moltmann and *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* by Catherine LaCugna (1952–1997). For LaCugna, understanding the Trinity as economic (with an explicit focus on soteriology) and the Triune God as a community of persons is crucial, while Moltmann's Trinity encompasses social, communitarian relationship(s) within the Trinity and with creation. Both theologians rely upon a social doctrine of the Trinity – a communal, relational understanding of the Trinity and God's relationship with and activity in the world, which refutes the prescriptive, hierarchical ordering of the Trinity favored by conservative evangelicals. This chapter will explore social trinitarianism by examining the mechanics of a relational Trinity, the role of

²⁷ "The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and vice versa," Karl Rahner

²⁸ This extends to the teleological and eschatological as well.

Christ and Christology, and lastly, how the relational Trinity offers the Christian community a way to model our relationships and relate to others.

Mechanics of a Trinity in Relation

Catherine LaCugna, writing in *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, describes trinitarian theology as “par excellence a theology of relationship, which explores the mysteries of love, relationship, personhood, and communion within the framework of God’s self-revelation in the person of Christ and the activity of the Spirit,” and this revelation affects essentially every aspect of Christian life and the Church (LaCugna, 1). When the Trinity is considered relational, it touches every aspect of our actions. Similarly, Moltmann writes as such: “...thinking in relationships and communities is developed out of the doctrine of the Trinity and is brought to bear on the relation of men and women to God, to other people and to mankind as a whole, as well as on their fellowship with the whole of creation” (Moltmann, loc. 414). Salvation, communion, and even theosis are all intrinsically bound to how we understand the Triune God, so LaCugna sums this all-encompassing activity up: “God to us, we to God, we to each other” (LaCugna, 243).²⁹

While the Trinity does not necessarily appear explicitly in scripture, it is present through a “pervasive trinitarian pattern of the scriptural witness to God, foreshadowed in the Old Testament... and found more explicitly in the witness of the New Testament... to the presence of the one and only God in the saving work of Jesus Christ and the renewing activity of the Holy Spirit” (Migliore, chap. 4 pg. 5). The Trinity is how we have come to understand God, as co-equal, eternal, and how God has chosen to reveal God’s self to humanity through history. Of this pattern, Moltmann writes: “the scarlet thread that runs through the biblical testimonies might be

²⁹ LaCugna provides a creation-inclusive update to Augustine’s writing in his work *On the Trinity*: “each are in each, and all in each, and each in all, and all are one” (6.10).

called the history of the kingdom of God. But what this history of the kingdom of God is about, is really the trinitarian history of the kingdom” (Moltmann, loc. 1452).

“The Economic Trinity is the Immanent Trinity, and Vice Versa”

The economic Trinity is the one yet threefold agency of Father, Son, and Spirit in the economy of salvation. This is a functional Trinity represented through the life of Jesus Christ and his relationship with God. Its sole emphasis is on soteriology. The immanent Trinity is the eternal distinctions of “persons” within the being of God.³⁰ The immanent Trinity is the ontological ground of the economic Trinity – this is how the eternal nature of God is to be understood. It is important to draw distinctions between the two understandings of the Trinity because it emphasizes the reconciling work of Christ and the renewing work of the Spirit, and through this, God remains eternally true to God’s self. It must be said that the economic and immanent Trinity is conceptual and does not point to two separate trinities. Karl Rahner (1904-1984), the creator of the economic and immanent axiom, found his proof through the incarnation of Christ and is therefore “derived from the economy of salvation” and that “the incarnation thus is proof of the strict identity between God in the economy and God as such” (LaCugna, 213). For LaCugna, the economic Trinity is the primary vehicle for understanding God: “the economy is not an abstract idea, but the life of God and creature existing together as one” (LaCugna, 377). The mission of the economic Trinity is to bring communion between God and creation, and through this missional activity, the Trinity breaks free of its secret inner life and comes into a relationship with creation through the act of salvation.

In answer to any accusations of modalism, which concerns considering the Trinity in two different “modes,” Moltmann writes: “The economic Trinity designates the triune God in his

³⁰ Also known as the “essential” Trinity.

dispensation of salvation, in which he is revealed. The economic Trinity is therefore also called the revelatory Trinity. The immanent Trinity is the name given to the triune God as he is in himself. The immanent Trinity is also called the substantial Trinity. This distinction cannot mean that there are two different Trinities. It is rather a matter of the same triune God as he is in his saving revelation and as he is in himself” (Moltmann, loc. 2212). Statements about the economic and immanent Trinity cannot conflict with each other and must adhere to doxological statements (Moltmann, loc. 2256). At the same time, there is an ongoing economy of salvation in history through God’s communication via Christ and God’s own “intradivine relation” (LaCugna, 217). Moltmann expands beyond the immanent and economic Trinity in his work *The Way of Jesus Christ*, where Christ is grasped “dynamically, in the forward movement of God’s history with the world” (Moltmann, loc. xiii). Moltmann continued this understanding in *Trinity and the Kingdom*: “from the very beginning, no immanent Trinity and no divine glory is conceivable without ‘the Lamb who was slain’” (Moltmann, loc. 2328). For Moltmann, his theological starting point is the cross.

Christology

To summarize the importance of Christology, Daniel Migliore (b. 1935) writes as such in *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, “Christology is not the whole of Christian doctrine, but it is the point from which all else is illumined” (Migliore, chap. 8). According to Migliore, based on the work of theologian Donald Baillie (1887-1954), through the incarnation the Word of God is united with human nature, and despite its paradoxical nature, we can come to some understanding through our own Christian experience. The union of God and humanity in Jesus Christ is a singular, unique act of God (Migliore, chap. 8). The eternal Word of God is the initiating subject of the history of Jesus Christ.

Christology can be viewed in a binary manner by utilizing either the life or divinity of Christ as an originating point for Christology: Christology from below pertains to history, while Christology from above is eternal and ahistorical. Christology from above and below are incomplete on its own because one favors the humanity and history of Christ while the other favors the eternal, unchanging aspect of the Trinity. Do we start with humanity or divinity? The union of the Word of God and humanity is sustained through the Holy Spirit and grace. In considering the fullness of Christ, we must consider equally the human experience of Christ, Jesus' ministry and death, and also Christ as a Person of the eternal Trinity. The word eternal does not hint at an inert, unchanging God, but rather that God exists within and without the arc of human history. God is capable of change, which is made explicit through the incarnation. Moltmann argues, as mentioned above, regarding the economic and immanent Trinity, that Christology also must be dynamic in the movement of history rather than a binary approach of above and below (Kärkkäinen, 12). From an immanent or high perspective, considering Jesus as Christ as the originating point allows for the dynamic union of the Word of God with humanity through salvation, which is the mediating act of Christ that unites humanity with God.

Karl Barth writes of Christ as such in *The Humanity of God*: "in Jesus Christ there is no isolation of man from God or of God from man. Rather, in Him we encounter the history, the dialogue, in which God and man meet and are together, the reality of the covenant mutually contracted, preserved, and fulfilled by them. Jesus Christ is in His one Person, as true God, Man's loyal partner, and as true man, God's. He is the Lord humbled for communion with man and likewise the Servant exalted to communion with God" (Barth, 46). The point made is that

Jesus Christ is, at the same time, paradoxically, dialectically, the mediator between God and man while man and God himself.

The fullness of Christ is understood through the combination of Christology from above and below and through the baptism of Christ, which reveals the co-divinity of the Son to the Father and Spirit. In the life of Christ, Christ's baptism becomes crucial to the Trinity's economy. It is understood through Christ's baptism that the Spirit is sent forth, which signifies an open (relational) Trinity. In this unique act, "the trinitarian history of God becomes a history that is open to the world," and through baptism, men and women are "integrated into the history of the Trinity" (Moltmann, loc. 1383). So, through this understanding of both immanent and economic history and Christology from above and below, one deduces that theology must be baptismal and soteriological. Through baptism, the Christian enters into unity with creation and the Trinity, which is communion with the divine.

Arianism

Arthur C. McGill (1926–1980), in his work *Suffering: A Test of Theological Method*, writes of Arianism as such, "according to [Arius'] opponents, the basic premise of Arius's thinking was that God the Father is absolutely unique and transcendent, and God's essence cannot be shared by another or transferred to another, not even the Son. This unpassable divinity was to be eternally wholly self-contained and complete in itself" (McGill, 70). Consequently, for Arius, the distinction between Father and Son was one of substance; if they were of the same substance, there would be two gods. Rather than sharing the same 'essence' with the Father, the Son is God's first and unique creation (Kärkkäinen, 39). This understanding was that Jesus was not the fullness of God but merely a creature among many (though first and highly exalted). According to Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (b. 1958) in *Christology: A Global Perspective*, this

understanding likely arose from the Hellenistic idea that suffering and death could not be attributed to divinity (Kärkkäinen, 40).

Similarly, the wholly contained divinity relates to a Stoic understanding of God, in which God is a self-contained generative principle (σπερματικός λογός or *pneuma*).³¹ The generative principle, or Arius' self-contained divinity, cannot divide the divine unity and cannot be directly active in the material world; the divine must work through the agent that is Christ (McGill, 71).³² For Arius, God ceases to be worthy of praise and worship if he is divisible or dependent, specifically in the case of Jesus Christ, who, Arius claims, was made out of nothing by God and is alien in essence to the Father.³³ Arius can only see the begetting of Christ as blasphemous in terms of extreme monotheism. This scandal led to the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, which sought to formally establish Christ's nature. McGill sums the Christological elements of the Nicene Creed up as such: "the Son that men encounter in Jesus and as Jesus (1) is derived from the very being of the Father, (2) is completely equal to the Father in all respects (i.e., He receives all that the Father has), and (3) fully glorifies the Father, offering as praise to the Father all that he has received" (McGill, 69).

Athanasius, Arius' biggest opponent, found that Jesus Christ of the New Testament represented a "dependent, needy powerfulness" that was found not to compromise God's full divinity (McGill, 73). Self-containment is not found to be the essential mark of divinity. McGill writes: "the true God, therefore, will always disappoint that Arian feeling of reverence for the absolute which lies in the heart of every man" (McGill, 74). This has ramifications for humanity's salvation and signifies that God would be incapable of saving humanity if Christ was

³¹ This is a beginning point for pneumatology.

³² *Agonos theos*; sterile god.

³³ Arius: "If the Father begat the Son, then he who was begotten had a beginning in existence, and from this it follows there was a time when the Son was not."

a unique creation. For Kärkkäinen, this line of inquiry represents how the soteriological concern has driven much of theology, specifically Christology (Kärkkäinen, 40). However, the key here is establishing the decisive marks of the Father and Son, which are based in love through the Father giving all things to the Son, “including the honor and reverence due to him as God,” and for the Son, “it is the love by which he yields all glory back to the Father,” (McGill, 75).³⁴ If we understand that love is the essential and defining mark of the Trinity, then we understand that the inner relationship is based on a “total and mutual self-giving” that exists in a state of action, which is self-communication (McGill, 76). McGill writes: “if God’s reality in himself is the relation between Father and Son, then God is this staggering dynamism of mutual self-communication” (McGill, 76). This relationship continues throughout *eternity* without beginning or end.

Perichoresis

Simply put, perichoresis means that all three Persons of the Trinity occupy the divine space, so we cannot comprehend God without comprehending all three Persons of the Trinity simultaneously (Bray, 158).³⁵ The Father simply cannot be understood as Father outside the “web of mutual relations of the Three” (Kärkkäinen, 39). On perichoresis, Migliore writes, “sharing a common essence, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are differentiated by their relationships with each other, existing in the mutual giving and receiving of love. Their mutual indwelling (perichoresis) is an intimacy far beyond any relationship known to creatures” (Migliore, chap. 4). This indwelling unity lies in the dynamic relationship or fellowship of the Trinity and is a dynamic concept – it is open, inviting, and also capable of interaction with creation. For Moltmann, the unity of the Trinity is found in the eternal perichoresis of the divine Persons.

³⁴ From Athanasius: ‘reciprocal delight’

³⁵ Similarly, *koinonia* or communion theology.

Perichoresis is the basis of the Triune relationship of the Godhead. It can be defined as co-indwelling, co-inhering, and mutual interpenetration. Alister McGrath (b. 1953) writes in *Christianity: An Introduction* that it "allows the individuality of the persons to be maintained, while insisting that each person shares in the life of the other two. An image often used to express this idea is that of a 'community of being,' in which each person, while maintaining its distinctive identity, penetrates the others and is penetrated by them".³⁶ On the inner relationship of the Trinity and salvation, Moltmann writes: "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" (Moltmann, 2300). For Moltmann, the dispensation of salvation is the vehicle of the open system of the Trinity – the Trinity's work through Christ reconciles humanity to the inner life and relationship of the Trinity. Taking this a step further, perichoresis becomes eschatological – through consummation and communion, God finally comes to indwell within His creation eternally, and the divine union is achieved. For Moltmann, through the eschaton, the economic Trinity of soteriological works is finally transcended into the immanent Trinity of being (Moltmann, 161).

If salvation (communion) hinges upon the uniting or reconciliation of man to God, then God cannot be solitary, but rather salvation relates to the relational and open perichoresis of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Moltmann writes: "the doctrine of the perichoresis links together in a brilliant way the threeness and the unity, without reducing the threeness to the unity, or dissolving the unity in the threeness. The unity of the triunity lies in the eternal perichoresis of the trinitarian persons. Interpreted perichoretically, the trinitarian persons form their own unity

³⁶ Alister McGrath. *Christianity: An Introduction*. Oxford. Blackwell Publishing. 2011.

by themselves in the circulation of the divine life” (Moltmann, loc. 2550).³⁷ This mutual interpenetration informs us that the Triune God is an open system with *relationality as its essential mark of divinity*.

Moreover, through this understanding of perichoresis, eternal functional subordinationism can be soundly refuted. Moltmann writes of this refutation: “through the concept of perichoresis, all subordinationism in the doctrine of the Trinity is avoided...Here the three Persons are equal; they live and are manifested in one another and through one another” (Moltmann, loc. 2560).

A Relational Trinity and the Church

Though this chapter has sought to understand the Trinity's inner relationship, what does this tell us about God's relation to the world? For McGill, the only answer is that “God exercises his power in relation to men through self-giving love and service” (McGill, 79). The inner relationship of the Trinity, which is based in self-giving, is expressed outwardly through the life of Christ as the “revealer of God's own essential life” (McGill, 79). Through Christ, God gives his life in service to creation because his essential character is a life of self-giving (McGill, 82). Similarly, McGill states, “[God] is unobstructed openness. When we meet him in his actions, we meet him in his full openness toward us” (McGill, 65).

For LaCugna, communion is the “unifying force” that holds together the consubstantial persons of the Trinity in love (LaCugna, 249). The entire purpose of the economic Trinity is the communion of *all*. God's open system of relationality is diametrically opposed to human's

³⁷ The understanding of person is critical to the argument for a social Trinity. According to Moltmann: The substantial understanding of person (Boethius) and the relational understanding of person (Augustine) [is] expanded by the historical understanding of person (Hegel). The Persons [of the Trinity] do not merely ‘exist’ in their relations; they also realize themselves in one another by virtue of self-surrendering love” (Moltmann, loc. 2535). In a Hegelian sense, the person gives himself entirely to a counterpart and is found only by expressing himself in others (Moltmann, loc. 2533).

tendency for in-group and out-group relations and identity. In human relations that seek to order and systematize, there is a propensity for hierarchy and assigning status to those closer to the “center” against those closer to the margins of society.³⁸ Similarly, Moltmann finds that baptism is the key to communion with the divine and the community of Christian believers. If God is love, then God has the capacity to break free from the inner intratrinitarian life and come into the world. For LaCugna, “God moves toward us so that we may move toward each other and thereby toward God” (LaCugna, 377). Moltmann also writes: “we have to say that the Triune God loves the world with the very same love that he himself is” (Moltmann, loc. 2221). Anything less than this self-emptying love of salvation begins to negate the concept of a Christian God. For Moltmann, this love is most acutely expressed through the crucifixion. In this line, Moltmann, whose theological starting point is the cross, redefines the Trinity: “The Father is crucifying love, the Son is crucified love, and the Holy Spirit is the unvanquishable power of the cross” (Moltmann, loc. 1287).

For LaCugna, love is done in and through community. She writes: “entering into divine life is impossible unless we also enter into a life of love and communion with others” (LaCugna, 382). Through salvation, we can live as one family in God’s household (*basileia*) (LaCugna, 384). LaCugna relies heavily on her understanding of the economic Trinity through *oikonomia*³⁹ and our adoption via salvation as God’s sons and daughters. She also asserts rightfully the non-patriarchal conception of the Triune God.⁴⁰ Moltmann follows this idea with an understanding

³⁸ See: the Great Chain of Being and its ordered hierarchical system for the universe, including divine decrees and monarchical ordination.

³⁹ Literally: household management. Theologically: God’s ability to guide creation toward salvation; economic.

⁴⁰ LaCugna writes: “But according to the reign preached by Jesus Christ, patriarchy is not God’s *archē*; the rule of the male is not the rule of God. In God’s new household, the male does not rule, God rules together with us, in solidarity with the poor, the slave, the sinner. Male and female are equal partners in God’s household” (LaCugna, 394).

that Christ is first among men, and that we are called to become brothers and sisters of this first perfect man through baptism.

According to Karl Barth, because God first and supremely exists for the world, the Church is to exist not for itself but for others. The Church will not exist without human beings and the community they build, which the Spirit ultimately leads. From Migliore: “A trinitarian ecclesiology will take its basic clue from the fact that God made known in the reconciling work of Jesus Christ and the continuing activity of the Holy Spirit is the triune God who loves in freedom and who desires that we participate in that life of love” (Migliore, chap. 11). *Koinonia* becomes critically important across the faith as we understand communion ecclesiology through our understanding of the perichoresis of the Triune God. Migliore writes: “human life comes to completion by participation in and reflection of the triune love of God” (Migliore, chap. 11). The Trinity *is* divine life in communion, and from this blueprint, we can discern how we are to do church.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to explain the mechanics and activities of a Trinity in relation by examining the immanent and economic Trinity, Christology from above and below, and the role of communion and baptism in both the Christian life and the inner life of the Trinity. The point made herein is that the Trinity is open and relational: the Trinity is open through the mediating activity of the Triune God, which is economic in nature – soteriological, made clear through the baptism and crucifixion of Christ. The self-emptying love of God is a key to understanding soteriology. Moltmann writes: “the Triune God reveals himself as love in the fellowship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. His freedom, therefore, lies in the friendship which he offers men and women, and through which he makes them his friends. His

freedom is his vulnerable love, his openness, the encountering kindness through which he suffers with the human beings he loves and becomes their advocate, thereby throwing open their future to them” (Moltmann, loc. 910).

To understand a Trinity in relation is to rely upon perichoresis. Perichoresis is the mutual interpenetration of the Persons of the Trinity, in which, while distinct, the Persons exist within and are dependent entirely upon each other. Perichoresis teaches us that community is critically important and that a relational Trinity cannot be imagined to be true without it. Rather than an ordered, prescriptive approach to society, perichoresis teaches us that Christian life is transformed through baptism, communion, and ultimately entering the *basileia* or Kingdom of God.

The final chapter will uncover this thesis's scarlet thread: how the Trinity's relationality has deep reverberations for human life and how we are called to be as Christians. It will bring together the faulty hierarchical Trinity and its implications on modern life, Hegelian reconciliation through Christ, the social Trinity and its lessons of baptism and communion, and finally, discuss human relationality, bringing in a theology of hope through an eschatological light.

CHAPTER 5

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL HOPE OF THE TRINITY: LESSONS FROM A TRINITY IN RELATION

Introduction

This thesis has attempted to present the perspective that the Trinity is an open system based in relationality, offered as an alternative to the hierarchical Trinity of conservative evangelical Christians. Overall, this has been an examination of an open-ended Trinity that exists solely in relationship and is engaged in the active work of reconciling humanity through salvation, baptism, and communion. This thesis has examined two opposing models of the Trinity and the ramifications for each, one based on domination and subordination and the other offering humanity a radically egalitarian way forward based on the inner relationship of the Triune God. When presented with two models of the Trinity, hierarchical and relational, it becomes clear that the relational model offers a community-oriented understanding of the Trinity, while the hierarchical model leads to disordered relations between men and women and a deeply distraught society. I have found even more validity in a relational Trinity by examining the Hegelian understanding of reconciliation via the incarnation and social trinitarianism. If the triune God is relational, and that relationality is based in self-giving love that enfolds humanity, then we can understand how the active and open Trinity reverberates into our own lives and how we “do” church. This thesis has returned over again to several key themes: communion, the incarnation, reconciliation, and salvation – seeking to understand better Christ’s role in the Trinity and how humanity is involved. From a Hegelian perspective, through reconciliation, we return to our true continuity with the divine – this is salvation and is eschatological in nature. For

a God whose mission is the salvation of creation, He becomes a missional God; reconciliation and communion become eschatological in nature. It is not a fiery and dark eschaton but one of coming home – of true belonging. We desire as a creation to return to the creator, and as if in a mirror, the creator desires us to return to Him. If the Triune God deals in salvific works, God aims to “save” humanity by restoring us to divine life. This is the purpose of the economic Trinity. As humanity is restored, so can the economic and immanent transcend and return to one.

At the beginning of this thesis, I asked the question of the ethical and philosophical implications of a subordinationist trinitarian theology and the response from the perspective of a relational or social Trinity. As sub-questions, I considered the hierarchical reading of the Trinity put forth by conservative evangelicals and what have been recent repercussions in this thinking; I also considered the philosophical implications of a relational Trinity by examining Hegelian reconciliation and social trinitarianism; and lastly, I asked what this relational, open understanding of the Trinity put forth by modern theologians like Catherine LaCugna and Jürgen Moltmann have to teach us about not just God, but the greater Church as well.

This final chapter will seek to uncover the scarlet thread of this thesis: tracing the underlying themes and currents of how intimate our understanding of Christ’s role in the Trinity can be in our lives. Not just *our* lives but our church, society, relationships with others, policies, economic systems, and orientation to God. As this thesis comes to a close, I shall connect the dots of the differing trinitarian models, Hegel’s reconciliation, and social trinitarianism, utilizing it all to refute functional subordinationism; lastly, this work will consider the radically eschatological hope of a mission-driven Triune God.

Power and Discipline

Chapter 2 sought to provide a modern benchmark on how a hierarchical understanding of the Trinity put forth by conservative evangelicals reverberates into our individual lives and society. The case study put forth was the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and showed how theology comes to affect our lives. To fully understand a relational Trinity, we must examine the counterargument of functional subordinationism. This chapter discussed the legacy of the *Roe v. Wade* decision and its importance concerning women's fight for equality and bodily autonomy, examined subordinationism, outlined the interplay between conservative evangelical theology and politics, and probed some foundational biblical arguments for subordinationism.

Hegel's Reconciliation

Chapter 3 examined Hegel's contributions to theology, mainly through Hegelian reconciliation and its correspondence to the incarnation. For Hegel, God is active via *oikonomia* – the economic Trinity – through history, and God's work is to reconcile man to God. God's desire to reconcile the finite (creation) with the Infinite (Absolute) is made concrete through the incarnation. This continuity between God and humanity (Creator and creation) opens the door to understanding a Trinity in relation in which humanity is explicitly enfolded through the person of Christ and His salvific, communing activities, and the radical implications of this person and activity upon how we understand the Trinity and God's relationship with humanity. The chapter set out to examine Hegelian thought's impact on theology by looking at Hegel's understanding of the incarnation and resurrection of Christ and the importance of tradition.

The Economic and Immanent

As this work transitioned into the fourth chapter, soteriology became integral for reconciliation with the divine; the economy of the Trinity and the work of Christ also became

crucial in this next step. Chapter four focused on a social doctrine of the Trinity and the economic and immanent Trinity. The social doctrine of the Trinity hinges solely upon being in relation, and for Jürgen Moltmann, the fellowship and relationality of the Trinity is the essence of God (God exists in relation), and this essence opens God up to a relationship with the world. Furthermore, if we understand God as being in relation, we understand that God is incapable of hierarchy. A social Trinity further verifies Nicene trinitarian doctrine and opens the doors to a greater fellowship with creation. This chapter discussed social trinitarianism by examining the mechanics of a relational Trinity, the role of Christ and Christology, how the relational Trinity offers the Christian community a way to model our relationships, and how Christians relate to others.

The Trinity, One in Essence and Undivided

For Greek Orthodox Bishop John Zizioulas (1931–2023), there is no true being without communion, and nothing exists as an individual in and of itself. In order to be considered a person, there must be communion, relation, and an opening to the “Other” (Zizioulas uses the term *ekstasis*).⁴¹ Humanity, creation, and even the church reflect God's open and relational being (Kärkkäinen, 90). Zizioulas writes in *Being as Communion*, “This way of being...is a way of relationship with the world, with other people and with God, an event of communion...” (Zizioulas, 15). God exists *in* communion. This is the point that Catherine LaCugna is making in *God For Us* as well. God's only form of being is the mutual relationship of self-giving love, and God's personhood can only be understood as a relationship of love (Kärkkäinen, 92). For Zizioulas, “the being of God could be known only through personal relationships and love. Being means life, and life means communion” (Zizioulas, 16). In maintaining Orthodox tradition,

⁴¹ Recall the defining of person via Boethius in chapter 4. For Zizioulas, personhood is constituted of *ekstasis* and *hypostasis*.

Zizioulas also holds that human beings are divinized through theosis, therefore participating in the divine existence. Once again, the Trinity is shown to be both open and relational.⁴² For Zizioulas, the whole of ecclesial experience is a reflection of Trinitarian life.

Refuting Functional Subordinationism once and for all

It is my hope that through the chapters of this thesis, it has become clear how extreme the difference is and how grave the ramifications can be between the two understandings of the Trinity being put forth in modern theology. On the one hand, a prescriptively ordered Trinity empowers a system of domination and submission that affects all aspects of our lives, while on the other hand, we cannot imagine God without imagining God in relationship – God *is* the relationship. When we imagine God not as a person but as *the* act of love and fellowship, we envision a relational, communitarian existence for ourselves. The Trinity comes to deeply inform the entirety of the Christian experience and our self-understanding.

As discussed in the second chapter, subordinationism has entered the public theological space through evangelical and Reformed theologians such as George Knight III, Wayne Grudem, Bruce Ware, and others. This understanding that the Son is eternally subordinate in role to the Father is mirrored in “role relationship” of women to men. In contrast, women are eternally subordinate in role to men, which has reverberations in bodily autonomy, marriage, ordination, et cetera. This forced division turns the Trinity into one who commands and one who obeys; the Son is under the Father’s eternal *authority*, which is replicated in the relationship between the sexes.

⁴² It is worth noting here that Zizioulas diverges from Moltmann and LaCugna in his Orthodox stance of the monarchy of the Father. The Father acts as the ontological ground of the Trinity; this is an asymmetrically balanced Trinity. This idea of divine monarkhē is addressed from a Catholic perspective in *God For Us* by Catherine LaCugna.

If any hierarchy is assigned to the Trinity, this ordering destroys the equality of the three Persons. Chapter 4 discussed the doctrine of perichoresis at length; however, this doctrine is also critical in rejecting modern subordinationism. Perichoresis once more is a very old term, discussed by John of Damascus in *De fide orthodoxa* as “necessary being-in-one-another and “...as to cleave to each other, and they have their being in each other.”⁴³ Moltmann states: “the doctrine of perichoresis links together in a brilliant way the threeness and the unity...the unity of the triunity lies in the eternal perichoresis of the trinitarian persons” (Moltmann, loc. 2551). This chapter carries perichoresis further via Zizioulas, who states that God exists only *in* communion and does *not* exist outside of this. The divine life is wholly fulfilled in the relations to one another, and taking it a step further, in relationship with creation through Christ as mediator. Once more, Moltmann writes: “through the concept of perichoresis, all subordinationism...is avoided. The [‘monarchy of the Father’] has no validity within the eternal circulation of the divine life, and non in the perichoretic unity of the Trinity. Here the three Persons are equal; they live and are manifested in one another and through another” (Moltmann, loc. 2560).

With subordinationism, there is also the question of divine will. In what I will refer to as “Orthodox Trinitarianism,” the Father and Son are of the same substance, and that will is a property of substance. In this regard, there is one divine will established in the Godhead. If the Son eternally yields to the Father as is described in subordinationism, Christ’s own will would be yielded through his submission. For the Son to eternally submit to the Father would require two divine wills in the Godhead. The understanding that God would have two wills makes no sense on theological grounds.

⁴³ John of Damascus, *De fide orthodoxa* 1.8, PG 94.829A.

Similarly, theologian Millard Erickson (b. 1932) argues that if authority and submission are two distinct parts of the Father and Son's essence, then they are no longer *homoousios*, meaning subordinationism is in divergence with Nicene thought.⁴⁴ Despite many theologians who uphold subordinationism while rejecting Arianism, they hold a *heteroousios* stance on the Trinity that begins to toe the line of tritheism. At the end of the day, functional subordinationism, or any name it is known by, brings classical Christology and soteriology into jeopardy. It is no longer an argument for an egalitarian understanding of the Trinity and human relations but represents a duty to maintain and uphold Christianity's doctrine without adulteration. While the Christian must understand that much of the incarnation remains a divine mystery, we can understand what God has revealed to us in history and what has been upheld by the church via Nicene Christology for nearly two millennia.

But even outside the theological formulations and discussion of will and personhood, it should become abundantly clear that in the literal egalitarian vs. complementarian debate, there are profound ramifications on individual life and society discussed in chapter 2. This argument regarding the trinitarian formula is multi-faceted, deeply complex, and pervasive throughout time. If we understand God as being *as* communion like Zizioulas, LaCugna, Moltmann, and others have advocated for, then we begin to see how deeply it affects Christian self-understanding. The Trinity and divine life act as a mirror for how we relate to each other and God. If God is impassable, unmoved, and unphased by creation, then the gap will never be bridged for humanity's salvation. If God is an eternal power-driven relation of dominance and submission, of two divine wills eternally at odds, then we will posit that Christ, as first creation, cannot fully reconcile creation as understood in functional subordinationism. If we finally

⁴⁴ Millard Erickson. *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009) 172.

understand that God is solely relational and through Christ reaches across the great chasm of divinity and humanity to collect and reconcile us, *all of us*, then we finally begin to clearly see the model God has set for us in human relations. Despite our creatureliness, we are raised into divine life through the salvific work of Christ as God-man and beloved mediator.

Relationality and Eschatology

One final piece that is critical to this argument is that the relational Trinity and the work of Christ are eschatological. The economic Trinity is missional and based on the salvific act of God through Christ. Trinitarian theology is eschatological because it is based in history, and eschatology is the science of last things. This speaks to Hegel's reconciliation of the finite to the Infinite with a soteriological and teleological dimension. Like what I have outlined from Hans Küng's *Incarnation of God*, Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928–2014) argues in his essay *Redemptive Event and History* "History is the most comprehensive horizon of Christian theology. All theological questions are meaningful only within the framework of the history which God has with humanity and through humanity with his whole creation-the history moving toward a future still hidden from the world but already revealed in Jesus Christ" (Pannenberg, 15). Like Moltmann, for Pannenberg, God provides the dynamic thrust for history to move into the future. This brings home the understanding that we are moving through time toward an event horizon (for Moltmann, the "Christ-event"), which will result in the eschaton. At the eschaton, the works of the economic Trinity will culminate, and the working Trinity will transcend into the immanent Trinity, as Moltmann has argued. This will result in the final reconciliation of the finite to the Absolute, In Hegelian terms. As Christians, we expectantly await the eschaton, and for Moltmann, humanity strains after the future promise of a coming Christ. This promise is at the

heart of not just Christology and soteriology but also the heart of trinitarian doctrine. We exist in the not-yet, awaiting the fulfillment of the promise, for our true nature is theosis.

REFERENCES

- Giles, Kevin. *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate*. Downer's Grove. InterVarsity Press. 2002. Kindle edition.
- Flowers, Ronald B. *That Godless Court? Supreme Court Decisions on Church-State Relationships*. Second edition. Louisville. Westminster John Knox Press. 2005.
- Encyclopaedia Britannica, inc. (2022). *Roe v. Wade*. Encyclopaedia Britannica. Retrieved July 2, 2022, from <https://www.britannica.com/event/Roe-v-Wade>.
- Du Mez, Kristin Kobes. *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*. New York. Liveright.2020.
- Kemeny, P.C. *Church, State and Public Justice: Five Views* (Spectrum Multiview Book Series). New York. IVP Academic. 2009. Kindle edition.
- Ingram, Alexia. (2021). *McFall v. Shimp and the Case for Bodily Autonomy*. Retrieved July 7, 2022, from <https://hulr.org/spring-2021/mcfall-v-shimp-and-the-case-for-bodily-autonomy>.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*. 1981. Notre Dame. Notre Dame Press.
- Johnson, Keith. *Trinitarian Agency and the Eternal Subordination of the Son: An Augustinian Perspective*. Themelios. Retrieved September 18, 2022, from <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/trinitarian-agency-and-the-eternal-subordination-of-the-son-an-augustinian-perspective/>
- Tinkham, Matthew. *Neo-Subordinationism: The Alien Argumentation in the Gender Debate*. Andrews University Seminary Studies, Vol. 55, No. 2, 237–290. 2017.
- Küng, Hans. *The Incarnation of God: an introduction to Hegel's theological thought as prolegomena to a future Christology*. New York. Crossroad. 1987.
- Hodgson, Peter C. 'Christ and Reconciliation,' *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. (Oxford, 2005; online edition, Oxford Academic, 20 Apr. 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199273618.003.0008>, accessed 26 Oct. 2022.
- Van Riet, Georges. *The Problem of God in Hegel*, Parts II-III: *Philosophy Today*, Vol. XI, Number 2/4, Summer 1967, pp. 75-105.
- G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: The Lectures of 1827*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 468-69.

- Ottati, Douglas F. & Stout, Jeffrey. *From Christ to the World: Introductory Readings in Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing. 1994.
- Hegel, G. W. F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford. Oxford University Press. 1806. Revised 1977.
- Bourke, Richard. *Hegel and the French Revolution, History of European Ideas*, DOI: 10.1080/01916599.2022.2095754. 2022. Accessed November 12, 2022.
- Beck, L. W. (1980). The Reformation, the Revolution, and the Restoration in Hegel's Political Philosophy. *Revue Européenne Des Sciences Sociales*, 18(52), 59–72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40369323>.
- Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids. Zondervan Academic. 1994.
- Allen, Diogenes. *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*. Louisville. Westminster John Knox Press. 1985.
- Lee, Hyo-Dong. *Spirit, Qi, and the Multitude: A Comparative Theology for the Democracy of Creation, Comparative Theology: Thinking Across Traditions*. New York. Fordham University Press. 2013.
- Barth, Karl. *The Humanity of God*. Louisville. Westminster John Knox Press. 1960.
- Migliore, Daniel. *Faith Seeking Understanding*. Cambridge. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 1991.
- Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. Minneapolis. Fortress Press. 1993.
- LaCugna, Catherine. *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. New York. HarperCollins. 1991.
- Bray, Gerald. *The Doctrine of God: Contours of Christian Theology*. Downers Grove. InterVarsity Press. 1993.
- Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. *Christology: A Global Introduction*. Ada. Baker Academic. 2003.
- Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. *The Trinity: Global Perspectives*. Louisville. Westminster John Knox Press. 2007.
- McGill, Arthur C. *Suffering: A Test of Theological Method*. Philadelphia. The Westminster Press. 1982.
- Zizioulas, John. *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. Yonkers. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. 1997.

Pannenberg, Wolfhart. "Redemptive Event and History" in *Basic Questions in Theology*, v.1, Philadelphia. Westminster. 1970.