

# THE TRINITY

**A MODEL OF COMMUNITY**

*for*

**THE CHURCH AND THE HUMAN SOCIETY**



Anthony U. Nwachukwu

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ISBN: 978 229 1179

Printed in Nigeria by:  
Divine Love Publications, Enugu Nigeria  
08134639393, 07034740002  
dlpenugu@yahoo.com

## **DEDICATED**

To the blessed memory of my late parents, Mr. Columba Chiadikwe and Ezinne Priscilla Chikere Nwachukwu, and Rev. Fr. Mike Echeazu Madu.

## **FOREWORD**

St John, the epistle writer once said: "Beloved we are God's children now, what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). That God is a triune God and at the same time One and lives in a community and in relationship is humanly speaking inconceivable and makes a huge difference between the Christian concept of God and those of other religions. This is the stone rejected by the builders (the great non-Christian philosophers and theologians of old) that has become the corner stone for a perfect understanding of human and societal relationship with God and with the entire nature by some Christian thinkers of the new dispensation. The economic Trinity is the perfection of divine self-revelation Jesus promised His disciples would happen when the advocate comes, "the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you everything and remind you of all I have told you" (John 14.25). As John spoke that what we are to be was not yet revealed, in other words, the revelation of the Trinitarian standard for living the faith was yet to be revealed as he wrote, and with its revelation we have come to know that we are like Him and can only live out our faith by taking the economic Trinity as a standard for thorough Christian witnessing.

This book is a huge contribution in elucidating the mystery of the Trinity and making it a way of life accessible to Christ's faithful. That we could see Him as He is in Himself is truly the most precious gift of the Triune God to Christians, to Christian uniqueness, understanding of human life and nature and Christian unity and unity in the outer society. Assuredly, further investigations on these assertions should be for years to come subjects of theological reflections.

**Rev. Fr. Prof. Anacletus Nnamdi Odoemene**



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

God, in his infinite mercy, has been good to me. The graces of life, strength and perception have been marvellous gifts from Him. Above all is the Priesthood by which He called me to serve Him in a special capacity in the community of His chosen people, unworthy as I am. For these twenty-Five Years, God has never ceased to fill me with the requisite graces I have ever needed in the exercise of that Priestly office. I therefore thank God for so much love. I owe him the first fruit of my happiness. To Him I lift up my hands in praise

I have never been lonely in the journey of life. I have enjoyed the love, care and support of many to whom I owe much gratitude. The first person is my Late Bishop, Most Rev Dr. V. A. Chikwe, who took me in confidence and offered me such a wonderful opportunity to further my studies. May God grant him eternal rest. My gratitude goes also to the Apostolic Administrator of my diocese, Most Rev. Dr. Lucius I. Ugorji, who has, since assumption of office laboured day and night to heal the wounds of ecclesiastical brokenness and rebuild the communion for which the Church is known. I owe a debt of gratitude to the former Vicar General and one time Diocesan Administrator of my diocese, Very Rev Msgr. T. Nwalo, and the entire presbyterium of Ahiara Diocese, for their material and spiritual support.

I thank in a very special way, my mentor and academic guide, Rev Prof. Anacletus Nnamdi Odoemene, and all who tailored the ideas expressed in this book. My Priest friends, too numerous to mention, teachers at all the levels of my education and study mates

deserve special thanks. Deserving of special mention are the former Rector of the Catholic Institute of West Africa, Late Very Rev Msgr. Prof. Felix A. Adeigbo, and his academic team, my formators in the major and minor seminaries, especially Rt. Rev. Msgr. Theophilus Okere and Simon U. Amateze, my blood relations in the priesthood and religious life, Frs. Innocent Njoku (CSSp), Paul Ohaeri, Malachy Ogbede, ndi Father na ndi Sister Nguru, the members of Ahiara and all priests of the '93 set who are marking their Silver Jubilee anniversary in the priesthood this year, are fondly remembered and appreciated. The Superior Generals, Rev. Mother Mary Anne Dike (DDL) and Rev. Mother Martha Offor (SJS), and their Sisters have a special place in my heart.

Last but not the least, I owe a debt of sincere gratitude to the amiable Vice Chancellor, Very Rev Fr Prof Christian Anieke, the FCC Prof Edwin Onyeneje, the BOT, the Governing Council, Principal officers and all staff and students, and in particular the Dean and staff and students of the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy/Religious Studies unit, of Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu for all the love they have shown me since I joined them. The same sentiments go to the Rector, Priests and Religious, Chaplaincy Council, and importantly the Chairperson and members of the Omnium Sanctorum Chaplaincy, Thinkers Corner Enugu for the generosity in organizing an undeserved Priestly Silver Jubilee Celebration for me in the Chaplaincy. To these noble ladies and gentlemen, I owe them a million thanks and pray the Almighty to reward and bless them all.

I remain indebted to my family, numerous colleagues and friends whose presence have had effects on my life. Pat and Chinwe, Bonny and Oge, Pat Nosike, Sir and Lady (late) Linus Ogbonna, SMS/SPCS 1979/4 family, and many others too numerous to mention here are all appreciated. I pray God to bless and reward all of them. I have enjoyed and profited from their assistance. My story is their story, my happiness is their happiness. May God reward them all for making part of the story of my life and grant them his blessing.

**Anthony Uchechukwu Nwachukwu.**



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## PREFACE

The Christian doctrine of God has assumed the central stage in theological discussions lately. Attention is no longer so much on the formulation of this doctrine of God which has been largely accepted as a given among Christians of various denominations. It is rather the focus on the implications of this doctrine to practical life that has become the nexus of attraction to theologians and other scholars in allied fields. In this case, the Blessed Trinity is seen as a model of life for humans, for the Church and for the world. Being a community of persons in perfect relationship, this image of God portrayed through the pages of positive revelation as community of perfect love, mutual coinherent transparency and communion, an image that could best be described as divine choreography. This character makes the Trinity the ideal form of every community, with none of the many traits of the human community – oppression, conflicts, subordination, intolerance and enmity.

In agreement with Karl Rahner for whom the Trinity, a mystery of faith, is also a mystery of life to be lived, the whole essence of this Trinitarian self-disclosure in God's economic actions (creation, redemption and sanctification) does not end with the revelation of God as the *Tremendum et fascinans*. This dry knowledge would make this doctrine of God pointless as Kant would suppose. On the contrary, its climactic point lies in its illumination and the help such revelations could render to, the practical life of Church and humankind who, as *imago dei*, live in communities. This new way of interpreting the old doctrine of faith bridges the gap between faith and reason, doctrine and life, theory and praxis in respect of this doctrine of God.

In the following pages, the author engages in a exploration of the rich imports of the doctrine of the Trinity as a model of life for human beings living in communities/societies. This new

Trinitarian hermeneutics highlights the practical aspect of the Trinity, a doctrine of faith which Augustine so vigorously expounded and defended is today appreciated in a new light for its many rich implications for harmonious living in the family, in the community and within the universe, where the universe is considered a web of interactions and inter-relationships, as it exists in divinity. Thus, the divine Trinity teaches us how to live in communities and in communion with one another. The new insights this new understanding gives to social workers, especially those engaged in peace-building and conflict resolution and peace building makes this work a must read for all.



## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is receiving much attention today within theological circles than in the immediate past centuries. Like the re-emergence of Homer's Odysseus from his ten year epic travel away from home, there is a breaking forth, a re-emergence, and renewal of interest on the theology of the Christian dogma of the Blessed Trinity from apparent oblivion in the more recent time. This previously considered obsolete doctrine of faith emerges in grand style today to occupy a strategic pedestal in theological discussions and allied fields of thought and interdisciplinary studies. Its practical imports have equally been attested to since many now look at it as a sine qua non for the development of a community spirit and social cohesion and as a model of life for humankind. Thus, the once dry, obsolete, absurd mystery of faith has become a mystery of life and model for every living in community. One can deduce from this new awareness that this is the age of the Trinity.

Owing to this rising interest in this dogma of faith, contemporary theologians take a different approach from those of the Patristic and Scholastic theologians. Both Patristics and Scholastics occupied themselves with the need to present an intelligible explanation of this mystery of God's life, especially for the purpose of meeting with the intellectual minds of their contrivers as if the little human brain can ever come to a full grasp of the mystery. They rather turn their attention towards a new hermeneutic approach which tends to explore the implications of this mystery of faith in real life situations. Thus they express their conviction that this mystery of faith could also be a mystery of life and thus underscoring the importance of the most sublime of all mysteries, the Holy Trinity, for the human society.

This revolution in Trinitarian theological thought was initiated by two European theologians, Karl Barth in the Protestant circles and Karl Rahner from the Catholic. Their theological assumption is that the revelation of the nature of God is designed by God to furnish humankind with such insights that could help them model their life and action in a manner similar to that of God. Rahner, for example, opines that this mystery of faith (to be believed) is also a mystery to be lived<sup>1</sup>. The conviction of these contemporary theologians is that understanding the Trinity thus opens up to humankind an enabling disposition for living trinitarianly, that is, harmoniously with one another within the Church and within the human community, emulating thus, the inner life of the Trinity. To live in community is to live trinitarianly since the Trinity is a community of Persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in eternal relation.

The rich benefits of this approach to this dogma of faith in the contemporary times could be witnessed in the harvest of literatures on the theology of the Blessed Trinity emerging since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its promise is marvellous in the areas of conflict resolution and peace-keeping where it serves as a model. St Augustine of Hippo who championed the cause of this doctrine of the Christian faith in the West employed a Trinitarian hermeneutic in at once in defending and expounding the Christian belief on the nature of God. He did this to meet up with the curiosity of its contrivers which was causing a rift in the “seamless robe of Christ” while expounding this unique doctrine at the same time as a unique truth of the Christian faith. As contemporary theologians would, the Church was confronted on all sides by Christological and pneumatological controversies at the time of St Augustine. Members of Christ’s Body were split into factions. The Arians, for instance, had denied the divinity of Christ upon which rest the centrality of the Christian Gospel message. This meant a death blow to Christianity. This denial put to question the entire

faith of the Church at a period and in an environment where the same message was confronted by challenges from Greco - Roman pagan cultures. Augustine, seeing the threat this posed to Christian unity, devoted his work, *De Trinitate*, to defending the faith of the Church against false and heretical pretensions and to enforcing catholic unity by clarifying the faith content of the Christian teaching on the Blessed Trinity. Through his arguments and elaborations, he was able to achieve a number of things at the same time: he strengthened the faithful and clarified the so much challenged aspect of the Christian doctrine and ensured the unity of faith among the members of the Body of Christ. Since it was inconceivable on the one hand, and self-contradictory how Three distinct Persons beings (three distinct hypostases) is One God, Augustine illustrated how one reality may correctly have different hypostases. But with his teaching that the One God (*Deo Uno*) is the same as the Triune God (*Deo Trino*), he gave an answer that deconstructed the mathematical puzzle by stating that  $1+1+1 = 1$ , rather than,  $1 + 1+1 = 3$ . To ordinary human unaided reason, this is an untenable mathematics, but Augustine, by his reliance and his numerous appeals to the evidence of Scripture on both the distinctness of each divine person and the indivisible unity of the Godhead, painted the being of God in the picture of an interpersonal relationship. The relatants, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, being equally eternal and divine, though different in their hypostasis, are of one in their essence, or nature or substance, hence his expression, "*una essentia tres persona*". This relationality is at the essence of who God is, encompassing love in an infinite scope of self-differentiated reciprocity. The Son and the Father, for example, are defined in relationship to one another, to be the Father, there has to be a Son, and vice versa.

It was common knowledge at the Patristic times, especially among the Eastern Fathers, that the hallmark of Trinitarian life and relationality is communion. It was interpreted as the bond of love and mutual interpenetration between the Triune family of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However, Augustine did not follow the same point of departure with the Greek Church Fathers. He adopted a different starting point, the reverse order from that of the Greek theologians. In the Greek Trinitarian theological tradition, theological treatises began with the distinct *hypostases* (the Three distinct Persons) in the Trinity – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They treated this *hypostases* (personality) as treated as logically prior to the *ousia* (nature).<sup>2</sup> While attesting to the distinctness of the Three hypostases, they affirmed too, in consonance with the traditional faith teaching of the Church, that the action (*energeia*) of the Three Divine Persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, was one and only one alone (or as they put it, *opera trinitatis indivisa est* – the work of the Trinity is indivisible).<sup>3</sup> St Augustine, leading the development of the Latin Trinitarian theology, and in response to the contending issues in the Church of his time, fixed his thought first on the unity of the divine nature and only subsequently on the equality of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and thus established that the basis of Trinitarian love is the nature common to all members of the divine community/family. He viewed Personality (*persona*) to be, so to speak, the final complement of the nature (*substantia* – substance). Contrary to the Greek Fathers, Augustine held the nature to be logically prior to personality. Since His nature is One, he is known to us as One God. This led to his conclusion that God whose nature is One, is known to us as One God before He can be known to us as Three Persons. But since He is also a Trinity, *Deus* is not just God the Father, but the Trinity which is essentially a community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What is said of one member of the family is equally said of others (*De Trinitate. Bk 1, Ch 12. 25*). He thought of God in communitarian conceptions. To illustrate this

further, Augustine insisted that every external operation of God, by which alone we come to any knowledge of God, is an activity common to the whole Trinity, and cannot be attributed to one of the Three Divine Persons in isolation, save by appropriation.

It remains evidential that theological reflection on this doctrine of faith of the Christians flourished immensely in the Patristic period and at the same time among the Schoolmen. The more hair-splitting problem around this doctrine arose in the modern times. This is more directly linked to the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries when every doctrine of the Church came under heavy attack. Among these doctrines, the Trinity was “the most savagely attacked as the most absurd and pointless of many apparently untenable beliefs of the Christian tradition.”<sup>4</sup> The critics accused it of having no practical relevance to the human condition. As students of modern rationalist and empiricist philosophical traditions, these had adopted the position that all truth claims must first of all be subjected to rational or empirically detectable grounds before their truth values could be accepted. Thus, they insisted that any non-verifiable/non-falsifiable truth claims should be thrown into the thrash-bin. Since the domain under which such themes as “the Trinity”, angels, heaven, miracles, etc., (religion and metaphysics) falls under the noumenal, according to Immanuel Kant’s classification. Since noumenal objects cannot be apprehended by the senses, Kant declared such doctrines as the Trinity as irrational. Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science*, in praise of the triumph of scientific rationality over sacred revelation, declared the death of God. These criticisms left many centuries with the vision of the Trinity as a set of abstract conjectures which served no other purpose than to satisfy curiosities and provide rationalistic explanations of puzzles beyond human comprehension.

This criticism on the image of the Blessed Trinity has had an overriding influence in the development of Trinitarian thought and life within the Church and is attested by the various Christian denominations. It led to the loss of Trinitarian consciousness – in thought, and often, in the experiences of daily life. Karl Rahner’s *Trinity* and Colin E. Gunton’s *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* attest to this loss of the Trinitarian consciousness and experience, even among Christians. The “threeness” seems somehow additional, or a merely Christian addition to a generally accepted doctrine of God.<sup>5</sup> Rahner’s remark says that for most Christians, God is only thought of in purely monotheistic categories, hence he supposes most Christians to be strictly monotheists. Colin E. Gunton points out that in the Protestant circles, Christian worship contains a copious indication that belief in the Trinity is a mere formal expression of the Christian faith which has not penetrated practical Christian piety. *The Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today (1989)* of the British Council of Churches, for instance, observed that in both the Alternative Service Book and the collects of the Book of Common Prayer, the Holy Spirit is very rarely or scarcely mentioned.<sup>6</sup> One can then say that the Trinity is not captured in our consciousness.

All these point to an estrangement of the experience of the Trinity in actual Christian and human life. Evidences from both theology (especially in the Catholic circle) and worship (Protestant) attribute the forgetfulness of the Trinity to either of the following reasons: it is either owing to the fact that the doctrine has never penetrated the blood stream of the Church since the modern times, so that there is pretty too little to remember, or it existed only on the formal level, making no contribution to real concrete living. The West is bereft of this manner of appreciating this Trinitarian faith because it finds no place in their conscious minds. They scarcely “carry” it along with them in the journey of life. As J. Scott Horrell, the author of the article “*The Self-Giving Triune God, The Imago Dei And The*

*Nature Of The Local Church: An Ontology Of Mission*”, puts it, many Christians still feel what Kant expressed. He illustrates this with a report of what happened recently in Sao Paolo, Brazil. He writes:

At an ordination council in a large evangelical Church in So Paulo, Brazil, after a pastoral candidate had floundered completely in trying to answer questions concerning the Godhead, a veteran denominational leader proffered in the young man’s defense that the doctrine of the Trinity did not really matter: “Most Evangelicals believe in three Gods anyway.” Apparently for this pastor, as for Kant, the concept of the Triune God was irrelevant.<sup>7</sup>

It is devoid of any life and most irrelevant to real and actual living in the material world. Thus, belief in and confession of this Trinitarian faith became only a mere “yardstick for measuring authentic Christian belief”

The Trinity meant more to St Augustine than a mere doctrinal recitation. It was for him a measure of authentic faith and a gauged for unity within the Christian community. Sadly enough, the elements of this doctrine have been forgotten, and for centuries, the most central of all Christian doctrines has been treated on the periphery or as an appendage. Forgotten too are St any lessons from the Trinitarian legacies of the past teachers of the faith, like St. Augustine. His teaching, for instance, laid the foundation for conceiving the Trinity as a model of community and for thinking of the Trinity in communitarian and relational schemes, schemes that help us think of our dear God as a community of persons in relation. A revisit to his Trinitarian doctrine would be expedient especially as it offers an ontological ground for addressing much of the problems confronting contemporary society. That this society

is immersed in several shades of divisiveness, relativism, individualism and its consequences is evident in the many cases of conflict and even wars ranging from the family feuds to inter-state wars. These indicators of human brokenness show the extent human persons are estranged from their more fully image and identity as *imago trinitatis*. Since underlying every question on God is the question about man, the “questioner” himself, knowledge of God brings illumination on who we are, what we are, where we are, whither we are heading, etc., Augustine presents us with a viable lens for viewing ourselves as beings in community through a vision of the Trinity. The knowledge gained from a study of the nature and being of God would in return to open avenues that guide our self-understanding as relational beings in communion. This makes God a model for community life worthy of emulation.

In response therefore to the modernist thesis, the Trinity is not a piece of abstract intellectual theorizing reflective only of a great and fabulous mathematical conundrum. Just as the first Christians discovered in Christ and the Holy Spirit, not a new God, but a new and living way of knowing him and relating with Him, so are we expected today to rediscover in the Trinity a new hermeneutic for living and relating with God and with one another in our communities/in the world. A revisit to St Augustine who had left a major land mark as a legacy, a model we may employ in bringing the light of the Gospel to bear on living human condition in the world and in addressing the many contentious conflicts in the present time, would become of utmost importance, especially, in an age that is so steeped in controversies and often violent conflicts as the present age.

Should we not draw lessons from the early Christian and New Testament faith communities where the Trinity was considered not to be a new God, but a new way of understanding who God is,



about access to God through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup> The doctrine of the Trinity therefore presents to us not only a doctrine of what we ought to believe about God and his work, it also presents us with an insight into how God lives and works so as to guide us on how to live and work in the human community as members of the same family of humankind called to the same final destiny. It is a light that illumines the human feet as they stride on the sands of time. With it, humanity and the world would never go astray. The Church is the first to emulate this Trinitarian way of life and through her, as through a spectacle, humanity can emulate God.

So much like the Trinitarian teachings of the Eastern Orthodox Church where the Trinity is understood like a skill such that both worship and thought are so steeped in Trinitarian categories, so can we live like the Trinity lives. This skill so permeates their being that they both worship and think trinitarianly such that what they think, what they worship, that they put into action. We wish to assert here that the end-point of theologizing is faith which finds expression in worship and good neighbourliness. Accordingly, Gunton states that “Theological teaching is not an end in itself, but a means of ensuring that it is the real God we worship, the real God before whom we live. That is the point of the doctrine of the trinity above all....”<sup>9</sup> But Gunton would not just approve of any theologizing that simply stops at stressing the inner being of God in himself.

**This** is a calling, a challenge, an experience and, at the same time, a destination. To live trinitarianly then would be like acquiring a skill for the art of living before God, with our neighbour, with and in the created world where we appreciate those things that unite us more than those that separate and divide us. The teacher and owner of the dance is God Himself, while the dance style is communitarian. The divine dance itself is marked by such perfect

rhythming that the steps march in unison as befits a perfect being. With rhythming steps that permit neither frictions nor subjection, humans are schooled into the ideal manner of relating with others as persons in relation. This could help in human interpersonal relationships among members of different human groups and communities, such as the Church and the *Umunna*. Thus, the theology of the Trinity is neither isolated from real or practical human needs nor aloof to those experiences that grieve human life in communities or distort the true image of this being as an *imago dei*. This vision of the doctrine of the Trinity and its theology therefore, is most appreciated when we study this doctrine of God from the perspective of its import to the human persons, communities, and world.

This exocentric relational agenda gives the study of the ancient, traditional dogma of faith a new hermeneutics that now translates the once dead doctrine into a beam of hope for humankind in every time and clime. Whereas this is an interpretation of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, its stress is the apprehension that the Trinity consists of Three Persons whose unity consists of a loving relationship.<sup>10</sup> This way of interpreting the same old truth of faith is in consonance with a theological culture that dates back to the Church Fathers such as Augustine and the Cappadocian Fathers. The Fathers explain the Trinity as three individualities in one indivisible being, while at the same time emphatically asserting that the Christian community (the Church) is its analogy, or, as the Eastern Orthodox theologians would typically say, "an icon" of God's love, and a mutual participation in an ethical life that is comparable to God, but only analogous to God's being. Contemporary theologians like John Zizioulas stress the social - relational nature of God as a mode of relation found in God's very subsistence to which human relations can and ought to conform. Since God (in the Trinity) is an inherently social and relational being human unity can approach conformity to this image of

Divine unity through self-giving, empathy, transparency and adoration for one another.

Our argument in this paper revolves around the following propositions:

- a. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is a truth of faith which has much bearing on actual living in the world.
- b. Learning about Trinitarian life is like acquiring a skill to enable us know how to live and work within the human community as beings-in-communion.
- c. The Church is like a window through which we perceive the being and life of the Trinity. Thus she exemplifies this communion of life and through her example, the world could draw light.

Models can enhance excellence and authentic/sustainable human development. Trinitarian models themselves go as far as enhancing harmonious living relationships among members of communities and groups and the church as forms of human community with a supernatural destiny. Such models exist in the Christian doctrine of the Blessed Trinity which St Augustine expounded from the standpoint of the biblical and traditional Christian teaching. Augustine employed the unitive model of the Trinity by which he built his Trinitarian edifice upon the pre-eminence of the unity of substance in the Godhead before the distinctions among the Divine Three. Thus, the Three are what they are in the first place on account of the divine nature which they possess in common. Since God cannot but be one, each is equally divine, equally perfect and equally eternal, yet there is only One God, and not three gods. This was his reason for classifying the various analogies used by his predecessors for illustrations of the Trinity under vestiges since they imply three separate entities. According to him, vestiges contain only hazy and faint semblances. This accounts for his

rejection of interpersonal love in *Book VIII* of his *De Trinitate* for its lack of consubstantiality. In its stead, he conceived of images (*imago*) as conveying stronger indications of threeness, whereby all the three elements inhere on the one thing or substance. This he found in the mind, hence his psychological trinitarianism. It highlights the common nature the Three Persons of the One God have in common as the ground for their unity and mutual love for one another. Just as St Augustine did employ his model in addressing the burning issues that confronted the unity of the Church of his time, one can replicate this same Trinitarian model as a theological guide in addressing the contending issues in human relationship in the present age. This is done in the conviction that the same way it helped Augustine to achieve and restore unity among the faithful of Christ in Augustine's time and equally in presenting a clarification of the Christian faith, the present age might draw from the rich promises of this doctrine of faith a way of life that would enable the men and women of the present age to chart a new pathway to unity and peace in the family of God's people and in their local communities.

Since all persons decry every form of brokenness and its effects (the disintegration of the Trinitarian experience) in both society and Church, there is need to locate the importance of such a study on the Trinity in the help such an orientation could render to, the much needed healing and wholeness in our world today. Succinctly put, an understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity throws much light on one's understanding his full humanity. In this case, it helps in providing a theoretical frame for searching for and in providing solutions to the challenges of flops in values and the new wave of violent crises confronting humans as human beings today; in it alone lies the key to solving much of the destabilizing social tensions and conflict issues that leave human societies more impoverished and underdeveloped. The following assumptions run across the lines and pages here are:

- a. The world peace moves and initiatives are ineffective because of the absence of authentic ontological base reality and role model that illumine communal living;
- b. This ontological base and model is found only in God who is a communion of persons in relation;
- c. This Trinitarian model of life could be emulated;
- d. As the Trinitarian spirit has nourished the Church's life and unity, so could it fill the gaps of division and heal the wounds of disintegration in a world torn into shreds by factions and selfishness.

Commenting on this Trinitarian model, James Love writes:

And, we also know from our experience of this mysterious triune God, that sometimes the divine mission blows us into directions that confuse us, challenge us, and sometimes terrify us. But always, for true expressions of Trinitarian faith is God's deep and steadfast love for us and the world.<sup>11</sup>

The Church in Igboland, as a local Church, provides us with a study case for testing the fruits of this Trinitarian theological reflection. It deals more directly with the import of Trinitarian theology in the world today. This does not only provoke a study of the Igbo Church, but projects her at the same time in a limelight, thus challenging both head and members to reflect the Trinitarian model of community and pointing out how this could be made possible. The fruit of will go down well for the Church in Igboland as for any other local Church, for the universal Church and the world community in general.

### **Method of Research**

Systematic theology distinguishes itself by the use of method in theological reflection. Since theology itself is a critical reflection

on the faith, it all means that faith is truly so only when it is thought deeply into and consciously expressed in words and actions.<sup>12</sup> Through theologizing faith attains requisite maturation and growth, hence without it, faith would ever remain passive, unproductive.

There exist several different theological methods though with a thin tread cutting across them. The choice of any by any theologian is often determined by the theologian's perspective and the question he is addressing. However, the aim and end of theological reflection is one; thus by following different theologies, one and the same theological question may be approached from different perspectives, contexts and worldviews. We consider highly in this context David Tracy's "critical correlation" which according to Richard McBrien,<sup>13</sup> is a modification of Paul Tillich's "method of correlation."<sup>14</sup> However, beyond Tracy and Tillich, we are applying this method to a study of the mission of the Church in a contemporary African milieu. The two basic correlating elements or factors are the Christian message and the human situation. However, these are viewed in cognizance of the culture that shapes the world of the research area.

According to Tillich, the correlation method makes an analysis of the human situation out of which the essential questions arise.<sup>15</sup> Tracy, lends the explanation that the two correlating elements, the Christian message and the human situation must be creatively interpreted such that each influences the other.<sup>16</sup> This establishes a pattern of mutually critical correlations between interpretation of situation and the gospel as each reality influences, confronts, informs, transforms and correlates the understanding of the other.<sup>17</sup> The need for the inculturational approach and orientation of this correlation is based on the fact that no tree stands on itself without the firm grips of the roots on the soil.

The search for the roots helped Kunta Kinte to reconstruct his past which had been nearly erased by the slave trade and the experience of his African-American ancestors as slaves. The positive effects of Haley's work began with the explosion of interest in genealogy in the world and the opening of the door for dialogue among cultures.<sup>18</sup> With that Kunta regained confidence and could re-orientate himself towards attaining his full potentials as a human person with a destiny. The Biblical example of Tobit (Tobit 4:12-13 referring to Gen 24:3-4; 28:8-10) instantiates this need for exploring the root for value, truth and meaning. So is it also with theological inculturation.

The research therefore seeks to make a critical appropriation of the Christian message drawing upon the perennial teaching of the Church, on the Trinity as espoused by St Augustine and the findings of contemporary theological scholarship, and on the other hand, an appropriation of the actual human situation, which the documents, *Gaudium et Spes* (nn. 4 – 10) and *Ecclesia in Africa*, addressed. This would thus initiate the dialogue in a triangular correlation: faith, culture and actuality. The intention for adopting such an approach is reflected in Richard McBrien's Catholicism as he said:

The correlation of the Christian message and human situation in mutual conversation, or dialogue, has but a single intention: to draw out of our critical reflection upon Christian faith (which is theology) the outcomes of "right belief" (orthodoxy), "right practice" (orthopraxis), and "right worship. The latter two, as indicated above, are folded into the one overarching concept of discipleship.<sup>19</sup>

The definition of terms in this work is done for clarification purposes. A. Nwachukwu agrees with E. Bolaji Idowu on the following statement:

... when you find confusion of argument in a book, want of clearness of expression, when you see men arguing and misunderstanding each other, there is nearly always one reason. Either they are using words in different senses or they have no idea of what they mean by their words.<sup>20</sup>

In order to avoid this confusion, we undertake to say in what sense we are employing our most underlying concepts and terminologies. It is our contention that a clear understanding of these would facilitate a better understanding of the thrust of the argument. These terms include theology, Trinity, Church, human person, and community, substance, and unity.

### **Theology**

The term “theology” is derived from two Greek words *theos* (God) and *logos* (meaning, science) to literally mean the science of God. William J. Hill recounts its development and traced it to pagan antiquity, especially in the works of Plato and Aristotle. The early Greek Fathers used it in correlation to “*oikonomia*,” where *theologia* would refer to the inner mysteries of the Godhead while “*oikonomia*” would refer to God’s plan for the world manifest in the Christ event. But since Abelard in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the word was used explicitly in our sense of signifying an intellectual discipline; that is an ordered body of knowledge about God.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly put, John W. De Gruchy explained theology thus:

Literally speaking, theology has to do with our attempt to speak about God, or to explain what we mean by God. In the same way, the word *logos* is used in other academic disciplines such as anthropology (the study of human beings), sociology (the study of society), geology (the study of the earth) and so on. The word “theology” goes back to the



ancient Greek philosophers who used it to describe explanation of the mysteries of the world. later on it was used by early Christian theologians to refer to the mystery of the being of God, as well as to the proclamation of the truth about God revealed in Jesus Christ as the *logos* of God (John 1:1-14).<sup>22</sup>

## **Trinity**

The Trinity is a specifically Christian article of faith which states that there are three persons in one God, otherwise called the Trinity. This doctrine is about our insight into the nature of God's being which is not assessable to human reason unless by the light of revelation by which He reveals himself and communicates his life. Theology has always sought to present an insight into the innermost nature of the Triune God<sup>23</sup> and this has, not only sparked off, but also has remained a subject of much controversy and debate in the history of the Christian Church till the present age.

Systematic theology interprets and redefines the Trinity in the light of its relevance and implications for human persons as members of the same family or community. While it does not forget to retrieve the orthodox explanations, it looks at God with images that are reflective of "community", "family" or even "church", that is, concepts which underscore God's innermost being as an interpersonal being in all His perfections. From here, it goes on to ask how these explanations and elaborations would illuminate human hearts as they relate with one another as members of the same family, either of faith, of the same human community or even of the same family of creation.

The anthropological bent of this way of theologizing emphasizes that the Trinity is revealed for the sake of human beings who bear in their nature the image of God (*imago dei*). The new trend is not

concerned so much with the veracity of this claim of revelation, for this has been attested to in the pages of the Holy Writ. It rather seeks a new way of interpreting this article of faith so as to draw a world of meaning from it that would shed light on other aspects of human life and his world as beings-in-relation. It looks for a correlation between that article of faith and other aspects of human life and salvation. This light opens the door for drawing a theological discussion into such contending issues as ecumenism, politics, peace and conflict studies, gender issues, struggles for equality and self-actualization, arts and culture, ecology, science etc. Karl Rahner leads the Catholic forum in this new attitude to theological exploration. Edmund J. Dobbin paraphrases his ideas in the following way:

We might formulate the essential task facing Trinitarian theology as the cataclytical unlocking of the meaning inherent in the primary discourse of the tradition in the context of our historically conscious modern world. Historically consciousness “involves more than a sense of the past.” It takes seriously the history in which we live and our responsibility for it. We value freedom as the capacity creatively to imagine finer possibilities and to be drawn to a new future. We cherish this temporal structure of the “becoming of our being,” although with people of every age we experience its fragility and perpetual perishing.<sup>24</sup>

The doctrine is thus open to application to real life situations which confront us today. The same doctrine which St. Augustine called a “rule of faith” thus becomes a rule of life for interpreting human experiences.

### **Community**

The English word “community” has received great attention, especially since the publication of Ferdinand Tonnies’ classic work

*Gemeinschaft* und *Gesellschaft* in 1887. The English translation published in 1963 revealed a sharp difference between community and society with the former referring to an informal or interpersonal community or primary groups. Avery Dulles points out that “community” (*Gemeinschaft*) possesses five chief characteristics which are:

- a. Face-to-face association;
- b. The unspecified character of association;
- c. Relative permanence;
- d. The small number of persons involved;
- e. The relative intimacy among the participants.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, Charles H. Cooley explained that it has to do with a certain fusion of the individualistic in a common whole, so that one’s very self, is the common life and purpose of the group; and thus explained that perhaps “the simplest way of describing the wholeness is by saying that it is a “we,” it involves the sort of sympathy and mutual identification for which “we” is the natural expression.”<sup>26</sup> It is however, a concept which has ever drawn much attention since the history of thought.

Etymologically, the word community could be traced to the old Latin “*communitas*” (community, fellowship), a word drawn from “communion” (common).<sup>27</sup> The Oxford Universal Dictionary, had rather linked it to the old French *com(m)unete* or *com(m)unite* which itself is derived from the older Latin word *communitatem*. It connotes different shades of meanings of which the dictionary identified five shifts between the 16<sup>th</sup> and mid 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is expressive of a reference that shifts from things to persons. In each case, it points to the idea of appertaining to all in common; common ownership; common character, agreement, identity, social intercourse or communion; society, the sound state; or in respect of persons, it connotes the ideas of commonalty, or could mean a

body of people organized into a political, municipal or social units; and more specifically, since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it refers to a body of persons living together, and practicing community of goods.<sup>28</sup>

*Communitas* itself connotes all these ideas but brings out more a nuance which emphasizes the interpersonal bond in the relationship. First of all, John Locke had regarded it as a natural phenomenon hence he could speak of the original community of all things, whereas the evolutionist sociologist, Herbert Spencer conceived of the link which binds nature together, hence he would speak of the essential community of nature between organic growth and inorganic growth. But from pure sociological and political parlance, community could be said to refer to a society of people having common rights and privileges, or common interests, civil, political, or ecclesiastical or living under the same laws and regulations, as community of farmers. In this light, a broader understanding would mean society at large, the public, or people in general. Yet in a stricter sense, one could still speak of community in terms of common character, similarity, likeness, as community of spirit. In this regard then the classification of Tonnies between “community” and “society” would go a long way to help us fashion out what where we are going.

One could therefore say that the word community, whose origin dates back to earliest known antiquity, has assumed different shades of meanings across the ages, and today could be used or applied in different senses. It could point to the idea of common characteristics which are easily identified among the members of a given group and this group could be located in ecological, human, political, economic, cultural and religious circles. In this sense, its meaning looms large and can best be interpreted within a given context, for instance, Trinitarian theologians speak of God as a community of persons in eternal relation; one could speak of a

community of organic nature, animals, human community, down to a community of farmers or to the kindred and harems.

A human community, more specifically, and more technically speaking, would simply refer to a kind of society. J. Messner would define it thus: “a social unit whose members are permanently bound together by the common possession of vitally significant values or ends and by forms of love and responsibility leashed upon these.”<sup>29</sup> It could either designate the primary communities (the marriage and the family community); and also societies in the widest sense (the community of the human race, the community of nations); those united by a common spiritual purpose, such as religious communities or orders; and those united by a purpose imposed from without. In whichever sense, the community is a union and every union possesses special characteristics that distinguish it from others. They are found/expressed in their bonds, which Messner classified to be ontological, teleological, affective, moral, organizational or communicative. For instance, the ontological sees the family community as indispensable for a fully human existence and development since it is the nursery of social virtues and especially of the correct notions of command and obedience in the society. Augustine elaborates the link between the different types of communities thus stating that the family community depends on the larger community of the neighbourhood, and political community for its continued existence while itself is the exempted and foundation of all community.<sup>30</sup>

In the history of thought, its earliest use is linked to Aristotle who explained a community as a group established by men having shared values. Cicero looked to a consensus in law as well as in interests as its basis while Augustine stressed love as the basis of communal concord.<sup>31</sup>

In this paper, we consider greatly this understanding of the human community both as a natural belonging and as a given kind of society, an understanding which helps us to more fully and meaningfully understand how, in the sense of St Augustine, and the use of his Trinitarian analogies, we could draw how things in their varieties and individual distinctness may in a sense also be one. We see this instantiation in the Trinity. In African settings, this was not strange as the basic understanding of community would indicate. Hence recourse to traditional understanding of the community opens a favourable door for the dialogue for a theological understanding of the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity especially for the Church in Igboland. The Church itself is a community of faith.

### **Church**

The late Holy Father, John XXIII, in describing the gathering of the Vatican II Council which he had convoked, used the term “ecclesia” as a prophetic word which stands for “coming together or a meeting” very properly for such (an ecumenical) gathering in a solemn and fraternal assembly.<sup>32</sup> He thus led us to a new hermeneutic for the Church which encompasses both the given local community of faith to embrace more or less the universality of the people who, according to *Lumen Gentium* 4, are brought together by the unity of Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In this light, the word “Church” could now receive varied definitions according to the various perspectives of contemporary theology. We place emphasis in our working definition of the Church in this work to refer at the same time to that Mystical Body of Christ which traditional Catholic theology has ever emphasized; a liturgical assembly of the people of God, which at the same time serves as a basis for the encounter between God and the human community. Scillebeeckx regarded it as a sacrament of encounter

with God which is not only a structural organization existing alongside the world, nor remains merely at the level of mystery. She is above all, according to Henri de Lubac, “not merely that strongly hierarchical and disciplined society whose divine origin has to be maintained... if Christ is the sacrament of God, the church is for us the sacrament of Christ...”<sup>33</sup> Lubac concludes that as a sacrament, the church contains in itself that which it signifies: unity hence he had said that “humanity is one, organically one by its divine structure; it is church’s mission to reveal to men that pristine unity that they have lost, to restore and to complete it”.

By fulfilling its mission as *sacramentum unitatis*, the Church not only serves as an embodiment of the triune God, but equally serves as God’s instrument to bring and foster unity in the world. She is a community of those brought into unity by the Triune God to form a living community of faith with a mission to bring humanity and the world into unity with God (LG. 1, 4).

We take the Church in Mbaiseland to exemplify the Church in any other part of Igboland. In a similar vein, the Mbaise community typifies this reality in Igboland. There she serves as a sign and instrument of salvation and unity for humanity and an avenue for encounter with God. She is called into being to lead the family of Mbaise into becoming a family of God’s people as she prepares them for the Parousia. She remains relevant and true to her mission when she, as Ratzinger, now Benedict XVI, would say, begins to be seen “not just as the unity of the Eucharistic table, but also as the community of those who through this table are united among themselves”.<sup>34</sup> She is true to her vocation only if she would anticipate and represent this destiny of all mankind and the consummation of history. She has a spiritual mission that is socially vigilant. She reflects in the world of mankind, the reality of God who is a community of persons in eternal relation, as the “Church of God”. Ours is a relation of faith, hope and love by

which, like the Triune persons, we are open and responsible to one another. In this respect, the Church could best fit into the Igbo image of the *Umunna*, a concept we will explore deeper within the work.

This work is divided into six chapters. The first, the introductory is intended to identify and clarify the problematic of this research. This is achieved through a highlighting of the problem, the aim of the research, the significance, the argument of the thesis, and the presentation of the methodology of the research, the working hypothesis and finally, the clarification of terms and concepts. This chapter works to present in clear terms, a solid base for the discussions that will follow in the rest part of the work. The second chapter is to undertake an excursus of literatures of concerning the subject matter of the research. This is done in two major sections: Trinity and the Church. While the first tries to evaluate past scholarly discussion on St Augustine's Trinitarian teaching, the second will relate it to the Church with particular reference to the communion of life in the family of faith. Thus the chapter is to note how scholars have profited from the teachings of St Augustine to elucidate their understanding of the Trinity and the usefulness of this understanding for the Church as a community. The next chapter undertakes a theological study which seeks to establish the meaning and significance of the Christian doctrine of the Blessed Trinity for a deepened understanding of the central Christian doctrine of faith for Christians of the present age. The discoveries of this chapter will be brought to interface with the social environment as the host of the Church, which more so, the church must minister unto if she is to fulfil her mission of light and salt to the world, being herself an icon of the Blessed Trinity in the world. Thus, the next chapter brings the church's self –understanding as an image of the Trinity and Nazareth of Trinitarian culture and life within the contemporary Nigerian community that has earlier been identified – which in this case will be Mbaise, an Igbo community



and host of a local Church in Nigeria. This will be done not with the intent of tongue-lashing the Church or the Nigerian society, but as an honest search for better understanding and deepening of the faith of the Church and her mission within the human community. The last chapter makes some suggestions that would help in facilitating interpersonal relationship within the community of faith and among their local communities.

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<sup>29</sup>J. Messner, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vo. IV, 80.

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## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **DIFFERENT UNDERSTANDINGS OF COMMUNITY AND THEOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS**

Much of the emphases in contemporary theology have shifted from abstract thoughts to real questions concerning the relevance of the theological question and research to human life and his environment. Man is now at the centre point of the theological question. In this light, reflections in Trinitarian theology now focuses attention rather on the implications of such beliefs as the Blessed Trinity on human living rather than on a mere argumentative justification of such articles of faith, doctrines and dogmas as preoccupied the concerns of the apologetics and theology before today. Consequently therefore, question about the Trinity and the import of this article of faith has received much attention in today's writings. It is our wish at this point to turn to these writings and pieces of literatures to see what their authors have said as a justification for our subject matter in this research.

#### **2.1 The Point of Departure for Trinitarian Reflection Today**

Appreciation of the doctrine of the Trinity as a doctrine of faith is well accepted by theologians of all ages. So far, much ground covered so far by way of theological discussions about God in his intimate self and in his economic actions. These made a lot of progress that impacted the systematization of the Christian theology, at least beyond the theogonies of the Greco-Roman pagan world. However, they tended to create a dichotomy in God as if "the immanent self" and "the economic self" are the two separate parallel selves of the same Absolutely Perfect Being. Despite all the achievements of what we may term at this point as traditional approaches to theology, most theologians today focus the searchlight on experience as the point of departure of theology.

**This** presents theology as an interactive system of thought that **interfaces** between life and faith in a single complex picture. This **new** intellectual approach inaugurates a new hermeneutics of the **Trinitarian** doctrine which highlights the implications or imports of **this** doctrine of faith on the life and experiences of human beings **and** their communities today. Since this doctrine of the Trinity is a **doctrine** of the Christian faith, hence talking about the Trinity in a **theological** work would be an expression of the author's **experience** of God within the spectrum of the Christian faith in the **catholic** institution. This chapter is devoted however to the way **theologians** have grappled with this debate as a preparation for a **balanced** understanding of the Trinitarian doctrine. Included are **analyses** of the problem of God and the crisis of the human **community**, and Trinitarian thoughts of different authors, **especially** on St Augustine's *De Trinitate*.

John Courtney Murray's publication, *The Problem of God*, sets the **theology – philosophy** (faith – reason) debate or disputation in the **ambient** of the crises of the time. At the root of these crises of the **modern** man, he says, is the problem of God. Hence, what we have **today** as the modern crises all centre on God. It is an experience **that** is characterized with the loss of the sense of God (“the godless man”), a loss that ends up vitiating our vision of the human person and his relationship with the world. Though Murray avows here **that** this problem of “the godless man” has its roots firmly established in the deep past, in the biblical and patristic traditions, he states in categorical terms that the problem has arisen to become a phenomenon of major proportion and a determinant factor in the world of intellect, popular culture, and politics in the more recent time: “The problem is with us as it was with our forebears, and, if we are to understand today's problem in depth, it will be necessary to review the problem of yesterday”.<sup>1</sup> For instance, Murray explains that the inability to get a precise name for God is the basis for the OT concept of ignorance of God, whose roots are Exodus



3:10 and Judges 14:17-18. In those OT Jewish societies, the name was not a mere appellation used only for purposes of designation. It defined the person: "To know the name of another was to know who and what the other was – his identity, qualities, and character, or perhaps more exactly... his power, role, function – what the other was entitled or empowered to do."<sup>2</sup> Thus, this ignorance is attested to in the two texts mentioned above. God answered Moses "YHWH" (this is non-vocalized because it has no vowel) famously translated as "I am who I am" (or "I am he who is", in the Greek *LXX*) while to Manoah, the answer he got was simply "it is ineffable".

Beyond OT, Murray asserts that "the NT transforms the ancient problem of Yahweh into the new problem of Jesus"<sup>3</sup> and by extension, this constituted the major problematic which the early Church Fathers had to face in the environment (milieu) where the new faith community found itself. Jesus had addressed God by a personal tag as "Father" to whom He is the Son and together with the Father, He would be present in us through the Spirit who himself is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. While this claim is well appreciated, it must be noted that Murray did not tell us how this ignorance of God transformed into the real human crises bedevilling the world today.

Murray's analysis of the human experience left many questions unanswered. Is the "problem of God" the same as that of the "godless man"? Is the problem or are these problems byproducts of a necessary historical process? And since such atheist philosophers like Hume and Kant preached some form of ethics, what then accounts for the evolution of the problem of God into the "the godless man" who now turns into wolf to other men, using Hobbesian terms? How does this explain the crises in closely knit societies and homogenous communities in the present age? Perhaps a look into developments in modern period of European

history would shed more light to these questions. These would find answers in the developments in the history of modern thought, especially in the tradition founded by the French Mathematician and philosopher, Rene Descartes, or Murray would have presumed this. Descartes laid the foundation of what would eventually lead to the stiffest criticism against theology and its themes in Western societies. His thought was obviously shaped by the revolutionary climate in the epoch he lived. These revolutions began with the birth and progress registered by the science since the publication of Copernicus' *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium (On the Revolution of the Celestial Spheres)* in 1543 and Galileo Galilei's *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems (1632)*, all of which upset all previously accepted scientific truths. It soon spread across several spheres of life like religion (in the Protestant Revolution), politics (the French Revolution of 1789) and the Enlightenment. The Cartesian comparison between philosophy and the Mathematical method saw him discountenance the claims of philosophy which, unlike mathematics, are always doubted, uncertain and unclear. They do not rely on first principles that are irrefutably clear and distinct and indubitable.

To resolve this, and to salvage philosophy, he resolved to knock down the entire philosophical foundations and to reconstruct a new epistemological system that would yield strong and reliable outcomes as the truths of mathematics. This means putting to doubt all previous knowledge claims until one should arrive at a certain truth that meets the same basic conditions as found in mathematics. Accepting the idea of his own existence as the fundamental first principle of all certainties and guarantor of the existence of the external world became the ground for the crisis between the "self" and "otherness" that became foundational to European individualism. This appears most in his *Discourse on Methods*. This is an outline of Cartesian entire philosophical edifice, where he laid the intellectual foundation stones of what

became modern philosophy, but which would be exploited by modernists in their attacks against theology and the existence of God. In the short term, philosophy, formerly the "*ancilla theologiae*" (handmaid of theology), became liberated from theology, science became antagonistic to theology, and empirical factors became the basic conditionalities for judging reliable or acceptable knowledge.

Though Descartes had not doubted the existence of God himself, he initiated a novel intellectual climate that would soon engulf religion and discountenance such religious truths as the Trinity. While the German, Immanuel Kant, and his fellow Enlightenment philosophers declared the Trinity to be the most absurd of all Christian doctrines, Nietzsche declared God to be dead. The longer terms were the cultural trends of unbridled individualism and liberalism which ensued as Cartesian legacies. These became mental frames for assessing human and social behaviours. As epitomized in the slogan of the French Revolution of 1789 (*liberté, égalité, et fraternité* (liberty, equality and fraternity), all forms of authority and hierarchy were rejected. Alongside these, were also the rejection of God and all ecclesiastical authorities and censorships as relativism became the order in assessments of human conduct. The implication is that anything goes. The implications Cartesian innovations continue in new forms with the passage of time. Religion is attacked, atheism becomes the more popular culture. With morality relativized, man became a wolf to others, hence the many wars of great magnitude and the destructions of the adhesives that kept society strongly knit since the modern times.

Theologians of the late Modern period, under the influence of the intellectual current of their time, had sought to provide an epistemological basis that would make the Christian faith appealing to the intellectual mind of the time. Kant, for whom

intelligibility entails some à *posteriori* foundations, had relegated religion, metaphysics and, by extension God, to the non-material imperceptible noumenal world. Hence, the objects of faith and religion and such themes as God, Angels, Heaven and Hell, amongst others, were defined as untenable to reason while the Trinity which beats the limits of unaided reason is declared the most absurd of all Christian tenets. This dealt a deathblow to the Christian religion. Theology itself was rendered obsolete. As such thinkers like Auguste Comte categorized theology under myths theological themes became understood by many as mythical themes, similar to those of Greek mythologies like Cronos or Fate. They placed theology in the last and most primitive rung of the historical process which has the positive stage (the sociological stage) at its peak.

Ever since the modern period, Christian thinkers have either battled with trepidation to offer apologetics in defence of both the existence of God and this traditional dogma of faith, the Trinity, or in search of a solid ground upon which they could base their arguments for the establishment of the reasonableness of faith before constructing any acceptable theological logic. To meet the fancy of these philosophers, such revivalist theologians as Schleiermacher sought the ground for the justification of faith and the construction of theology in experience, hence, theology-from-below. Rudolph Bultmann's demythologization, for instance, was constructed upon this agenda of grounding any Christology on the Jesus of history rather than on the Christ of faith. Though Baxter Kruger criticizes Schleiermacher for "looking into the wrong heart" as Karl Barth's response to a question on whether he subscribed to theology from below, was "*NEIN!!!!*", John MacQuarrie's *Principles of Christian Theology* and Bourassa's *Questions de Théologie Trinitaire* represent the views on theology-from-below. Macquarrie's *Principles* presents a synthesis of those fundamental elements in Christian theology where he adopted the

*point de départ* of “theology from below” where experience is made the fundamental ground of any theology. He argues that the experience of faith acquired through the theologian’s participation in the community of faith (as *fides qua* and *fides quae*) is the first formative factor in theology; “... it is at this ‘elementary’ stage that fundamental decisions are made, and these decisions may well determine the whole character of theology that is subsequently worked out.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore,

In this area of experience, as a in every other, we seek to “make sense” of our experience, and the process of bringing the content of the faith – experience to clear expression in words embarks is on the business of theology.<sup>5</sup>

MacQuarrie acknowledges that faith in its true nature is not a mere cognitive act but an attitude of the whole self which entails belief.

The question of the discovery of God whose publication raised a lot of dust takes a new direction when Francois Bourassa’s *Questions de Théologie Trinitaire* placed the subject of the Trinity as the point of departure of theology. He placed the Trinity at the centre of every theological debate and thus underlined its importance. With regard to the centrality of the question of the Trinity at the heart of every Christian theology, Bourassa identified revelation as the means by which the object of theological reflection is communicated to humanity. He emphasized the nature of this God to be Trinitarian hence he says:

*Et le Dieu qui se révèle en cette démarche c'est Dieu le père, adressant sa Parole à la creature, pour lui dévoiler son amour paternel, et ainsi la régénérer en son Fils dans le don de son Esprit (pp 17-18; cf. Dei Verbum 1, 2).*

Theology then, according to him, gives itself towards understanding the internal structure of revelation and of the faith and thus tends towards understanding in consequence the incomprehensible mystery, which is the Triune God. His question is if theology then as a science of faith and revelation, should any subject on the Trinity not follow respect this order by a consideration, not of the immanent Trinity, but from the starting point of his revelation where, for instance, he has sent us his Son, a perfect expression of himself, resplendent of his glory, the perfect image of his goodness, the Word who reveals him (the Father) to us as he is in himself and in this way give us the fullness of his Spirit.<sup>6</sup>

Bourassa has thus, in our time, fortified the direction from the “theology from below” centering on the theme of revelation, as Barth did, as the effective starting point for trinitarian and theological discourse. The ineffable God becomes the God who in our own time, speaks to us through his own Son (cf Heb 1: 1-3). God reveals himself to us and by virtue of this revelation guides us to understand ourselves and the natural course of events around us in the ambient of salvation history. While we pointed out the apparent flaws which left “theology from below” handicapped, this method exposes us to more serious logical lacuna and throws theology into serious confrontation with the rational approach. Kant and neo-Kantianism would rather expose us to doubts over the existence of God since we first anticipate the question before asking it. This could well be the background to the modernist disdain for metaphysical quibbling in which the subject of God and religion falls. Bourassa therefore, while asserting that the God of the Christian faith is the primary object of every theologizing since theology itself is the science of God and of faith, he has brought theology to discountenances reason; this is the bane of the modern age – the demarcation between reason and faith and the radical choice of reason against faith. Thus while MacQuerie as we have

seen favoured human experience of the faith, Bourassa favoured the content of the faith before locating the place of the human experience.

George F. McLean observes that the notion of God is not a mere product of human reasoning. He points out that the Absolute, seen from the archaeology of human knowledge, has been there at the centre of human life from its earliest totemic beginnings. In the more contemporary times, attention has really shifted from this type of debate. Questions are rising today, not about faith clarifications, nor classical systematic Christian philosophy evolved with the idea of *Magna Graecia* which, in Platonic terms, is a deepening that moves from the order of forms to that of being as existence.<sup>7</sup> This turn, according to McLean presents the new approach as full of implications for the understanding of the relation of the human person to God, and first of all for the sense of the divine itself. He flawed the Platonic model as a more passive sense of the divine whose concern was more or less such highest ideas as the One, or the Good, and which were passive objects of contemplation.

However, he distinguished this from what he regarded as the existential sense of being and its openness to the infinite. He interprets Thomas Aquinas' five ways in the dialectic of learning about God from man, or rather as *à posteriori* ways to the Absolute. This renewed Thomism would be a beginning point of a process which begins from man and will eventually come back to man. In section One, he discussed the direction as a direction from man to God and more chiastically in section two, he will discuss learning about man from God.

McLean recognized Paul Tillich's phenomenological approach as the basis for this trend of theology. He holds as did Tillich that the life of philosophy, as of man himself, is the work of identifying

these polar elements (thesis), seeing how, by their falling apart, life becomes destructive (antithesis), and how they can be reconciled (synthesis). In religious terms, the thesis is the paradise of basic natures, the antithesis is the fall into sin and death, the synthesis is resurrection and new life. By this, Tillich, as stated by McLean understands the presence of God in all things and their relation to him.

McLean's synthesis of Tillich's correlation method aided him to highlight the significance of human history and culture. In consequence, he saw God as suffering and as transforming history and culture. He could exclaim that Tillich, under the influence of Karl Barth (for Barth had laid stress upon the transcendence of God as the "totally other"), holds that God acts in human history. Human history thus serves as a manifestation of God as the human crisis, reflecting the fall, opens humanity up for revelation of the divine. In the final analysis then, still using Tillich's correlational method, McLean sets the human experiences of paradise, the fall and reconciliation in the dialectic of correlation with creation, fall and redemption. All these take place within the horizon of man, and never in the noumenal realm of being.

The correlation of the purely natural man with the saving mystery is the distinguishing mark of this McLean – Tillich synthesis. It opens for us, however, a new horizon for Trinitarian reflections. Today we see anthropology and theology coming together and so bearing on one another that the understanding of one paves the way for a better understanding of the other. We now see God as a "totally other" who, not only is the principle of communion for humans, but who acts on our history and invites us to the communion inherent in his nature as a communitarian being.

Thomas F. Torrance has earlier pointed out an outline of this trend of theologizing where, like Rahner and Barth, the doctrine of the



Trinity has become the focal point in theological discussion with its immense implications for our knowledge of God and for knowledge of ourselves. In *Trinitarian Perspectives: Towards Doctrinal Agreement*, Torrance sets God as a relational being who creates personal reciprocity between us and himself and there from, creates a community of reciprocity of love. This community of reciprocity of love is itself a reflection of what the Godhead is: He is “eternally personal in himself, for in his one Being he is always a mutual movement of personal communion in the Love that God is”.<sup>8</sup>

Torrance studies the rich depths of the Christian Trinitarian faith by using St. Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus and John Calvin as his windows and lens. He evaded the nearly traditional Augustinian model which set the unity of God over and above the persons, in contrast to the Eastern model and through the help of these three theologians, he set the relationship between the One and the Three not in contra to the other but as rather the light that illumines the other. He crowned his work by stating in clear terms the human perplexity with regard to our incomprehensibility of the Divine Essence in itself, and also on the other hand our hope with regard to the manner of divine self-revelation to us. Thus, he concludes:

But we may know who God is, for he has made himself personally known to us through the Incarnation of his son, and the Communion of the Holy Spirit. Thus in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity we confess with the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, that what God is towards us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in his revealing and saving activity among us in salvation-history he is eternally in his One Being, and that what God is eternally in his One Being as Father, Son and Holy Spirit he is toward us in his revealing and saving activity.<sup>9</sup>

God is a relational being. In his relating to us, he made himself known in personal distinctions as Trinity. This reveals to us about the inner being of God of which we have no unaided access, save by the light of revelation. Torrance, the Fathers and Calvin as mentioned earlier, bring to us a teaching on (a) God who is always bent towards us to incorporate us into the mystery of this Communion Love. He agrees that this understanding of the Trinity is a big asset to the desired unity between the Church in the West and the East. It could be the doctrinal base for ecumenical dialogue.

If we are to make anything out of Torrance's work, the title alone, *Trinitarian Perspectives*, speaks volumes. This is enlightening since it latently approves the authenticity of the various theologies and different perspectives from which this doctrine can validly be approached and interpreted without so much affecting and yet without shifting from this basic notion of the Christian faith. He equally gives us a guideline on how to approach the two trinities: the immanent and the economic into attempts to understand the One and the same God in himself and in his relation to us.

Paul D. Molnar's *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity* commends Torrance for his recognition that all our theological knowledge is grounded in the fact that God is towards us what he is eternally in himself.<sup>10</sup> He builds his own Trinitarian synthesis on the analysis of the Immanent Trinity as the fundamental ground for understanding the economic Trinity. Taking a good purview a cross several Trinitarian tradition and treatises, he addresses the issue of how we can know God addresses the issue of how we can know God according to his own true rather than create him in our own image. His contention is that any Trinitarian reflection, and indeed, any theology that does not start with God's action in the economy of salvation will result in a flawed perception of both divine and human freedom.

He relied on the thinking of Torrance which Colin E. Gunton had heavily criticized in his *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*. His clarification of the unity of the economic and the immanent Trinity helps to guide us against the tendency of polemics of either downplaying the one and over emphasizing the other. His strong emphasis could be summed in the assertion that what God revealed to us about himself is what he is in his eternal being. It is in accepting and working with this theological frame that one may be freed from the immanent versus economic polemics in Trinitarian theology that has engulfed theological reflections in the more recent contemporary times.

The polemics Molnar as indicated was created in the contemporary mentality of empiricism. The battle is usually between old methodologies for theologizing which we have already highlighted in this work. But it had begun with the distinction made of the inner life of God as against his relationship and extra by the Scholastics, particularly by Thomas Aquinas. Augustine had drawn the strength on the Trinity from the tradition of sacred scripture which is an expression of the faith of Israel and of the early Christians and secondly on the works of his catholic predecessors. This distinction is made in respect of the modernistic epistemological tendency that has crept into theology especially the Blessed Trinity. Karl Rahner, in the Catholic circle, brought this to bear on our reflections on the Trinity when he taught that we have no access to the Trinity in apart from the threefold ways of divine self-communication *ad extra*. This obviously is convenient for a tradition-bound theologian, but it creates and strengthens the duality in God which has remained a problematic till date. In *The Trinity*, he therefore argued that it is at the level of economy that we can know God. This is why he crowned his thought in this work as he did in the *Theological Investigations* under the same subject, that the Blessed Trinity is a mystery for us.

It is a mystery for us in the three manners of God's saving communication to us.

Rahner allowed an epistemological question to condition the ontology of God. His thesis seems to say that we cannot say that God exists or God is unless we are able to say what he is for us. This presupposes two philosophical naiveties: to be is to be perceived of Berkeley with an utilitarian flavour. In as much as he played safe in consonance with Catholic orthodoxy, he led the doctrine of God to a watershed that has given vent to a lot of misinterpretations today.

It is in the light of this misinterpretation that the theologies of the recent times are emerging today. The summary of it all would be Catherine Mowry LaCugna's *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. Here LaCugna's chiasmic presentation of a dynamic Trinity integrates God with humanity. This model according to her "expresses the one ecstatic movement of God outward by which all things originate from God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and all things are brought into union with God and returned to God. There is neither economic nor an immanent Trinity".<sup>11</sup> The first half of this chiasm shows that the world came into being from the Father through the Son, and then through the Holy Spirit. The second half incorporates God's redemptive acts in history, in which all things return through the Holy Spirit and then through Jesus Christ back to the Father. Obviously, she establishes an integrative understanding of the Trinity. In this model, it would be absurd to engage in semantic quibbles since there is no talk of God outside his relationship in the twofold events of creation and redemption.

By implication then, LaCugna does not accept the importance of the immanent Trinity as the presupposition meaning and goal of any Trinitarian theology. God's existence, in simple terms, is

reduced to his existence in the economy; hence she asserts that "The doctrine of the Trinity is not ultimately a teaching about "God" but a teaching about God's life with us and our life with each other".<sup>12</sup> So to speak of God otherwise would only be an expression of God's life with us in the economy.<sup>13</sup>

She has been accused of ambiguity, pantheism and dualism by Molnar but we want to assert here that her method is very problematic. Her image of God smacks of subordination for the Son and for the Holy Spirit. Though she would not wish this subordination, her model upholds an ontological subordination inherent in theologies that teach the Father as the Monarch as pointed out by Torrance and John Zizioulas.<sup>14</sup>

The works already studied, though they have presented to us the development of Trinitarian theology till the present day, on the one hand, they are unanimous in presenting the Trinity as a mystery of faith. But on the other hand, their elaboration of this mystery ends up leading us from one dead end to another. The current debate on the economic and the immanent Trinity polemic is a delineation from the Augustinian model which would see the Trinity as a model of community. This will redirect our course and re-orientate the theological debate to the main line questions rather than a pursuit of the crumb. We will not fail to note that Karl Rahner had come very close to this in his ruminations over the mission of the Trinity ad extra, but as we noted, his orientation was largely epistemological. But here our emphasis will be more on this mission for human salvation without at the same time creating a dualism in Trinitarian thought. Our position on that is, as Molnar would say, the two are one about the same One God, the author and finisher of history, who is in himself and whose self-revelation would provide us, as a mirror, a model for looking at ourselves as human beings in the community.

## 2.2 The Trinity and the Human Community

The aspect of Trinitarian theology that reflects on the Godhead as a model of community presuppose what we have said before that the Trinity is a mystery but one which is totally transcendent and yet in freedom is actively present in our world in his saving works of creation, sanctification and redemption. This also presupposes that the Trinity too is like sun, though not in the world as such but through whose radiance the world has light. Thirdly, then this presupposes a social Trinity where the unity of the distinct persons could serve as a model of life for human beings in societies. On this note, we take up the last presupposition.

### 2.2.1 The Trinity as a Mystery of Interpersonal Relationship

*The Mystery of the Triune God* brings us how John O' Donnell synthesized this mystery of God and how he showed its relevance to the human world. Though it is a mystery of faith which explains to the man/woman of faith about the God we worship. But he goes further to show how this mystery is related to us, not necessarily in the principal events of creation and redemption as has been the focus of many theologians, but, according to him, he shows how this living tradition of the faith of the Church has always served as an event of invitation to reflection.

O'Donnell remarked that the clearest invitation is towards the personal image of the Trinity. He had identified Augustine to have initiated this move when Augustine, taking cue from Genesis 1:26 looked to the human person to find in what manner man reflect the image and likeness of God. Having identified the analogy of love as the basis of interpersonal relationship and image of the relationality among the Trinitarian persons, he had preferred the human soul in a manner quite distinct from his predecessors who looked for this vestigial in natural phenomena. From the analysis

of the human soul, the soul's memory, knowledge and love of God. He comments however that this had a difficulty as the analogy would imply that the three persons in God are closed in upon itself in acts of knowing and willing. However, O'Donnell shows the interrelatedness of the persons of the Trinity and the show of solidarity and support, which in a modern language takes us back to the same subjects of divine interpenetration or perichoretic life of God in traditional theology. O'Donnell therefore presents God as a social being, a being in relation and thus creates a social image of the Trinity which could go in either way of unity in diversity  $1 = 3$  or  $3 = 1$ .

In recognition of this image of the Trinity, A. Nwachukwu in *The Church and Trinitarian Communion* comments that the Trinity is given more or less a social interpretation in our own age. He remarks that reflections on the Trinity are not essentially cut off from the same perennial questions, but they are oriented towards practicality (praxis), that is, towards explaining the contemporary challenges of one time and many facing the world today. Thus, he opines that the Trinity is proposed as a model for explaining how people can co-exists, as distinct, and yet, bound in unity to one another taking clue from the inner nature of One God in three Persons.<sup>15</sup>

It is in this purview that Thomas S. Scirghi's article, "The Trinity: A Model for Belonging in Contemporary Society", illustrates how even in ordinary political and commercial circles, there is a noticeable shift from a narrow, perhaps selfish individualism towards the idea of belonging, of community and to mutual interest. Here and in these, Scirghi's proposes that the Trinity could serve as an example, as a model.

Taking our thought back to recent texts, we go first to Joseph Bracken's work in *The Truine Symbol: Persons, Process and*

**Community** which had first appeared in an abridged form as an **article** in the Heythrop Journal in 1974. Bracken had conceived the **Trinity** as a community and consequently explored a **communitarian** understanding of the same. He had defined the **Trinity** as “a community of three divine persons who are constantly **growing** in knowledge and love of one another and who are thus **themselves** in process even as they constitute the divine **community** as a specifically social process.”<sup>16</sup>

Bracken would focus his analysis of the Trinity in terms of the **concept** which, for him, is descriptive of his intent. Here are **Persons, Process, and Community**. In the Heythrop Journal, he had **written** on *The Holy Trinity as a Community of Divine Persons* (Heythrop Journal, 15 (1974)). It is obvious then that this classic shows special interest on the theology of models where the nature of God serves as a model for human beings and the world. In his **analysis**, however, we recognize that being itself is a dynamic **process**, and that to be is to be related, whence God is dynamic and **subsists** in relationship.

Bracken, has no difficulty in his analyses of persons in the light of present day scholarship and that too of community; however the relationship between person and community reveals a problematic. First is the unclear distinction between persons and individuals in the light of contemporary scholarship. Secondly he has a flaw in his conception of community and with these two; his work only initiated series of questions. To highlight the problematic, it is expedient to understand what personal distinctness and community meant for Bracken. He conceived the community to mean an **aggregate** of persons whereas he conceived persons in the substance categories. Thus, each person is a substance in himself. By way of simple syllogism, the community is then an aggregate of different consciousness. Theologians, obviously abhor a tritheistic thesis to which this is an obvious implication of



Bracken's ontology. To escape this loophole, Bracken would tend to clarify his concept of community as an ontological unity which is greater than the sum of its (constituent) parts. Aware of the obvious implications too, Bracken would further clarify that unity in God is not a unity of substance but one of community showing thus a flight from Aristotelian category of substance. Bringing his thoughts to bear on the Trinity, he explained that "One and the same act of being therefore would constitute each of the three divine persons as an individual existent, and all of them together as a divine community."<sup>17</sup>

His theological explanation of this relationship between person and community in respect of Trinitarian categories shows a path quite different from Barth and Rahner who proposed for one act of divine consciousness. Bracken, on the other hand opines for three consciousness and three freedoms in the Trinity: "Even though each divine person has his own mind and will, they are of one mind and one will in everything they say and do, both with respect to one another and in their relationships with human beings and the whole of creation."<sup>18</sup> He thus proposed for a shared consciousness among the three divine persons.

Bracken could have been more concerned with his intent; providing a model for living as persons in relation just as the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity is about the interrelatedness of the divine persons in the Godhead. He could then have interpreted the persons and its corollary the community in the light of distinct individualities, distinct consciousness who come together to "compose" a unity. Whereas this tract could have served better in political contracts, it is disastrous for dogmatics and puts the whole doctrine of faith contra its *raison d'être*. Yet the Trinity is a perfect community as Boff would say, but the perfection should first be seen in the light of the traditional Christian concepts than in the contemporary sociological perspectives and categories.

## 2.2 Personhood as Condition for a Communitarian Image of the Trinity

Jürgen Moltmann's Trinitarian theology is clearly outlined in his two works: *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, and his *Humanity in God* which he had co-authored with Elizabeth Wendel-Moltmann. Even though he had pursued vigorously a social model of the Trinity like Bracken, but unlike Bracken, he had given the clarification that the concept of "person" in Trinitarian theology is very unique unlike Bracken's generalization.<sup>19</sup> Being a person for Moltmann means essentially to be in relation. Thus, he asserted that the Trinity is the community of divine persons in relation or put in another form, the being of the persons is their relationship.

He did not, like Bracken, cut off completely from traditional Christian metaphysics, but while rejecting the Aristotelian thesis substance thesis which he claims has misled Western thought by making the individual a defined unique subject, he leaned on the classical concept of perichoresis through which he could explain the mutual interpenetration among the divine persons and through this he would teach that the Trinity is not a divine substance but a divine *koinonia*.

The approach he took was to develop a thesis that would build up the human community. In *Humanity in God*, he establishes that the Trinity is a divine community while the human community is the image of the Trinity (*imago trinitatis*). Because of this, he established that human beings are summoned to reflect the divine likeness while the Christian life is called to reflect per excellence this image as we are summoned to community. There is a close resemblance here between his thought and St. Augustine. Augustine saw a semblance between the *imago dei* and spiritual journey. Having established that the Trinity is unplanted within the soul, our spiritual journey, drawn by love, is possible especially as

it will only be complete in the souls union of God at the beatific vision. Thus, as the soul drawn towards this union, so does he argue that the summons of Christian life is to be lived out in solidarity with others and that this summons is by nature, eschatological where at the execration, God will be all in all. We all will be united in the Trinity.

In the Trinity and the Kingdom of God, Moltmann found a preference for a social trinitarianism which he took to political analysis. Having asserted that theology is never concerned with the actual existence of God, but with his rule in heaven and earth, the issue of divine monarchy then provides the justification for earthly domination whether moral, religious, patriarchal or political domination and makes it a hierarchy, a "holy rule". This, according to him makes the idea of the almighty ruler of the universe everywhere require abject servitude, because it points to complete dependency in all spheres of life.<sup>20</sup>

He therefore distinguishes social trinitarianism from Trinitarian monotheism which, he says provides religious motivation for political monotheism, and finally this would have enshrined the divine right of kings. Trinitarian monarchism is correlated with a monarchical structure of the universe as Father – Son – and Holy Spirit parallels one deity – One Logos – and One cosmos. He states:

The fusing of biblical and cosmological monarchism gave rise to the notion of the single, universal pyramid: the One God is Creator, Lord and possessor of the world. His will is its law. In him the world has its unity and its peace. By distinguishing between Creator and creature, the biblical doctrine of creation (compared with Aristolelian and stoic cosmology) accentuated the idea of God's power of disposal and the dependency of everything on his will.<sup>21</sup>

He argues that this union of the highest power and the higher law in God, though excludes earthly tyranny, but in actual fact, the lack of accountability in the person of the king (ruler) puts him outside the law and justifies Hobbesian principle of “auctoritas, non veritas facit legem” (authority instead of the truth fashions the law).<sup>22</sup>

It is against this background that he found this model of the Trinity wanting. He therefore sought a replacement by proposing a doctrine of the Trinity that unites the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in their being and in their economic missions beyond the images of omnipotence, who would otherwise reflect in earthly rulers. He then admonishes that in this new understanding, even where the trace of omnipotence appears, it would not be an archetype for the earth's mighty, but this might (in God) is to be understood more properly in the sense of one who exposes himself to the experience of suffering, pain, helplessness and death rather than in power but in love. The glory of this triune God would then be reflected in the community of Christ which is a fellowship of believers and of the poor rather than on the crown of kings. Lastly, Moltmann would set the Holy Spirit as the life-given Spirit who confers on us the future and hope.

Summarizing his points on political monotheism, Moltmann suggests that this doctrine of the Trinity provides the intellectual means whereby to harmonize personality and sociality in the community of men and women without sacrificing the one to the other, whether in the political society or in the Church.<sup>23</sup>

Moltmann sounds too hypocritical especially in his repudiation of ecclesiastical and civil authority. Following his model would be too idealistic and quite unhistorical. A nearly similar ideology was preached in communist socialism which history has faulted. St. Augustine was more realistic to observe that there is no perfect

society including the Church which is a community of saints and sinners while the Vatican II Fathers avowed of the human traits in the Church (LG). However, he calls for a rethink in our human community as we relate to one another and with nature presenting the Trinity as a model of social life, a model of relationship.

Trinitarian theologians are unanimous over the consideration of “Persons” in the Godhead as the fundamental ground for presenting the Trinity as a model of community. The Cappadocian Fathers were the first to imagine the place of the Persons and personal distinction in the Godhead. They had worked up unity in the Godhead as a result of the mutuality of relations and love among the three persons. They had emphasized the role of the persons in the “Constitution” of the Godhead (community). Augustine however followed an alternative course by thinking first of the unity in the Godhead which is also about the distinct persons. Despite the chasm in their points of departure, traditional Trinitarian theology upholds the Christian truth that there is only one God in three persons.

The challenge of Trinitarian theology had been how to relate this idea of “One” to the “Many”. Histories of Trinitarian theology reveal this to be a foundation for several heretical and erroneous views. Hence Walter Kasper in *The God of Jesus Christ*, which is essentially a justification of the Christian faith against modern atheism, argues that the Trinity is actually the Christian form of monotheism. He shows the link of Christianity to the Judaic foundations but then the specific Christian recognition of the Son and the Holy Spirit as Persons in the same one Godhead with the Father distinguishes this dynamic monotheism to the strict monotheism of the Jewish faith. He so emphasizes the unity of the Trinity that one easily traces a semblance of thought back to Tertullian who upheld that if God is not one, then he is not God. In like fashion, Kasper holds that Oneness of God is not quantitative

or numerical one but qualitative.<sup>24</sup> This God is one, simple and indivisible.

Aquinas modified Boethius definition by highlighting the element of “relation” as an essential property of “person”. Boethius had seen the person as an incommunicable subsistence. Taking this to the Trinitarian rigours, Thomas Aquinas defined persons of the Trinity as distinct subsistent relations. William Hill’s *The Three-Personed God, The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation* explains persons in the light of contemporary psychological perspective. A person is now seen as a centre of consciousness and freedom. This notion reveals three special characteristics as Hill notes:

- a. Consciousness of self and of others
- b. Relationality, and
- c. Intersubjectivity.<sup>25</sup>

Back to Trinitarian lives, Hill would now say that The persons in God thus constitute a divine intersubjectivity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three centres of consciousness in community, in mutual communication. The members of the Trinity are now seen as constituting a community of persons in pure reciprocity, as subjects and centres of one divine conscious life. each person is constituted by what might analogically be called an ‘I’ in self-awareness of its own unique identity, but only by way of rapport to the other two persons as non-self; indeed, it is in virtue of that free interplay, wherein each person disposes himself towards the others in knowing and loving, that each person gains his unique identity.<sup>26</sup>

Persons therefore make up the community, so is it with God. The Trinity assumes the role of a model to human communities when these try to emulate the giving and sharing in the Trinity; and

understands the human community as a dynamic of persons in relation as it is in the Blessed Trinity.

In his *Introduction to Christianity*, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger explores what could be regarded as a modern interpretation of the fundamental articles of the Christian faith, especially as elucidated on the Apostles' Creed. In this work he showed as masterly command of knowledge of scripture and in-depth information about the development of the Christian faith and its theology. This book was developed from his series of summer 1967 term lectures at Tübingen. In the preface to the 2000 edition he underscores the point that God and Christ form the centre point of any introduction to the Christian faith especially that seeks to explore the full meaning of God-with-us. He begins this work with a discussion of fundamental issues common to any religion that establish Christianity among the world religion. He however discusses this under the ambient of the Christian faith from the Catholic perspective. Within this light, he discusses his Triune God in the fifth chapter of the first part.

Ratzinger makes two important marks that give credit to the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. First, he underscores its importance as a reference point for theology, pointing out that all other lines of Christian thought anchor on it.<sup>27</sup> Secondly, he pinpoints its certainty in the search for an understanding of what reality is. For him, it discloses a new way of understanding reality: what God is and what man is: relational beings hence, for him, "the most paradoxical approach is at the same time the most illuminating and helpful one".

Through an analysis of the Christian faith, he points out therefore that it is in understanding what God is that we may comprehend or come to a more proper concept of what we are as beings in relation. In what then could be termed an earnest search for an

emergence of the human person and his community, Ratzinger uses the unity of substance and relationality in the Trinity to illustrate his point. The “three-ness” by virtue of which we have “*una essentia tres persona*” is established from biblical evidences that there is a “We” in God. Thus the elements of I” and “You” imply relationship, coexistent diversity and affinity and thus a presence of dialogue within God. He would then agree that God subsists in three people. He is therefore, more of a “We” who “who “lives” and thrives in relationship where the three divine persons engage in an eternal dialogue of being and love.

Ratzinger took the Trinitarian reflection to another dimension – to the philosophical arena where he placed the “*una essential tres persona*” in contradistinction to Aristotelian concept of substance and accidents. According to Aristotle, substance would be the real thing whereas the accident refers to the circumstance of the thing. For Ratzinger, on the contrary, the experience of God we have is of one who conducts a dialogue, he is not only “logos” but also “*dialogos*”, that is, not only idea and meaning but speech and word in the reciprocal exchanges of partners in conversation. Ratzinger points out then that this experience exploded the ancient (Aristotelian) division between the reality and the merely circumstantial and now goes forth to show that the *relatio*, the dialogue stands beside the substance as an equally primordial form of being.<sup>28</sup>The eternal conversationists are Father, Son and Holy Spirit, such that through the multi-unity that grows in love, God becomes a model of unity and oneness towards which one should strive.

Humans could draw from this model how to live in unity realizing that it is in recognizing and relating with the other that we become more fully what we are as beings in relation. As he put it, citing St. Augustine’s Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, “*Mea doctrina non est mea*” – My teaching is not mine, but his who sent



me” (Jn 7:16), “Augustine has used the paradox in this sentence to illuminate the paradoxical nature of the Christian image of God and of Christian existence .... If one reads the sentence again with this insight, it then says: I am by no means just I; I am not mine at all, my I is that of another.”<sup>29</sup> It is therefore through this honest discussion about God that we discover who we truly are: dialogical and relational beings; beings who exist and thrive in community.

### 2.3 Various Backgrounds to Understanding the Term “Community”

The concept of “community” evokes shared or constituted life; idea or interest. The evolution of the word showed a transition from Latin “*Communitas*”, itself a carriage from two separate words *cum* (with, together) and *munus* (gift), signifying fellowship or organized society to the Old French (community) from which it came to English. Philosophical tracts showed traces of it in among the Greeks of antiquity, especially where Plato and Aristotle talked about the good of the general public, the common good, to refer to that which is for the general welfare/wellbeing.

Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia in the article “Community” points out that it is a concept that can be applied in various senses due to the various scientific perspectives. It speaks, for instance, it speaks of community from the perspectives of the biological, social and even applied sciences. This article highlighted the fact of sharing and constitutiveness to stress the nature and major characteristic of any society. But our point here will lead us to ask whether it means exactly the same thing for man in all aspects of his life. The political, cultural, and sociological realities of life. We take to see what authors have said.

### 2.3.1 Community as an Anthropological Phenomenon

Man is by nature an '*ens socialis*', that is a sociable, social animal. He realizes himself by living not alone, but in a society. Tim Chesters, in the article, "The Good News of the Trinity", points out that relationship is an active condition imbedded in the nature of humankind. According to him, "... we are made in the image of Trinitarian God. We are made in the image of the one-in-three God. We are made for plurality and unity." He points out that to live in community is implanted in the constitution of our being as "*ens socialis*". He therefore observes that the antithesis consists in the increasingly fragmented and isolated life of society; it leaves us with little to share for community life or social cohesion<sup>30</sup>

Chesters introduces already a theological model into his analysis of the human condition, though he uses this theological explanation to point the way out of human brokenness and fragmentation. An explanation from culture will provide us a better understanding of this basic condition of our being.

### 2.3.2 Community as a Cultural Reality

Justin Nnadozie Ekennia helps us to explain community as a cultural reality. In his bid to find lasting solution to much of the problems confronting Africa in the contemporary times, he proposes what he called a tradition-based rationality of Alasdair MacLntyre. In his work, *African Modernity Crisis*, he establishes that Africans have lost grip of the sense of community and its constitutive features and characteristics. To identify in concrete terms the root cause of this crisis, he asserts, in agreement with MacLntyre, that it is the opposition of the self with the community.<sup>31</sup>

Underlying the importance of the community, he sees it with Arendt as a context for human action and goes on to explain that an action can only be an action of its specific type in the community. The question which Ekennia raised with this definition is whether this Aristotelian vision of community explained in Western concepts can well adapt to African contexts. Though he found in MacIntyre's concepts a lot about the community which can fit in well into African understanding, but more specifically he noted that African communities are not just were political realities, but in addition, "African communities have certain metaphysical presuppositions with which they approach their life and experiences." Africans recognize three aspects of reality; the physical, the abstract and the spiritual.<sup>32</sup> These three are thus, interconnected and together they make the African world. No one can exist outside it. The community is first more than a social construct, there is an implicit affinity between the self and his/her community.

African thinkers and theologians like Amba Oduyoye, the Malawian Bishop and theologians, Kalilombe, Metuh and Mbiti underscore the attachment and affinity the individual has for his community. Chidili's work, *Pedagogy of Human Dignity Through the Vision of Mercy Amba Oduyoye* underline the community as the cultural institution that shapes and very often determines the becoming of the human person. The individual person is not only a product, but more so, a property of the community. The individual is enmeshed in the community and whatever happens to him happens to the whole group and vice versa.

For Onwubiko, there is scarcely any "I" in Igbo communities. The individual is located in the "we-ness". Though dedicated to the development of the concept of the Church as the family of God, Onwubiko's *The Church as the Family of God (Ujamaa)* uses the African community model of the family and bondedness to

illustrate a new orientation for the Church in the modern times. Both his concepts of *Ujamaa*, family and the front over image describe life in Africa as a reality far from the individualism in western models or worse still as a reality that is far removed from the Hobbesian state of nature where man's life is described as short, brutish and solitary.

In this cultural context, intent, belief, resources, preferences, needs, risks and number of other conditions may be present and common, affecting the identity of the (participants) members and their degree of cohesiveness.

### 2.3.3 The Community as a Sociological Phenomenon

Ferdinand Tonnies distinction between two types of human association, into *Gemeinschaft* (usually translated as community) and *Gesellschaft* (society or association), according to the article "Community" in Wikipedia, initiates a debate among sociologists. However, this distinction distinguishes "*gemeinschaft*" (community) as a group of interacting people living in a common location; in contra distinction to a group organized around a given interest and common values. The family and kinship are described by Tonnies as the most perfect expressions of *gemeinschaft*. And to further this distinction, the features inherent in a community include communal networks and shared social understanding. It exists in freedom and membership is more often out of a natural bond. This is quite unlike *gesellschaft* where one is lured to membership by selfish interest.

Besides the distinction of Tonnies, Wikipedia still talks of other types of communities: geographic, communities of culture and community organizations and explains these in terms of their location, need or identity.<sup>33</sup> This sociological definition emphasizes the classification of human beings in the society according to

different bonds of relationship – natural or artificial for the attainment of human needs and for social cohesion. In clear simple terms, no one can be an island and no one lives alone. Man is born, he lives and dies in one form of community or the other.

This understanding of community is highlighted in the article *“Community Engagement: Definitions and Organizing Concepts from the Literature”* by the Public Health Practice Programme Office Internet. This article holds that the constitutive members of any community must be united by at least one common characteristic. These may be shared interest, geography, values, experiences, or traditions. These serve as bonds, some natural some artificial, which provide and condition the norms for living together as a family, a people, that is, a community. Based on this, the article further asserts that the concept as systems composed of individuals or sectors with functional interpretation of this image would further the concept in terms of a system composed of individuals or sectors that have at the same time distinct characteristics and interrelationships. Like a machine, the sectors are populated by groups of individuals who represent specialized functions, activities, or interest within the community system, where each sector therefore operates within specific boundaries for the well functioning of the system. Bringing life to it then, a community may be seen as a living organism or well-oiled machine. High performance (social cohesion) is attained at the optimal input of the sectors, organs, arms and individual parts where as low input undermines it and diminishes success.<sup>34</sup>

Bringing this down to Trinitarian terms would not be very easy unless we apply the scholastic principle of distinguishing human properties and qualities from the divine by employing attributes of perfection to the divine. In this respect, the Trinity can then be viewed as a perfect community of god which has three distinct but yet united sectors, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who

interrelate in such a perfect manner that no one is “completely” himself outside of the relation he has with the others in a four-fold relations. From what they are, each in himself, they “constitute” the one organ that yields optimum input in the *missio ad extra*.

#### 2.3.4 The Ecological Model of Community

Ecology reminds us of the unity of creatures under the same web of life or umbrella called environment who journey towards attaining the same ultimate destiny. Whereas scriptural models will identify the glory of God and salvation of the world as this ultimate destiny.

Kylen Lee, in *Fundamentals of Ecology: A Brief Investigation into the Economy of Nature* looks at the ecosystem as an inclusive nature society characterized by the interactions of organisms with other organisms and with the physical environment. This E-book explains that within this “nature society”, this chain of interconnections (interactions) is represented in a chart form that follows a down-up model where a simple atom links to the biosphere passing through molecule, organelle, cell, tissue, organ, organism, population, community and ecosystem. Here population becomes the group of interacting and interbreeding organism of the same species; community is the different populations (groups of different species) living together interacting as competitors, predators and prey, or symbiotically while ecosystem – organisms and their physical and chemical environments together in a particular area and the biosphere is the thin film on the surface of the earth in which all life exists, the union of every ecosystems on earth which is a highly ordered system, held together by the energy of the sun.

The community in this context, the groups of different species interacting in an area is explained by Lee to contain two

distinguishing characteristics: composition and diversity. While the one consists simply of “a listing of the various species in the community,” the other “involves both species richness (the number of species) as well as evenness (the relative abundance of different species).<sup>35</sup>

Ecological model of community is a technical term employed by healthcare providers, especially in the public healthcare sector as a model of healthcare provision system which addresses the public health problems at multiple levels such as the interaction and integration of biological, behavioural, environmental, and social determinants as well as the influence of organizations (e.g. workplace and schools), other persons (e.g. Family, friends and peers), and public policies of which together help individuals make healthy choices in their daily lives. This model highlights how health and wellbeing are affected by changes and interactions between all these factors over the course of one’s life<sup>36</sup> In this health sector, a link is shown of the chain of interactions between the individual down to public health policies.

But theologically, one can draw the conclusion that community in the ecological perspective runs rather as a functionalist or a structuralist model which emphasizes the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of man with his physical environment in the web of creation where populations and communities emphasizes the role each plays in this web. Man’s place is highlighted in the biblical and theological traditions as the caretaker of the rest of creation.

Summarily, these various understandings of the concept community reveal the phenomenon as a chain of interrelations among phenomena of the same shared nature or “experiences”. Like Tim Chesters said, “God made us for the plural and unity”. We find ourselves in the community hence as “*ens socialis*”, no

**one** leads an isolated life. It is under the bonds of **interconnectedness** and interactions, sharing and giving and taking **from** one another (symbiotic life) that nature, humanity and the **community** thrives, flourishes and blossoms. The ideal and model **of** community life (for emulation) can only be that being which **alone** enjoys the attributes of perfection, the Perfect **Being/community** (God, the Blessed Trinity) who subsists in **perfect** relationship and interpenetration between the Father the **Son** and the Holy Spirit.

**In** created community, there is visible experience of disfunction, **disintegration** and abuse/violation, first among humans. Secondly, **the** presence of predators poses a challenge to the symbiotic life of **nature**. This could be the basis for understanding the dynamic **evolutionary** process of Darwin. Authors are unanimous in **agreeing** that these manifest a clear absence of perfect harmony in **the** community and cannot as a result guarantee satisfaction to the **quest** for community. It becomes necessary for us at this juncture **to** turn our gaze towards what authors have written about this **model** of community to see if it promises a solid base for **modelling** our human community after the divine community, the Trinity.

#### 2.4 The Trinity as a Perfect Community

As we have seen from our study of community, we can and very clearly say that the Trinity is the community of God and that the **doctrine** of the Blessed Trinity can be explained comprehensively as the doctrine about the divine community. The background for **discussing** the Trinity as a perfect community is to be located at the very heart of the doctrine of the Trinity: personal distinctness (*prosopon, hypostasis*) and unity of substance (or *homoousion*) and **then** the interaction (interconnectedness) among the members of **this** community. Many authors have truly emerged across the



different ages of the doctrines development, hence we are going to take sample theologians from among the Patristics and then among contemporary theologians. Among the first stage we will study the works of Irenaeus, Tertullian among the pre-Nicaean Fathers, and St. John Damascene who is described as the most eloquent theologian of the East and the doctrine of “*perichoresis*”.

Ireneaus (d.c.202) is taken as the first and still perhaps the greatest biblical theologians who drew the strength for his theology from St. John (on the Logos) and St. Paul on Jesus as the second Adam who draws together in one great Trinitarian project the whole story of creation and salvation and on the rule of faith and liturgical practice. His Trinitarian theology features most in his *Adversus Haeresus* in which he challenged the erroneous teachings of Marcion and the Gnostics on the Oneness of God. In this work, Irenaeus defended personal distinctions in God by teaching the divinity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and the unity of the Godhead against these heretics.<sup>37</sup> In these texts, he talked about the unity of the Three Persons in the One Godhead in which the Son and Holy Spirit are the two hands of God. Commenting on Genesis 1:26 after the style of St. Justin, he gave this Trinitarian summation:

In carrying out his intended work of creation, God did not need any help from angels, as if he did not have his own hands. For he has always at his side his Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit. Through them and in them he created all things of his own free will. And to them he says, “Let us make human beings in our image and likeness”<sup>38</sup>

This is perhaps, his most important contribution to the development of Trinitarian doctrine. This use of human language and bodily organs in discussions about the divine continues the biblical tradition but is more emphasizing to his central theme of

the sacredness of the body whose destiny lies in his doctrine of recapitulation. Thus the body could be a mirror for understanding the mystery of God. However, Irenaeus' language of two hands is confusing and left an ambiguity. It well recognized the relationship between the Father and the Son in parallel lines with the Fathers' relationship with the Spirit. But it is silent over the Son's relationship with the Holy Spirit. O'Collins comments that it could imply parallel missions or even no direct relationship between the Spirit and the Son. He did not use the word "Trinity", rather he taught that God is an eternal Triad of Father Son and Spirit who are distinct and equal. But the doctrine of the "two hands" show the unity in the Godhead and the unity of the divine missions ad extra which reveals a lot about community life.

Tertullian (d.c. 220) is younger contemporary of Irenaeus. He is reputed to be the greatest Latin writer and founder of theology in the West while O'Collins pictures him as the one who fashioned a Trinitarian vocabulary for the Latin world.<sup>39</sup> Among his many works, the most relevant to Trinitarian development are his *Adversus Marcionem* and his *Adversus Praxean*.

Tertullian contested against polytheism and rejected Gnostic divisions of divinity and defended God's oneness and uniqueness. In *Adversus Marcionem*, he wrote against Marcion's attempt to divide God. His view can be summarized by his dictum, "If God is not one, then there is no God." (Adv. Marc.1.3). This simple sentence shows that he was occurant with background knowledge of Greek philosophy which emphasized the perfections in God. Thus, the idea of many "gods" as possessing these divine attributes is inconceivable. On the other hand, Tertullian's *Adversus Praxean* makes a clarification of the doctrine of the monarchy of God which the Apologists used in their defense against polytheism (Adv Prax 3). He accused Praxeas who, he said, drove away the Paraclete and crucified the Father (*Adversus Praxean I*).

His unique contribution to the conception of God as a community appears in his carriage and usage of the concept of Trinity by which he meant the unity of substance and three distinct but undivided persons. He, for the first time among all theologians applied the term "*persona*" in theology as well as he was the first to apply *Trinitas* (Trinity) to God (Adv. Prax. 8). Thus, while the Greeks used *ousia*, Tertullian adopted *substantia*. His "*substantia*" refers to fundamental reality which is commonly shared by the three persons where as the term *persona* means the principle of operative individuality which was drawn from the older Latin "*persona*" (Greek *prosopon*) – a mask or a mere manifestation. With these, he works out a formula that would serve as a landmark in the further development of the doctrine of God as a community. This formula is, "three persons, one nature, and one substance." His text writes:

This is the complete nativity of Word, when it comes forth from God ... thereafter causing Him to be His Father by proceeding from whom He became Son .... Whatever therefore the substance of the Word (*substantia sermonis*) was, that I call a Person, and for it I claim the name Son; and while I acknowledge Him as Son I maintain He is another (*secundum*) beside the Father.<sup>40</sup>

In the same text, he explains the substance of the Father to be also the substance of the Son; with substance already explained as the fundamental reality commonly shared by the divine persons. He uses this materializing language (*substantia*) borrowed from stoic philosophy to illustrate his view. This is employed to Trinitarian categories while trying to illustrate the Trinity of God. He found a philosophical basis for God as a differentiated triune unity where the unity of the Godhead does neither impoverish nor consume personal distinctions. And in *Adversus Praxean* 8, he employs the use of analogies to illustrate the intimacy of the three persons, their personal distinctiveness and yet their unity of substance and being.

First he talks of the Son who was “produced” but not separated from the Father as a root produces the shoot, a spring the river and the sun a ray. The Spirit, the third person, different in “persona” from the Father and the Son, is the canal which comes from the river and its source, the fruit from the shoot and the roots, and as light from the ray from the sun. He adds: “But none of these is divorced from the origin from which it derives its own properties. Thus the Trinity derives from the Father by continuous and connected steps.” (Adv Prax, 8).

Tertullian, by reason of the relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit, completed the third link in the triangular chain which was left by Irenaeus. He moved the Trinitarian thesis forward by presenting an inherent image of the community through his explicit recognition of personal distinctions and the undivided unity of the persons in the same substance. The communitarian principle is thus underscored since the distinction of the persons does not compromise the unity of substance and the true divine monarchy.

Tertullian’s teaching on the monarchy of the Father contains some elements of subordinationism. Trying to stress their personal distinction, he explains that the Father is not the Son by reason of his being greater than the Son. Whereas he teaches the Father to be the whole substance (of the deity), the Son (and the Holy Spirit) is only a derivative and a portion of the whole (Adv. Prax. 9). In as much as these issues undermine the image of the community, Tertullian stands out as a pillar, in laying the foundation which contemporary theologians would build.

Irenaeus and Tertullian are reputed by the image of the communitarian God which they instantiated in the use of material images as analogies for unity in diversity. They laid the foundation for much of the western Trinitarian tradition which would rich its

apogee in Augustine in the Patristic era. Of this Gerald O'Collins makes this comment:

... fourth-century theologians tried to explore faithfully the unity, diversity, and relationships within the Trinity. They knew that the tripersonal God is present in the entire cosmos and in all human history – not least in the history of Jesus and his Church. They felt the obligation to reflect on the divine mystery in as much as their reflections could serve worship and discipleship.<sup>41</sup>

The Cappadocian Fathers – Basil, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus – advanced the discussion beyond Athanasius through their study of the divine persons, their definition and distinction as well as their relation to one another and to the Godhead. Their emphasis however was heavy on developing the language of three coequal and coeternal “*hypostaseis*” or persons/subjects sharing the one divine *ousia* or essence/being/substance.<sup>42</sup>

The unity of essence among the three persons “constitutes” this community of nature in God. Through this concept of community of nature, the Cappadocians could recognize the communion of life within the inner being of God (within the Godhead) as is expressed in the shared glory and the inseparable nature of God such that Gregory of Nyssa in *Ad Ablabium* or in his *Quod Non Sint Tres Dei* could affirmatively state that “there are not three gods”, that is “not three separate divine subjects,” but we speak of “three-in-one,” and that these three enjoy a unique unity, one infinitely closer than that between any three human persons. Thus they not only portray the community of life within the Godhead, but attributed to it the quality of perfection which cannot be found nor ascribed to any human community. The Trinity for them therefore manifests a perfection of community life by virtue of the nature and mission of the divine Persons. This would become an

asset that would be duly explored by John of Damascus which will offer to the Christian tradition an enriching vocabulary for a model of community life.

St. John of Damascus synthesized the trinitarian doctrine of his predecessors and served as the last eminent representative of Greek theology. His *De Fide Orthodoxa* (which is the third part of his celebrated book, *The Source of Knowledge*) is called as the *Summa* of Greek theology. It contains his doctrine of God and showed that he drew much from the Cappadocians and the Pseudo-Areopagite. Bill long describes him as the eloquent theologian on the doctrine of "Perichoresis".<sup>43</sup> Book I of *De Fide Orthodoxa* outlines a complete exposition of the Trinitarian faith of the Church which exposes the distinct attributes of God, the distinction of persons and the unity of their nature and finally their mutual co-inherence expressed in the Greek concept of *perichoresis* (*circumincession*). In the tradition of Basil and his fellow Cappadocians, John recognized the uniqueness of God and speaks of the common nature of God which is Trinitarian. He described the personal distinction of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit with the concept of subsistence and in line with orthodoxy expressed the Tertullian Trinitarian tradition of One God in three subsistence against the modalism of Sabellius. He thus recognizes the full deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and yet identifies the monarchy of the Father as the source and origin of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 8 of this book is sub-titled "*Concerning the Holy Trinity*". The beginning line explains, against background of any modalistic or polytheistic interpretations, the "uncompound" ineffable God who is the fountain of all that is, who is "made known in three perfect subsistences" and yet is one divinity, one essence, one power, one will, one energy. The perfection of relation in this Trinity (the uncompound God) is expressed in the ideas of unity

without confusion in their nature, and divided without separation (in their mission – in the economy).

In their personal relationship with one another, John explained that the names, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are relational concepts. He said “while the names Father, Son and Spirit are causeless and caused, and unbegotten and begotten, and procession contains the idea of separation: for these terms do not explain his essence, but the mutual relationship”. These same ideas had been expressed by the Cappadocians. They have their “beginning” in the utter timelessness of the Father (eternity) “for these never was a time when the Father was and the Son was not, but always the Father and always the Son, who was begotten of Him, existed together.” He illustrates these relational concepts by saying that the idea of “sonship” evokes the idea (notion) of fatherhood (paternity) and vice versa. The Holy Spirit in his utmost subsistent relationship with the Father is the Spiritation of God; he is not generated; rather he proceeds from the Father’s essence.

Thinking of three subsistences is to conceive God in numerical categories. There is obvious implication of polytheism which Athanasius had earlier warned against. St. John clarifies this by expressing the totally uncompoundness of God for according to him, compoundness is the beginning of separation. Though the subsistences are perfect, the indivisibility and unity of God is not called to question when these are conceived in terms of the Cappadocian ‘common nature of God’ or the “community of nature” by John of Damascus. He called to the appeal of reason and thought for the apprehension of the connection and unity in the Godhead. His clarification of this idea is distinguished from any human meetings and communities and even common nature among created beings. Whereas we observe, he argues, the community of nature where created beings exist as individual subsistences, (evoking separation and division), in the created realm, the

community and unity is observed through the co-eternity of the subsistences and through their unity of essence, energy, will and concord of mind; through their being identical in authority and power and goodness and movement by one impulse.

Life within this divine community (of nature) is expressed with the Greek concept of *Περιχώρησις* (*perichoresis*) – *circumincession* or *immanentia* by John of Damascus. This concept is of great import to our argument in this thesis. According to John, it is meant to “express the peculiarity of the relations of the Three Divine Persons or subsistences – their Indwelling in each other, the fact that, while they are distinct they yet are in one another, the coinherence which implies their equal and identical Godhead” (De fide, BK 1 ch 8). This Damascene doctrine, which is in consonance with the orthodox faith defined at Nicaea I, recognizes the “full” distinction of the subsistences and yet affirms their unalloyed unity since they interpenetrate one another. This same teaching received further experiences in Book III ch 5 (*subtitled: Concerning the number of Natures*). John says:

And we know further that these are indivisible and inseparable from each other and united into one, and interpenetrating one another without confusion ... I repeat, united without confusion, for they are three although united, and they are distinct, although inseparable. For although each has an independent existence, that is to say, is a perfect subsistence and has individuality of its own, that is, has a special mode of existence, yet they are one in essence and in the natural properties, and in being inseparable and indivisible from the Father’s subsistence, they both are said to be one God.<sup>44</sup>

John of Damascus therefore, in his bid to fight Sabellian and Arian abuses, following the examples of the Cappadocians and in consonance with the Nicene Constantinopolitan orthodoxy,



described God in such a manner most apt at recognizing the distinctness of the Persons and at the same time underscoring the importance of community life. Though he characterized the divine life as perichoretic and presented the difference from the human and created nature, he still presents the perichoretic life of God in such a light that humanity, made in the image and likeness of God would be fulfilling its mission in the world by emulating this divine reality. This theme has been so developed by Eastern Trinitarian theologians and is now making waves in the West and the thrust of social trinitarianism. Leonardo Boff judges the Trinity as a perfect society while Thomas J. Scirghi considers it as a model for belonging to contemporary society.

These evidences from Patristic teachings bear witness to the communitarian image of God in those early days of the Church's life. Though these contributions are lauded today, each is imbedded with a particular problem as the West which reached its peak in Augustine had the difficulty of safeguarding the personal distinctions because of too much emphasis on the nature of God; the danger in the East is to distinguish the distinctive persons from a tritheistic accusation. Contemporary theologians would take up this conception of the Trinity anew armed with theopoetic insights. Our first theologian would be Leonardo Boff.

Leonardo Boff presents, in his South American Brazil, the Trinitarian community as the perfect community. He expressed this conviction in his book, *Holy Trinity, the Perfect Community*. Boff points to the mystery of perichoresis, that Trinitarian communion as a characteristic of the divine community that is just not there in any other (created) community. We have seen that the theory of natural selection preaches the logic of survival of the fittest a logic that is present within imperfect circles.

Boff then would argue that this divine community is a “model for any, just, egalitarian (while respecting differences), social organization”.<sup>45</sup> According to Boff, disintegration and brokenness come when we lose sight of the essential perspective of the triune God – communion between the divine persons for therefore, offers us an example of participation and equality we can emulate as much as it offers a critical attitude to personhood, communion, society and the Church.<sup>46</sup>

Boff had in his earlier book *Trinity and Society*, spoken of the Trinity as a model for any social setting, but his later work, the *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community* had provided a more anthropologically directly visions of the Trinity where the community will provide our basis of belongingness to one another. By this work, he sees the divine community as of central importance for Christian life and a motif and factor for liberation.

And for Trinitarian theology to accomplish this task, Boff opts for a redefinition of the Trinity and a review of the rationalization that has preoccupied the Trinitarian discourse, the concept of personhood and highlights the actual living condition of the poor presented in the light of Trinitarian reflections and mirrors. He accuses contemporary theology of an individualistic conception of God, of a difficulty of human reason and language with asserting the Three-in-One and above all, of the neglect of the language of prayer and doxology which on the contrary capture the mysterious nature of the Trinity. He borrowed John of Damascene’s concept of “*perichoresis*” to emphasize that mutual interrelationship and indwelling within God is the key to every communality. It is the power behind God’s unity and love and can also help address human individualism which is the roof of all social crises and divisiveness. His assumption then is that if the Holy Trinity, the community of love is properly understood, human beings as *ens socialis* would have a model of life to emulate. He thus demanded

for a redefinition of this doctrine of faith to embrace the living realities of the man and woman, rich or poor, small or mighty in the human society.

Boff paints a feminine image of God and sets a distinction between the human and the divine. Our problem is that he seemed to have forgotten the poor whose context he purported to reflect in his schema for a systematic Trinitarian theology. Secondly, his comparative analysis between the human world and they seem to cut God in his transcendence off his reflections as he lays heavy emphasis on the participative and analogical study of God and the human world. Despite these, Boff's work provides us with an opportunity to recast our minds on the rudiments of personhood, community and individuality in our relationships with God and with one another in our world and in the Church. He appeals to a communitarian view of the Trinity as a remedy to mankind's inhumanity to others in the name of politics and economy.

Sr. Nona Harrison, following this communitarian concept of the Holy Trinity follows many contemporary theologians to emphasize the "*richesse*" of the Trinitarian model for human beings. In the article, "*The Holy Trinity: A Model for Human Community*" published in the St. Nina Quarterly, a journal exploring the ministry of women in the Eastern Orthodox Church, she teaches in consonance with the Church Fathers that in our imaging God we have the capacity to enter into communion with God and live lives of goodness and love.

Like many contemporary Orthodox theologians, our belonging to the human community and our relatedness to one another, like the mutual love and interrelatedness of the Trinitarian Persons are at the root of who we are. However, she distances herself from what she calls "egalitarian utopia" which she says is unrealistic. She cautions against such anarchist situations which results as a result

**of the misconception of the Trinitarian misconceptions for misconceptions for the human community. These misconceptions arise out of two extreme interpretations of the Trinity as a model of life for the human community. The first is the absolutely authoritarian interpretation of the Trinitarian model for the human community. The second is the deletion of all forms of hierarchy in the community, whereas the first risks the suppression of equality, personal dignity, mutuality, and diversity in unity for the sake of obedience (for Christ submitted in obedience to the will of his Father), she argues that this would be “a hierarchy without conciliarity, whereas the Holy Trinity is hierarchy that is also absolute conciliarity” where the divine persons defer to each other in love in a common life lived in free, and equal dignity, mutual collaboration and unity-in-diversity. The second is the extreme application of opposite. The third is an analogical misunderstanding of the trinitarian model. The human community is quite distinct from the divine community. We cannot as humans initiate the divine persons in absolutely everything. The total comprehension of the divine is not possible and so also imitation of Trinitarian communion in every way beyond human possibility. For these Harrison opts for a compassionate creativity, which demands us to reach out to others in mutual love and solidarity as the balanced way of imitating the divine community. Harrison’s view can be summarized thus:**

1. A distorted authoritarian understanding of human community leads to a distorted view of God.
2. Our belief in a Trinitarian God, in a God of social inter-relationship and shared love, commits us to enter into loving communion with God and with one another.
3. This requires a transfiguration of the human heart. These require a life of humility and self-offering on the part of leaders, and collaboration in communal effort on the followers. She says: “God does not abolish human

hierarchy but transfigures it from within into conciliarity, into mutual love and communion among persons who share freedom, equality, and royal dignity.”<sup>39</sup>

Harrison achieved a lot, especially correcting the misunderstanding of Trinitarian community as created by Jürgen Moltmann who tends to remove the ground upon which the “axis” of the Trinitarian community is built – the monarchy. However, Harrison too sounds ambiguous in what she calls her compassionate creativity and the “need to be led” and yet her avowed feminist agenda. She scores a mark when she attests that obedience and humility and unanimous cooperation constitute the highest ideal for human community. She calls the human community to care and attentiveness to one another.

## 2.5 The Church and the Trinity – the Exemplar of Trinitarian Community in the World

We have seen the unanimous acceptance of Trinitarian theologians of the contemporary times that the Trinity is a model of life for the world. Now Dr. Eric Williams in two articles “*Trinity – the Church*” and “*Trinity – the Family*” explore in practical terms of this vision in the reality of ecclesiastical institutions and in family life. Before studying these articles, let us first take a look at Nwachukwu Anthony’s work on *The Church and Trinitarian Communion*.

Nwachukwu as do Thomas J. Scirghi and Williams argues that: the world today is bedeviled by selfish individualism and is even moving towards belonging and community. The imperfections in the corporations which, according to Scirghi are gradually substituting the traditional institutions as the Church leave a craving in the profoundest parts of the human soul. So the argument is that even these cooperations cannot satisfy the human

**longing, it is only the Trinity that can. So Nwachukwu then presents the view that God who made us in his image and likeness invites us to communion with him through Christ in the Holy Spirit. It is through the Church that we realize on earth, the unity with God and with one another in a communion of faith and brotherliness. Thus for Nwachukwu, the Church serves as the point of realization of trinitarian communion and work of salvation. She is the exemplar of this life in the world, being herself called to reflect on earth the mystery of communion in the Godhead.<sup>47</sup>**

In this understanding, then, Williams defines the Church **not** in the vision of Vatican II ecclesiology, but with a Trinitarian nuance. She is one of the “schools” established by God to educate us in the etiquette of unity and diversity (Trinity – the Family). She is essentially a fellowship entrusted with the charge of reproducing the kinship of the triune God. Though acknowledging their personal self-distinctions, the members of the divine community never act independently or in opposition to one another and through this communion, we discover a principle of life that is appropriate to human existence and community.

The Church has a vocation to imitate the Trinity and the primary consideration for this imitation is that she (the Church) should be characterized by unity and not diversity. The Church is expected too to maintain this unity in respect of her community ministry. William therefore identified unity at the very root of the Church’s nature and mission. However on the avenues and organs for the accomplishment of this task, he, echoing Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium*, identifies her hierarchical and charismatic organs, though given the names (in this article) of leadership and the vision of individual Church members.

In his pentecostalist perspective, William shows the fundamental principles of ecclesiology which identifies the constitutive nature

of Church's membership and the division of labour for the common God. Though he fails to acknowledge the principles of Catholic ecclesiology, he, working with Trinitarian paradigms, underscores the truths about the divine origin of the Church, the vision of the Church as an exemplar of Trinitarian life on earth, and the freedom and liberty of the Church members which flowers the charismatic gifts of the Church and her hierarchical organs. Despite these, his synthesis of scripture and the implication of the Trinitarian faith in the world and the Church remain valid in the mainstream of our argument.

In this flora of literature, the Christian doctrine of the Blessed Trinity is found very enriching. Cutting across the different epochs of the Church and of the development of this article of faith and its theology, this is found a unanimous voice: the Trinity is the community of God for in the one God there are three persons. There is also a common agreement that the Trinity provides a justification for the unity of the Church's community. As Moltmann put it, "it corresponds to the indwelling of the Father in the Son and, of the Son in the Father. It participates in the divine Trinity, since the community of believers is not only fellowship with God but in God too."<sup>48</sup>

As the people of God, Body of Christ and spouse of the Holy Spirit, this Church lives and thrives in communion of life, bringing her children into unity and leading them towards the eschatological unity with the Trinitarian community. Though much of the materials reflect the denominational background of their authors, the truth about the Church as a community that not only mirrors the Trinitarian community but also makes it visible on earth is undisputed.

This understanding of being and relatedness is very fundamental to the thought and theology of Ratzinger. Following his gallery of

works, specially in his post Vatican II writings, one discovers the great deal of attention he pays to the concept of the Church as communion where he underscores the richness of this communion from the biblical and Magisterial interpretations of constituted belonging to the community of faith through the Church's self-understanding as ecclesia, People of God and Body of Christ. His students had brought a compilation of his ecclesiology in the compendium titled *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith* with the subtitle of "The Church as Communion". This subtitled reflects a work he published much earlier with the title *Called to Communion* in which he strove to reemphasize the nature, origin destination of the Church as against the background of contemporary questions and pressure. Despite the fact that much of the materials that constitute the corpus of this work rose from the responses he gave to a gathering of Bishops from Brazil at Rio de Janeiro between 23<sup>rd</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> of July 1990, in his capacity as Prefect of the Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith, concerning questions on the relationship between the universal Church and particular Church, with special regard to the primacy of the Pope and its relation to the ministry of the bishops, we regard this work more as a product of the Magisterium, we review it here for its theological content underlined in the concept of the Church as the new eschatological people, the gathering of which constituted the entire ministry of Jesus and that this became a people solely through his call and its response to his call and to his person (*Called to Communion*). He underscored the fact of a "corporate personality", a semitic concept, to be at the background in the understanding of this community of faith.

However in the compilation, *Pilgrims Fellowship of Faith* (originally published in 2002), the conviction of Ratzinger is shown to say that the Church in her essence is a creation of the Holy Spirit. The theological base of his conception of the Church as communion is drawn from St. Augustine's *De Trinitate* on the



nature of the Holy Spirit as the communion of the Father and the Son. He thus presents the Spirit in the Father – Son dynamics where the mediation of Father and Son to complete unity is being seen as communion on the basis of persons in keeping with the nature of God himself, personal.<sup>49</sup> The Holy Spirit becomes singled out then as the effecter of unity, the power of communication, its element of mediation and of enabling communion.

Within this spectrum of communion and communication, Ratzinger as Augustine uses the terms “love” (*caritas*) and “gift” (*donum*) in strict terms as names of the Holy Spirit. He is the love that grants the abiding while at the same time, the Holy Spirit is the gift of God – the gift of God is love – God shares himself as love in the Holy Spirit, thus, according to Ratzinger, love distinguishes the Holy Spirit; it manifests his presence and in that sense, the presence of God. This presence is abiding and enduring. This Ratzinger puts it that the fundamental activity of the Holy Spirit is the love that writes and draws into abiding unity.

This study of the nature of the Holy Spirit leads Ratzinger to an in-depth study of Augustine’s *De Trinitate*. In this study, following the footsteps of Augustine, Ratzinger builds an ecclesiology that has an inner connection with the Blessed Trinity. He locates this link, though in Christology, but more so in pneumatology. Here the Spirit as communion, brings in a picturesque the image of the Holy Spirit as the love and gift of God to himself that enables the unity that neither closes nor resolves the dialogue. He configures the Spirit as the medium for attaining unity as Person, both within the Trinitarian community and in the economy. He is the abiding love and gift of Father and the Son, a love that fecundates. And outside the Trinitarian communion, he is the source of the living water captured and formulated in John chapters 4 and seven whom every man cries out for and without which there is no life.

Thus, Ratzinger comments that the nature of the Holy Spirit as “given” (*datus*) does not reduce him to a mere intermediary between God (divinity) and humanity (creature). He remains within the inner reality of divinity, though it represents an opening onto history and toward man. According to Augustine, as Ratzinger observes, the Holy Spirit is of his very nature, God’s gift, God as wholly self-giving, God as sharing in himself, as gift (Augustine, *De Trinitate*, V, 14, 15). Within this inner reason in which the Holy Spirit is “*donum*” and “*datum*” is found a basis in advance for salvation history which appears as the inner reason and basis for creation. Ratzinger finds in this therefore the opening up to the economic doctrine of the Trinity from the immanent. It is in this opening up to salvation history that Ratzinger draws the connection down to the relationship between Trinitarian life and the Church still using Augustine as his guide.

In this understanding, Ratzinger underscores a very important point here stating that the presence of the Holy Spirit (who is love) is the distinguishing mark of what is Christian. Without love and unity, there is no Church and everything is empty. Thus, we may define the Church then not simply as *ecclesia*, but pneumatologically as the creation of the Spirit, as the Body of the Lord built up by the *Pneuma* – which indeed becomes the Body of Christ through the *Pneuma* making men into “communion” – as the creation of the Spirit, the Church is the “gift” of God in this world, and this “gift” is love. Earlier on, Ratzinger has opined that becoming a Christian means becoming “communion” and, thus, entering into the mode of existence of the Holy Spirit. It is therefore contradictory to think of a Christian as a sector in isolation of the brothers. To be a Christian means abiding in love and unity with one another among the brethren, hence it is the characteristic and hallmark of a Christian to accept the entire community of faith as a sure sign of the humility of love, enduring with one another in unity.

It is obvious that St. Augustine uses this logic of dogma to address the Donatist schism. But Ratzinger employs it to draw up the underlying truth of faith by which the theology of the Trinity becomes a direct standard for ecclesiology and emphasizes that the Holy Spirit, who is love, becomes the key to Christian living and communion.

Ratzinger summarizes his key point here by stating that it would be erroneous to despoil the Church of the image of the Spirit and give her only mere empirical and institutional images. He holds that in her very fact of being visible, empirical, in the sacraments, in the Word, and in love, she is the home of the spirit, and the spirit grants his presence in the concrete community of those who support and bear with one another on Christ's account. The Holy Spirit renders this home into an abode that guarantees the end of captivity, creates freedom and grants homeland and freedom to the members, and builds the unity of the Church.

The ecclesiology of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger in most recently been compiled by the German theologian and Cistercian priest, Maximilian Heinrich Heim in the book, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology*. Heim presents this piece of work as fundamental of ecclesiology which revolves around *Lumen Gentium*, (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*). Significantly this book had its forward endorsed by Ratzinger himself shortly before his election as Pope in 2005. This work contains a convincing interpretation of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council built around the works of Ratzinger since the Council.

This book has three parts: the first part is a presentation of the Church's self understanding according to *Lumen Gentium*. This first part follows the proforma of *Lumen Gentium* but discusses only the background schemas to the Council's deliberation – the tensions between tradition and innovation reflected in the schemas

*De Ecclesia* and what metamorphosed into *Lumen Gentium*: the mystery of the Church, the Church as the People of God and the hierarchical structure of the Church. The second part discusses among other things the Church as the locus of faith. It is captioned *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology*. This part highlights the contributions of Ratzinger to the development of Post Vatican II ecclesiology both in his capacities as teacher, pastor and member of the Magisterium while at the same time outlining his major ecclesiological themes. It is within this locus that he identifies the Eucharistic communities as the realization and goal of the Church's communion, being, as it is, that the Church is constituted as the Body of Christ through the Eucharist. Part three is Heim's synopsis and summary of Ratzinger ecclesiology. Of particular interest to us is the second part. Our focus is on his conception of the Church as a "*communio* unity" and since his second chapter of the part deals with issues already treated in his *Called to Communion* and his *Pilgrim Fellowship*, we suffice to limit our focus on the "*communio* unity".

Ratzinger has asserted that the Church is the Body of Christ as St. Paul had written. Beyond Paul, he elaborates this text to mean the participation in that communion between mankind and God which is the Incarnation of the Word. This communion is foundationally in the Eucharist. Augustine's Confession 7, 10, 16 is used to illustrate this point: "Communion means that the seemingly uncrossable frontier of my "I" is left open and can be so because Jesus has first taken us all into himself and has put himself totally into our hands".<sup>50</sup>

Invariably then Ratzinger, following Augustine, pinpoint Christ as the foundation that generate the Church and therefore opines that through ecclesial communion, we are given a share of the mystery of the Incarnation and then we may conclude that there is no

separation between the Church and the Eucharist, between communion and community fellowship.<sup>51</sup>

To understand the concept of *communio* as employed by Ratzinger, Heim points out its twofold understanding first is the secular roots, that in the semantics of *koinonia* (*κοινωνία*) and Trinitarian *communio*. *Koinonia* is a word that originates from secular root word for community (common property, common work and values). Its Hebrew equivalent is *habhūrâ* (fellowship, cooperative). From the Jewish perspective, Heim pointed out that a group of Pharisees in the first century BC called themselves *habhūrâ* while the term was used for the rabbis from the second century AD and finally was used for those who assembled for the passovermeal.<sup>52</sup>

Plato's symposium had spoken of *koinonia* in reference to the mutual communion between gods and men and even explained that this communion with gods brings about community among men. Trinitarian communion, on the other hand, had been revealed, especially by the Divine Word at the Incarnation. Accordingly, it serves as an essential feature of the Church which not only explains the origin of the Church from its source (the Trinitarian God as illustrated by *Lumen Gentium*, but also highlights the fact of the ever flowing link between the Church and Christ, and, hence the triune love of God. There is a *κοινωνία* between God and men and this becomes particularly manifest in the (sacrament) the Church. For this ecclesiology, the encounter with Jesus Christ is the point of departure and the centre of *communio*. For Ratzinger, the goal of this *communio* is eschatological joy.

Thus building on *Lumen Gentium's* presentation of the Church's mystery, the Church is *communio*; she reminds and signifies the communing of God with men in Christ as well as the communing of men with one another. For this reason, the Council Fathers had

called her as *sacramentum*, that is, a sign and instrument of salvation (cf LG, 48; Ag, 4). In the Eucharistic community, she is both Eucharist, fellowship, community and parish whose distinctive character has four-fold significance for Ratzinger: First, *communio*, according to Heim, becomes the answer that gives meaning to humanity, which at present is torn by modern individualism. Secondly, it is the intrinsic nature of the Church's liturgical celebration. Thirdly *communio* bestows binding force by remaining in the teaching of the Apostles. Lastly, it understands itself to be the missionary, in the sense of carrying on a dialogue with the world.

Accordingly therefore, in the frame of Ratzinger's ecclesiology, the Church as *communio* evokes the idea of the mystery of union which at the same time also calls up a response to the split into individuality. On this ground, she serves as a *sacramentum unitatis* as taught by the Council (LG I). However, as communion, the Church is not just about any effort to fuse factions into unity. Ratzinger had pointed out, in his *Principles of Catholic Theology*, the "Comprehensive unity, *unio, unitas* which would point in turn to the communion between God and men as realized in the person Jesus Christ and in turn becomes communicable in the Easter mystery. In *Called to Communion* therefore, he surmises that "The Church is communion; she is communion of the Word and Body of Christ and is thus communion among men, who by means of this communion that brings them together from above and from within are made one people, indeed, one Body.

Heim helps as to highlight the principal points of Ratzinger's ecclesiology which we have been trying to study from the books reviewed above. From these studies, we learn that the Church is a community of faith of those brought into communion with God and with one another through Jesus Christ. When we talk about the

Church them as communion, Ratzinger looks at it from the following perspectives:

- a. She derives her communion from her source, the Trinitarian communion.
- b. She becomes a sacrament that brings men and women into communion with God and with one another.
- c. She reflects this communion in her truth as a Eucharistic community.
- d. She, as sign herself, is the icon of Trinitarian communion in the world.

Ratzinger holds that her image as *communio* is drawn from the Trinitarian communion and is realized in the gathered community of faith; hence she is an assembly, a community, a fellowship. She is therefore communion by origin, nature and mission. She is called into being out of communion, she lives in communion and is called to bring communion to the world and to God. She lives to unite men with God and with one another. Historically she matches, leading her sons and daughters to the *eschaton*. She exercises her life in sacramental communion in the liturgical assembly/Community.

Ratzinger thus excels as an ecclesialogist who understands the full import of communion as a constituted reality and through this understanding highlights the truth underlying our nature as human a person; that is, as beings who are rather radically open and tending towards others. This is the situation where the “I” of each person is assimilated to that of Jesus (in the Eucharistic communion) and made similar to him in an exchange that increasingly breaks through the lines of separatedness and division. All who communicate become assimilated into this one “bread” and thus become one among themselves – one body.<sup>53</sup> He thus offers us in the ambient of contemporary Catholic theology a very

trust to discuss and visualize the Church first as a community, then as the icon and exemplar of the Trinitarian community in the world.

Colin E. Gunton argues that there are deficiencies in ecclesiology in the British context. First of all, he observes that the question of the being of the Church has been one of the most neglected topics of theology. Secondly, even when the concept “one, holy, catholic and apostolic” are used to describe the Church, there is an overwhelming disagreement over the understanding of these concepts because, their meanings are determined from different assumptions and theologies. Thirdly these deficiencies are matched by those on the general practice of Trinitarian theology, since the Trinity, the hub of every theology, is riddled with difficulties.

He sets out in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* for a project that would reconstruct ecclesiology in the peninsula by establishing an ontology upon which this ecclesiology would be built. Gunton has presented the idea that the inadequacy of the theology of the Church which he pointed out is as a result of a lack of such ontology that would serve as a foundation for the erection of the structure (ecclesiology). The event of this lack occurred, according to Harnack's *History of Dogma*, in the break with the theology of the Patristics of both East and West in the development of ecclesiology. The error of the present age (ecclesiology) is the discontinuity from the approach of the Patristic which had battled with the fundamental theological questions concerning first the nature of God and of his relation to the world, and then on who Christ is and what kind of being he is in relation to God the Father and the Holy Spirit on the one hand and to humanity on the other. From the analysis of Harnack's work, Gunton affirms that they (the early Christians) claimed to have generated a very different ontology from those in the ancient world and also from the implicit ontologies found in the Old Testament.



Gunton argues along the same line with Harnack that there were scarcely any such ontologies and where there was any, it was heavily girded with ideologies foreign to theology and ecclesiology. To bring this problem to a point, Gunton (based on the arguments of Harnack), hold that the result of the imposition of false metaphysic upon the gospel was the discrepancy found in the understanding of the Church and the disagreements on the meaning and answers to the question, what is the Church? This false metaphysic became the apparatus of early dogmatic theology which overlaid a foreign ideology upon the original teaching of Christianity. Though Gunton and Zizioulas disagree with Harnack's absolutization of all theology in this light, they do not object to the fact that ecclesiology had not profited from the distinctively Christian ontology based on the doctrine of the Trinity.

Gunton therefore undertakes a study of this history in order to establish the reason. This study of Harnack and other scholars led him to locate the problem at the struggle between the "orthodox" and the "heretics". He indentified in this struggle two principal issues of which one is largely a wrong conception of the other. First, it was largely pneumatological and secondly the reason is as a result of the interpretation of the above to reflect on history. First of all, their struggle revolves around the conception of how the Spirit constitutes the Church. The one group sticks to unity and stressed on the Church as an institution to which the other opposed. Each group, according to Gunton, laid claim to a corresponding conception of history. He notes:

The one is increasingly dualistic. This life is a preparation for the next, a training ground for future destiny. The other stresses more strongly the community as the place where the conditions of the life to come may be realized in the here and now. The reason for the divergence is the major deficiency in the development of

pneumatology in the West, certainly in so far as it is measured against the New Testament. In the later, there is considerable emphasis on the eschatological dimensions of the Spirit as the one by whose agency the life of the age to come is made real in the present. When that is lost, the Spirit tends to be institutionalized, so that in place of the free, dynamic, personal and particular agency of the Spirit, he is made into a substance which becomes the possession of the Church.<sup>54</sup>

The Montanist Tertullian, in *De Pudicitia* (ch. 21), for instance, reacting against the decision of a bishop to “lower” standards for Church members on fornication and adultery, reminds him that the Church is the Body of Christ, not a conclave of bishops. Tertullian reacts against the arrogation of powers to the clergy, and thus calls attention to the fact that the Church is a community by drawing a parallel between the Church as the community of faith with the Trinity and as a free act of congregating. The next instance used by Harnack, as Gunton points out, is Novatian who held that membership is not the sine qua non of salvation. The heretical group thus criticized the institution for claiming too much of a realization of eschatology while expecting too little of the community as a whole.<sup>55</sup>

The relevance of the study of heretics is, for Gunton, the claim that there is much wisdom in their history since their teaching and behaviour according to him, never endangered so much the Creed as a seamless unity of the institution. Gunton therefore has argued that “the waning of that social order is calling attention again to the need to rethink the structures of the Church as a community.”<sup>56</sup> For this reason, Gunton begins the retrieval exercise by a study of the relation of Christ and the Spirit to the Church. At issue here are the Christological and pneumatological determinations of the Church in history (the economy). These tend to be creating direct or causal, and therefore, ontological and logical links to the being of

the Church and their effects. To the first, Christ is linked with the institution of the Church. Secondly, there is need to examine how the Church in the modern times has exercised authority and this takes the probe back to the original questions of Christology and pneumatology and their relation to the Church. Gunton finds fault with their emphasis on the exercise of authority (obviously not in the manner of Jesus) drawn from the christological assumption of the Church's institution by Christ. He calls for a reconsideration of this relation of Christology and pneumatology with a consequent reduction of stress on the Church's institution by Christ and a greater emphasis on its constitution by the Holy Spirit. His strong point would be a conception of the humanity of Jesus which gives due emphasis to his freedom, particularity and contingency and that these are enabled by the (transcendent) Spirit rather than determined by the (immanent) Word. This Spirit who is responsible for the shape of Jesus' life is believed, according to Gunton, to give the Church a christomorphic direction. He believes this would enable a reappropriation of ecclesiology on the humanity of Christ. Such that Christology would be seen as the starting point since it is related to the question of the status of the events from which the Church originated. But to have something of what kind of sociality the Church is we must move from a discussion of the relation of Christology to pneumatology to an enquiry into what it is that makes the Church what it is. According to Gunton, this necessitates a move from the economic to the immanent and thus from the ontic to the ontological.

The appropriate ecclesiology, for Gunton, would be based on an ontology of the Church. He had argued that the lack of such ontology for the Church led to the filling of the vacuum, hence to retrieve and establish one for the Church would be more than required. He discovered this in the doctrine of the Trinity. This doctrine, according to the Cappadocians, teaches that the first thing to be said about the being of God is that it consists in personal

communion and this communion is an ontological category since the nature of God is communion.

He shuns the practice of appealing directly to the unity of the Three as the model for a unified Church or arguing from the distinction of persons for an ecclesiology of diversity. He rather proposes for a Trinitarian theology of creation which distinguishes the creator from creation (rather than place a logical link between creator and creations). This will help avoid the lapse into pantheism or monism. The Trinity, he says, replaces a logical conception of relation between God and the world with a personal one, but this distinction of creation and creator recognizes these two ontologically distinct realities whose distinctness, far from being the denial of relations, is its ground. This relation flows from the free and personal action of the triune God. Thus the Church would be seen as a contingent and finite only by virtue of its continuing dynamic dependence upon its creator. The Church then, as part of creation, is finite and contingent. This corresponds to the conception of the Church as the image of the humanity of Christ. The Father interrelates with his world by means of the humanity of his Son, and by his Spirit enables anticipations in the present of the promised perfection of the creation. Thus, the Church, as part of creation, reflects the *communio* or as Zizioulas puts it, the *koinonia* (community, sociality, compare with the Russian Sobornost). Gunton notes: "One implication of the threefold community that is God is its dynamism: the being of God is a community of energies, of perichoretic interaction. As such, it is difficult to conceive its consistency with any static hierarchy.

Gunton now inquires into the kind of analogy that could be made between God and the Church, between the Trinity and community. He sees the Church then as an echo, a finite echo or bodying forth of the divine personal dynamics. Moving away from Augustine to the Cappadocians, he defines the being of God as the persons in

relation to each other. With this Cappadocian Trinitarian theology is a corresponding ecclesiology which conceives the being of the Church as consisting in the relation of persons to each other. Concerning God to be what he is in virtue of what the Father, Son and Spirit give to and receive from each other helps to conceive the Church as a voluntary society, a society whose voluntary coalescence is also and first conceived as the work of God the Spirit. Gunton supports John Owen's conception of the Church as a community of freely relating persons which consequently echoes God's eternal being in relation and Edward Farley's phenomenological study of the Church.

He thus creates the framework by which the link between God and the Church may be drawn. Though the participants in the Cappadocian Trinity do constitute each other as persons, it is not simply that the same with the Church, otherwise would mean a construction of a social reality that disregards the way things happen to be. Rather this link is the Holy Spirit. The constitution is the work of the Holy Spirit. He provides the link between God and the Church and thus makes the Church the temporal echo of the eternal community that God is. Gunton identifies in this therefore, the fundamental ground for understanding what the Church is – the body of Christ (an organic metaphor) which speaks of the interpersonal unity: the personal unity of distinct but freely related persons. Thus the ontology of the Trinity helps us to appropriate something of the richness and openness of the central ecclesial model.

In this model, relations in the Church is not to be understood in the matrix of the institutional hierarchy which subordinates one group to the other, and excludes some from certain functions and services. To base the theology of the Church, argues Gunton, on the Trinity becomes of great practical importance since he places

the tripersonal community of God as the matrix of primary control on ecclesiology.

Having established the ontology for ecclesiology on the Trinity, identifying their relation in the echoing of the Trinity, Gunton now asserts that this Church now has a mission: to be a kind of reality in the finite level what God is in eternity? Gunton now takes a review of his steps so far and identifies the weight of his argument as an honest search for ontology appropriate for ecclesiology. He discovers the Trinity, because of its status as the ground of all being by reason of cause, to be the ultimate ground too to reflect on the Church. Both God and the Church talk of dynamics of persons, but one being the echo of the other in the different orders of divinity and creatureliness. "The concrete means by which the Church becomes an echo of the life of the Godhead are all such as to direct the Church away from self-glorification to source of its life in the creative and recreative presence of God to the world. The activity of proclamation and the celebration of the Gospel sacraments are temporal ways of orienting the community to the being of God. Proclamation turns the community to the Word whose echo it is called to be; baptism and Eucharist, the sacraments of incorporation and *koinonia*, to the love of God the Father towards his world as it is mediated by the Son and the Spirit. Thus there is no timeless Church: only a Church then and now to be, as the Spirit ever and again incorporates people into Christ and in the same action brings them into and maintains them in community with one another."<sup>57</sup> From this basic ontology, Gunton establishes a strong base for discussing the nature of the Church and its constitutive elements. For him then, the richness of a doctrine of the Trinity is a rich resource for a balanced ecclesiology. He shows despise for Augustine whose theology, forms the cause of the erroneous conception, grounds for subordination and hierarchy in the Church. He seeks to replace this

with the Cappadocian doctrine of the Trinity which looks at being in the dynamics of personal relationship.

Gunton's work is too argumentative and he shows a sign of a prolific reader. However, the vastness of his literature does scarcely take him to non-English contributors from continental Europe. Above all, he sees nothing good in hierarchy which for him is the instrument of the clergy to institutionalize and propagate domination and subordination in the Church.

The search for an authentic ontological basis for a study of the Church is recommendable but his emphasis that the Church is a community of free persons in relation, a community called into being by Christ and constituted into unity by the Holy Spirit seems wanting. First of all, he finds fault with any ecclesiology that builds on Christology since for him, Christology universalizes and prefers the image of the Church as an eschatological community constituted by the Holy Spirit and his preference of the later and demand that Christology should be related to pneumatology creates an acute demarcation between the two especially in their economic missions. Obviously he is led by his spite for authority considering the issue of the power of the keys which is imbedded in the Christological foundations of the Church's institution that he forgot that coherent Trinitarian teaching implicit in the Cappadocian theology of Trinitarian relations – the perichoretic life of the Triune God. Since whatever God is in his eternal being that he reveals in the economy, Gunton therefore separates Christ from his Spirit. Secondly, consequent upon this poor Trinitarian teaching is also a poor ecclesiology since, first, the Church is those brought into unity through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and who through their experiences of life await his return. Gunton therefore reflects the Protestant spirit manifest on Jürgen Moltmann that shies away from the administrative structures of the *ecclesia* and rather opts for an image of the

Church that, in the pretext of unity in diversity, leaves uncontrolled room for personal conscience.

James B. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance both have a healthier understanding of Trinitarian ontology. In his *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, James Torrance wrote:

Through our union with Christ we share in his communion with the Father and in his mission from the Father to bring others into that communion .... The mission of the Church is the gift of participating through the Holy Spirit in the Son's mission from the father to the world.<sup>58</sup>

On the other hand Thomas Torrance puts it this way: Because the Church is filled with the one universal Spirit of divine love, it is caught up in the universal movement of that love that ceaselessly flows from God through Jesus Christ out into the all the world".<sup>59</sup>

Avery Dulles *Models of the Church* would go a long way in addressing the lopsided vision of the Church explicit in the thoughts of Moltmann and Gunton and at the same time x-ray the misunderstandings of the Church through the use of models while also seeking a more palatable healing with an ecumenical openness. It portrays a re-examination of the problematic done with *sensus fidei* but not of with an exclusively blind flight to faith but with scientific zeal. From a study of contemporary theologians – Catholics and Protestants alike – Dulles came out in the original edition with six models or avenues within which history has testified to the understanding of the Church and by which the Church has touched the lives of Christian in its mission on earth. In the later edition (2001), he adds a new model (the Church as Community of disciples).



He sees the models as reflecting the salient features of the Church of Christ as it exists at any time or place. Hence his summary of the models reads:

By its very institution, the Church is a communion of grace (Model 2) structured as a human society (Model I). While sanctifying its own members, it offers praise and worship to God (Model 3). It is permanently charged with the responsibility of spreading the goodnews of the (Model 4) and of healing and consolidating the human community (Model 5).<sup>60</sup>

Dulles sees much of these models as reflecting also the thought dynamics of the various epochs of the Church's life. Each decade, he says, highlights certain themes or insights. For instance, he sees the late 1960s and early 1970s as one of intense criticism against institutions of all kinds, hence any writing on institutional model then would be too severe. But in truth, each model has some high points and its own short falls, yet Dulles would hold that each reflects a certain truth that complements the others and inversely, the shortfalls of one is provided by the richness of the other. He puts it this way:

As I have already explained in chapter XIII, there can be no supermodel that does full justice to all aspects of the Church. The Church as a mystery transcends all creaturely analogies and defies reduction to single theological paradigm. Members know the Church primarily through a kind of existential affinity or vital familiarity, of which images and concepts are rather crude objectifications. No one set of categories can capture in their full richness the manifold dimensions of the Church. Various models can complement one another and compensate for one another's shortcomings.<sup>61</sup>

Each was given a chapter in the work, though Dulles holds that they were deliberately defined narrowly so as to delineate them as sharp as possible in mutual contrast.

In chapter XIII, which is an addendum to the older publication, Dulles adds yet another model: The community of disciples. According to him, this image is specifically intended to harmonize the differences among the previous models. He picked the name from John Paul II's *Redemptor Hominis* and explains it as calling attention to the on-going relationship of the Church to Christ. He says:

The concept of discipleship also builds bridges to the other four models.... It illuminates the institutional and sacramental aspects of the Church and grounds the function of evangelization and service that are central to the herald and servant models. The notion of "community of disciples is thus a broadly inclusive one. Without being adequate to the full reality of the Church, it has ... potentialities as a basis for a comprehensive ecclesiology."<sup>62</sup>

In this book therefore, Dulles has precluded some of the tensions which came to border on the institution as if the Church has only one face. It has divine elements but structured as a human society. Its many features point out the many perspectives of "appropriate ecclesiology". Dulles strikes the mark by however by pointing that the Church is not only a communion but also a community and thus sets it on the platform where it can be compared and yet distinguished from other human societies and communities. He seems to say that the Church is a community founded by Christ and energized by the Holy Spirit which thrives in mutual support and stimulation. In it people experience a full Christian environment,<sup>63</sup> and generally involve themselves in the mission of Christ as his first disciples.<sup>64</sup>

He locates this image of the Church as coming in an age when the social dimension of discipleship have come increasingly to the fore. Today the link between Gospel and struggles for justice, peace, development and liberation is highly emphasized. In Africa we poise this gospel mission to the challenges of culture for its liberative mission, as do the South Americans on injustice.

The challenges facing this image of the Church come from freedom fighters who are opposed to all forms of oppression and stifling of the rights of the human person. This is because for this model, the individual is swallowed up and the charismatic feature of the Church is stifled at the expense of the hierarchical. Dulles himself agrees to this when he says: "The Church mediates the call of Christ and makes available the word of God and the sacraments, without which discipleship would scarcely be possible. Thus community of disciples is in some sense prior to its own members"<sup>65</sup> However, this shortcoming is to be provided for when the images of the Body of Christ and People of God are properly understood. If seen in its organic functions, hierarchical and charismatic organs of the Church do not stand in isolation; they complement each other in the corporate existence and mission of the organ, the body.

Michael Mullin's article, "*Paul, Trinity and Community*" in *The Thinking Faith*, The Online Journal of British Jesuits of November 26, 2008 takes as the title shows, a look at Paul's Trinitarian theology and his emphasis on community in his writings. Mullin's questions are: What do his letters tell us about the way he structured his own faith and prayer, and how he tried to guide the early Christian communities that he wrote to?" He sees these questions as timely for a contemporary broader understanding of Pauline contributions to the beginnings and ongoing life of the Church. His study (this article) focuses on the Acts of the Apostles

and the letters of St. Paul; though these have differences in genres and intent.

Whereas the Acts, written by an admirer and possibly a one time companion of Paul, gives a biographical account of Paul's missionary journeys, it portrays therefore a survey of Paul's achievement through these journeys. His Letters, on the other hand, written largely by Paul, show his own "outlook, concerns, disposition, feelings, and so forth during the actual circumstances and events of his life".

In this study then, Mullins brings out three principal issues under the themes of Paul's call, Trinitarian theology and prayer, and lastly, community/*koinonia*. Without prejudice to the first, we pay more attention here to the second and the third. Hence concerning his Trinitarian theology, Mullins explains that Paul's experience equips him with a fundamentally Trinitarian understanding of God. His response to any question on division in the Christian community, he always gives clarifications based on the essentials of the Gospels. These responses reflect usually a structure that is essentially Trinitarian. Paul, for instance, had great disaffection for the divisions in Corinth and other factions with different emphasis on versions on the Gospel. His famous "I am for Paul, I am for Appollos," etc (1Cor. 1:12) illustrates our point and show his *sensus fidei* in Christ and his attachment to him.

Perusing through the writings of Paul, particularly his letters to the Romans, Galatians and 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, Mullins finds a strong Trinitarian basis for expressing his faith, conversion and baptism. Paul sounds nearly explicit in expression of this Trinitarian faith where he says, among many other things, that God gives us the spirit that makes us cry out "Abba, Father". By this, we change status from one of a slave to one of sons and co-heirs (Rom 8: 14-17; Gal 4:6-7). He traces the roles of the Holy Spirit very similar to

the understanding found in the Gospels (Particularly Matt 10:20; Mk 3:11 and John 14:26, 16:13-15). These roles include those of guide of prayer and teacher of faith (cf. Gal 5: 16, 26). He is presented as God's instrument of instruction for God teaches us through the spirit (1Cor. 2:10-12).

Mullins reads through the lines of the Pauline corpus understanding of the Church as the continuation of Christ's presence in the world. Paul uses this teaching as a foundation for demanding mutual dependence and harmony in his communities like the parts of the body (1Cor 12:12-30; Rom 12:4-18). Mullins understands by this an image of the Pauline Church as a covenantal and grace-filled nature of the community with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And central to the functioning of this community is the image of Body of Christ as a paradigm of understanding its mystery and nature. In this Body, the Spirit is very present and active as the Giver of the gifts for building up of the community (1Cor 12-13; Rom 12:6-8). His gifts are many but still coming from the same Spirit. He enables faith and prayer; maintains harmony and upholds mutual love in the community (cf. 1Cor 12:13; cf. Rom 12:6-8; 9-21 and Phil 2:1-11). To the Galatians, Paul writes about the Spirit as facilitator of good conduct and morals in the life of the individual and the community (Gal 5:13-26) and speaks of the facilitator of unity as God reveals the mystery of his will to bring everything under Christ (Eph 1:9-10).

Mullins therefore explains from a study of the Pauline corpus, the Trinitarian foundation for understanding the nature of the Church as a community and the aim, institution and role of the Trinitarian persons in the being and mission of the Church. For Mullins, then, this understanding is very fundamental to the study of ecclesiology. Put in summary, the image of the community is drawn from that of which exists in the Godhead. It is in the economy that we see this relationship to the Church.

The search for Trinitarian models for human realities range from a comparison of roles in family life to such wide fields as society economy and politics. In consequence, many authors have seen the Trinity as a basis for their agitation, criticisms and foundations and ideologies. These place therefore a demand for a social understanding of the Trinity (popularly known as social Trinitarianism) which believes in the presentation of the Trinitarian doctrine in the intent of elucidating the human life and activity in the society, the community and the Church being part of it. The assumption here may fall between a cautious approach lest, as Gunton pointed out, we may dabble into the error of direct comparison and link between the Trinity and the human society as if this is correct between divinity and creation. The second extreme would be to fall into the platonic dualism where the real is to be found in the invisible while the visible is shadowy. Obviously this later would face the stiff opposition from realism while the former will runs the risk of pantheism.

For this, theological approach has always required a retrieval of the doctrine of the Trinity which we will do in chapter four. Permit us here to take a look at some of the cases where the Trinitarian model will be used in addressing contentions arising from people's actual living situations and circumstances. We begin with ecological theology, liberation theology and then feminism.

Agitations from ecological theology which considers the entire creation as a web of life and interconnectivity and mankind's place in it as the *imago dei* among all creatures but which has been bastardized as a result of human greed, demand attention today. Grdzeldze sees creation as an expression of God's love towards humankind and all creatures. It was affirmed to be good. Maximus the Confessor, for instance held that God is the Great from all eternity, and he creates when he wills, in his infinite goodness, through his co-equal Logos and Spirit. Though the human being

may be the crown of creation, his role in the midst of creatures is better seen as one of a care taker whose role emerges most in terms of “manifestations mediation and taking a leading place in praising God” as the positive interpretation of the biblical text of 1:26 and 28.<sup>66</sup> This biblical text is rather argued to be the spiritual and theological roots of the present ecological crisis. Man, rather than serving as minister he is projected to be the ruler, to whom God had subject every other creature since he enjoys the special status of image Dei. With this wrong interpretation unlimited exploitation of the material world which should have been regarded as neighbours, results. “Man estranges himself from God’s creation”, and in consequence, “the relations between creatures are reduced, or lost altogether and human beings fail to look for their identify in relationship with others beings.”<sup>67</sup> He rather sets himself as superior to others and confers upon himself the rulership of other creatures just as God stands above the universe as the sole ruler of the earth. In this understanding, Grdzeldze, joins forces with John Zizioulas and the Orthodox tradition, calls for replacement of ethics with ethos and of legislation by culture. Their dogmatic position reads: “humanity must learn to treat creation as a sacred offering to God, an oblation, a vehicle of grace, an incarnation of our most noble aspirations and prayers.”<sup>68</sup> This requires for a return to the spirit of community inherent in the Trinity.

Leonardo Boff, one of the theological luminaries from South America uses the Trinitarian paradigm to measure the living situation of the South American sub-continent. In a note that sounds of unism with the popularly called liberation theologians from the region, he denigrates the neglect of the Trinitarian truth and its reality of communion in the constitution of the living experience of the people of the region. These, according to him, have fallen into oblivion.<sup>69</sup> Boff therefore undertakes to take the paradigm in carrying out a critique of the causes of the deleterious amnesia in their society, and in their local and regional Churches.

The article, "Trinity", therefore is a study of the difficulties that stifle an authentic experience of the Trinitarian faith in the present context of South America. Thus, he approaches this study from politico-religious perspective. His question is: what is preventing a full living of our Trinitarian faith and in the bid to find a solution, he tries to study this The South American context today in the light of the Trinitarian mystery. This requires first an outlay of the problematic and followed by a liberative conception of the mystery but all these presuppose a retrieval of the doctrine whence it shines with the luminous brilliance of a yardstick for measuring true faith and authentic human experience.

Boff discovers two abuses at the base of the problematic. The first is the "age-old political authoritarianism, a concrete historical concentration of power" manifest in the inequality even in the family, parental bonds, in civil government where monarchs created a monopoly of power in their own hands and the chiefs of tribes or nations exercised power autocratically. In this situation, an ideology develops which uses the uniqueness of God (One God) to suppress franchise since the idea of one God implies one king or one law. He cites Genghis Kahn's dictum: "In heaven is one God alone, and on earth but one Lord: Genghis Kahn, the Son of God."<sup>70</sup> According to Boff then, this does not create a favourable condition for the experience of God as communion.

In the religious sphere, Boff reports of a similar phenomenon. The hierarchical structure of the Church centralizes sacred power in the hands of the High Priest or Pontifex Maximus. This is drawn from the Unitarian view of God which developed from theological monotheism. In this conception, God is seen as the vertex of a pyramid of all beings. This for Boff, stands as the upshot of experiences characterized by despotism and authoritarianism. However he argues with Erik Peterson that socio-religious reality serves as a basis for the construction of a non-Trinitarian, pre-



trinitarian monotheism where monotheism itself serves as the sacred legitimation for centralized forms of the exercise of political and religious power. In practice then, Boff remarks that despite the teaching of the Church (dogma) of a Trinity of persons, that the true God is a communion of three divine persons, the common experience of the faithful is rather the opposite that is that God is exclusively monotheistic. This leads to a disintegrated experience of the mystery and each person is seen as a separate God. In preaching then there is one God in three persons while in actual lived experience there are three Gods.

He identifies these gods and three religions: God the Father, found in social groups of an agrarian mentality; the all-knowing Father and judge and lord of life and death in patriarchal societies, where there is no space for a son. Human beings are mere servants. In like manner, there are also religions of God the Son where Christ is seen as the Teacher, Brother, Chief and Leader. Boff locates this in modern circles where horizontal relations predominate and in the experience of leaders and activists lead groups and move the masses. The third religion is that of God the Holy Spirit found among charismatic groups either in popular milieus or among the social elite. Each appears to be solitary in isolation of the others and the general atmosphere is the disintegration of the Trinitarian experience and the neglect of the principal and essential perspectives of the mystery of the triune God. This is the problematic and an exposé of the South American situation. It provokes theologians from the region to a "look again" at the mystery armed with experiences from their milieu.

Boff argues that this experience challenges the evangelical dimension of the doctrine where the experience of the poor who constitute the vast majority of the population throws the most crucial challenge. His principal question is: what does it mean for the poor to believe in the Trinity? This question requires more than

a formal presentation of the doctrine on the part of the teaching office and the faithful trying to understand them. It is rather an honest effort at an existential understanding / actualization of the mystery of interdependence and communion so that people could live their humanity fully and free. This presupposes two lines of reflection: meditation on the Trinitarian faith with insight that derives from that faith for personal and social life. The other starts inversely. They seek to understand to what extent the egalitarian interrelationship in the Trinity in a communion of life and love is realized in their context. The assumption is that the "Supreme Reality is the prototype of all other things and that this Supreme Reality is the absolute communion of three distinct Realities, each of equal dignity, with equal love and full reciprocal communion of love and life".<sup>71</sup> The project then is a search to change the society in such a way that their social reality will speak to them of the Trinity and thus afford them an opportunity to experience the three divine persons Boff indicates their leaning on Orthodox social reformers motto: "The Holy Trinity is our social programme".

The truth of the doctrine as taught by the Church is not in doubt. It is accepted as revealed following the routes of history and the Word in the lives of persons, in religions, and in the common history of human beings as well as in the Christ-event coupled with the manifestation of the Spirit in the Christian communities. Boff therefore sets this mystery upon the foundation of the faith that cuts across the ages dating from the Apostles. Its content is summed up in the Church's belief in One God in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who, for contextual purposes Boff illustrated with Irenaean analogy of the Father's two hands: Son and Holy Spirit; and as testified to in scripture, particularly in the Matthean baptismal formula, coupled with the explicit teachings of Jesus and the New Testament writings, as had been celebrated during worship and prayer early Church.

As this faith and practice made their marks in the life of the faithful, the Christian community had to clarify major heretical views that erupted: modalism, subordinationism and tritheism. These were misrepresentations of the true teaching testified to in scripture and worship. Modalism leaves an unqualified monotheism behind; subordinationism says that the Son and the Holy Spirit are also God but in lesser degrees, they are subordinate to the Father while the third says there are three Gods and thus neglects the communion of persons in the Godhead. The effort to battle these errors led to the development of appropriate theological language among which is person or hypostasis, relations, perichoresis (circumincession) and mission. These put together shape a Trinitarian theology which liberation theologians find as a model for addressing the living situations/condition of *imago dei* in the peninsula. Here emphasis is laid on the relationship of mutual interpretation (perichoresis) that exists among the divine persons, their communion, participation and egalitarian coexistence which are still maintained irrespective of the distinctness of the persons as a light and guide to reflect and live more fully as person in the image and likeness of god living in human communities like the community of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Boff sets the study then in the context of exposition of the harsh contradictions of the Latin American reality and thus invites us to reflect and experience with him the Trinitarian mystery as a mystery of communion among persons who are distinct. This reflection proposes what he calls a “theo-logical datum” where elaboration would hold that the divine oneness is communitarian; each person subsists in total, absolute communion with the other two. For him therefore this perspective would offer an ultimate foundation for the liberation of the oppressed, a liberation undertaken with a view to social justice, equity and construction of

a society of brothers and sisters that will be viable in the South American Society.

Since he contends that faith is not only expressed by the intellect that delves into mysteries, nor only by the heart that loves and trustingly surrenders itself to the divine persons, Boff's conclusion presents three proposals: that the human person be seen as a great parable of the Trinitarian mystery; that the human family be understood as a symbol of the Trinity and finally that the human society itself be seen as a symbolic reference to the mystery of the Holy Trinity; hence he admonishes that every society be constructed, consolidated and developed by the coexistence and interpenetration of these three forces.

Feminist theologians take the doctrine in another direction interpreting it in the perspective of the present-day condition of the woman. Several authors are actually involved in this movement cutting across race and gender with one slogan: liberation of the woman (human person) from injustice imposed by the patriarchal male domination and subordination of the woman. Outstanding works in this regard include Elizabeth Johnson's *She Who Is* (1992), Catherine Mowry LaCugna's "God in Communion with Us: The Trinity" in her edited book, *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*; LaCugna's *God For Us*, Marianne Katoppo's contribution, "The Concept of God and the Spirit from the Feminist Perspective" in Ursula King ed., *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader* (1994) and a host of other articles.

Central to these works is the avowed imbalance in the family of humankind that have only witnessed a downplaying of the womenfolk and in consequence the human person thus hindering humanity from flourishing as *imago dei*. They trace the reason to a hypothetical claim on gender but a more serious reason is the

patriarchy prevalent across the cultures that tend to present the men folk as superior to the womenfolk. This is decried because of its harmful presence in the community of faith. These works however taking a theological excursion pose it side by side with the doctrine of the Trinity as a theological framework and guide to the development of these thoughts. We should know however that this is largely a contemporary question which has fanned into wild flame, particularly since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. We will review Elizabeth Johnson's *She Who Is*, Katoppo's article.

Since its first publication in 1992, this work has gained penetration into various strata of life and has forced a rethink in biblical and theological studies. Johnson portrays the full characteristic of a modern/contemporary woman bold and firm in her convictions who believes in pulling the bull by the horn-mindless of traditional opinions and possible opprobrium. Her power lies in the fact that she argues as insider who is involved, and committed to her faith with a view to promoting justice and human wholeness and as such sees no contradiction in being a vocal woman and a Christian at the same time. She wages a war on tradition from her feminist perspective while at the same time picks from the resources of tradition the positive elements she finds supportive to her course. Her confidence is her motto: "The focus of absolute trust, one to whom you can give yourself without fear of betrayal, the holy mystery."<sup>72</sup>

The book, A full-fledge theological work in its own right goes deep into the very central symbols of the Christian tradition to engage in a God-talk with a vision – the condition of women. From this, perspective, she seems to ask whether the God-talk is at all needed, especially where centuries' old tradition seems to use the idea of God to bless and enshrine oppression. She finds herself not comfortable with this tradition which seems to gloss over the articles of the faith, leaving the real human face and its real

anxieties intended and thus reducing faith to an opiate phenomenon. She therefore invites all to a new way of engaging in the God-talk since what we discover will go a long way in reshaping and repositioning our view of reality and values. In succinct terms, she puts it this way: "... right speech about God is inseparable from solicitude for all creatures, and in particular for human beings".<sup>73</sup> This talk is radically linked to the achievement of full humanity.

Clarifying the importance and need for this talk, she now probes into the language of God as a key asset to a balanced / unbiased God-talk that will promote human becoming. This language is the major preoccupation of the book where Johnson lays the problematic of her probe. She contends that traditional Catholic language of God paints God in the image of an absolute male monarch who is infinitely removed from our experiences in the everyday material world; possesses all the superlative categories and comparisons as omnipotence, omniscience, transcendence which of course have provided frames for constructing historical human ideals of ruling class males, which in consequence is suspicious. This God is dragged into the mud of human sin. Though she does not argue neither for a feminine alternative nor place within this frame of mind, for instance of a feminine member of the Trinity like an earth goddess, she rather opines that we need an equivalent imagery that presents God in a male-female terms. She says so because the female is not fully represented in the categorization of the being of God as expressed in language forms and this is the a priori cause of the human imbalance.

She equally pays considerable attention to women's experience of God. She sees this God as the God of revelation who, with the aid of the Bible, is seen as God who acts in human history; whose presence and revelation are ever continuous. She has drawn the parallel that the awakening of the worth of women could still be

seen as part of the ever flowing revelation and experience of God.<sup>74</sup>

The logic of *She Who Is* drawn from the incomprehensibility and hiddenness of God which legitimizes the work as a typically theological work and at the same time provides a solid base for discussing the dynamics of revelation as divine self-disclosure, a principal theme in every theological excurses. And so for Johnson, God is a mystery, distinct from all creatures and possessing of no features of creatureliness that is better known intellectually by negating all symbols but is “nonetheless deeply known in human love, as love itself”.<sup>75</sup>

This enables Johnson to qualify what level of experience of God is in question. Her work is focused on God. And every talk about God issues from the experience of Christians, today as in the early Church. The doctrine of the Trinity, for one, arose out of the lived experience of early Christians. In this purview then, Johnson tries to locate and interpret the experience of women today, especially some clues that would point to God as Trinity which she sees in the Biblical figure of divine *Sophia* which she discusses as Spirit, Jesus, Mother. Rather than beginning with a study of *De Deo Uno*, she chose to begin from “the rear” – the Spirit (*Sophia*). This approach “allows a starting point more closely allied to the human experience of salvation, without which there would be no speech about the triune God at all”.<sup>76</sup> She devoted three chapters to *Sophia*. It is only in the last chapters that she discusses God as Trinity. In her discussion, she asserts in according to Christian faith that the Trinity is also a unity. And from this unity she comes to the conclusion that subordination in the Trinity is heretical. As in humans, “self-containment and the absence of relationship are not necessarily the highest perfection but signify lack.”<sup>77</sup> The conception of God as Trinity helps us think in the dynamics of love

and equality as constitutive elements to what is most living and real relationship.

Johnson makes a serious mark pushing further the need for re-engaging in the God-talk in a style that captures the challenges of the modern times. She writes as a Christian who is actively concerned with the maturation of her faith and the blossoming of her full humanity. She brought this face to face on the issue of women and has as such called for a more harmonious relationship and balance among God's children. She thus excels as a mouthpiece of God sounding the goodnews today while at the same time championing the course of women. However, her approach to the Trinitarian treatise sounds a lot unusual since she began with the Spirit, the Sophia. She is esteemed in the feminist agenda that reviews the talk on the body and brings it down to the discussion on the Trinity. She fails however to realize the need for the healthier language of the body that Sarah Coakey, another feminist theologian, demands.

The echo from the third world is represented here by Marianne Katoppo's *"The Concept of God and the Spirit from the Feminist Perspective."* That this issue is discussed in both worlds shows the imposing nature of the tension across the globe. Katoppo, writing quite early enough in the late 1970s and early 1980s pioneered feminist theology in Asia and particularly in her native Indonesia. In this article, she calls to question the Christian idea of "an all-male Trinity" which she sees as ridiculous in the context of Asian cosmic religion and meta-cosmic soteriologies.

Katoppo invites us to a rethink and a reformulation of Christian concept of God in order to create an atmosphere of balance, justice and full recognition of what we are. She finds fault with the Christian concept of God which is shaped and determined by purely western conceptual colourations found to be foreign in Asia



as in many parts of the third world. She themes this culture (West) to be reflective of war supremacy of gender between male and female. For her this is a culture of unthinkable dichotomization of male and female which has resulted in the dichotomization of life and death and indeed all of reality, including God. She reports of her first exposure to such conflicts ascribing it to the period she had to theologize in English, Dutch and German. This became necessary because, for her, language is where theology begins. The dichotomization in question shows the influence of the culture of West on Christianity for hitherto to wherever the gospel went, it carried along with it the values of the culture within which it had developed. Thus a deep study of the biblical cultures would locate the Biblical writings of the OT within the bosom of the Canaanite religious system where the OT faith separated itself from the rest. She therefore sees “the excessive emphasis on the maleness of God” as a reaction against the fertility goddesses of the land. She points thus: “Although the dominant metaphor in this cult was feminine, it reduced the woman to sex object, as is amply illustrated by the fertility plagues with their exaggerated representations of breasts and genitalia.” For her then it is the over inflation of this quest for distinctive identity among the Jews that has imposed itself as the permanent feature and image of everything we need to say about the Christian God.

She contexts this and asks a number of questions: How could women have been created in the image of God if God is decidedly male? Are there any legitimate reasons why the Old Hebrews had to consistently refer to God as “he” – and did they really do that? To the first, she finds in her research and study of the original language of the scriptures that the third persons started out in Hebrew as the feminine *Ruach*, but was effectively neutered by the Greek translators of the *LXX* and finally made masculine by Latin. The consequence is the all-male Trinity. And to the second, she realizes that even though masculine images are found

everywhere, there were nevertheless feminine images that tend to be conveniently overlooked. She enumerated just a few of them like “*rechanim*” which is used for God’s mercy, compassions (cf. Ex 34) that literally means movement of the womb (*rechem*) and therefrom argues that the womb is a specifically and uniquely feminine feature. Again is the translation of the name of God, *Yahweh*, which she says is originally a verb and is still translated today as Lord. And deep in the NT, she picks John 1:18 whose original version is changed by translators to shift from “God’s only begotten, who is in the Father’s breast” (*Greek Kolpos*)” into English as “He who is nearest to the Father’s heart.” First of all, she points to a critic of the language of “Father” which is seen only in an ontic sense today that helps limit it to being male rather than the expression of the loving concern of God who takes care of us. For her then, the word “Father”, understood in this sense of John’s prologue, is a symbol of divine fecundity and creativity. One can then see why she disagrees with the postulation that the reason behind the exclusively maleness of God is a reaction against the fertility goddesses of the Canaanite religious system. She therefore accuses patriarchy for an exclusively careful downplaying of the feminine image of God in the battle that projects the female as inferior to the male. This same patriarchy is the rule behind the subjugation of women and their oppression.

She, using the Trinity as the window to show the extent patriarchy and the domination of women can God, she does not see a possibility of an all-male God/Trinity. The Holy Spirit, third Person of the Blessed Trinity is an example. She observed that it is not even a coincidence that the Holy Spirit is reified, and symbolized in the image of a dove. The Greek word for dove is *peristera* which means Bird of Ishtar, the virgin goddess. In like manner, the Spirit is rather translated as male and the Trinity made all-male and from thence the Virgin Mary is adored as “daughter of the Father, mother of Jesus and spouse of the Holy Spirit and

thus provides men a paradigm for thinking and being women only in relations as daughter, mother and spouse and never as human beings in their own right. She dips her hand back to the history of dogma to trace this disregard in the war between orthodoxy and heresy (as did Gunton). Despite the declaration of the Holy Spirit as God who creates, who comforts and Giver of life by Nicaea, she reports that the council suppressed the proper pedestal upon which the Holy Spirit was understood as Mother of Jesus and mother of all creatures as found in the Gnostic writings such as the Gospel of the Hebrews and the Acts of Thomas and more specifically by the Montanists who gave prominence to the Holy Spirit and ordained women.

In summary, Katoppo requests the language of the Church calling the Holy Spirit “Lord” be changed. In her own right, she addresses the Spirit as “she”, who goes where she wills, who became “the monopolistic possession of the Judeo-Christian tradition imprisoned within the steel and concrete structures of western dogma and a permanent Atlantic Charter. The essence of the spirit is “boundless freedom” and it will be a negation of freedom to limit the Spirit’s activity. The Spirit then means life (vitality, creativity, growth), not death. Order (meaning significance, truth), not chaos. Community (sharing, fellowship, bearing one another’s burden), not separation and where so ever these marks abound, one should sense the work of the Spirit.

Katoppo is obviously right in speaking of our speech of God in anthropomorphic categories. Her Asian experience makes her comparisons she made of Christianity with the Asian religions authoritative. It is on this note that she would rightly declare it a ridicule to force Asians to think of God only in male pictures and paintings. Her use of textual criticism gives finesse to her arguments. However, her argument shows a mere portrayal at the discovery of the full potentials of womanhood that she scarcely

noticed the complementarity the gender language should propagate. Feminism needs to bring unscathing arguments as bases for dislodging biblical language, though taken to be influenced by androcentric schemes. But what is required is healing and *metanoia* rather than agitations and casting of aspersions.

The theo-drama of Genesis 1:26 and 1:27 could be the anchor for repositioning the language of theology as feminists are demanding. This divine image portrays a *richesse* for humankind. It does not convey only a larger vision of the divine, it leads us to a deeper understanding of ourselves also.

## 2.6 Authors' Appraisal of Augustine's Trinity

The development of the Trinitarian doctrine of the western Church Fathers reached its peak in the *De Trinitate* (On the Trinity) of Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430 AD). This work has attracted much attention across the ages. Henry Chadwick, Peter Brown, F. Van der Meer and G.A. Oshitelu, among many of his biographers and commentators, consider the different currents of his formative years to be very influential to the development of his thought, particularly on the doctrine of the Trinity. Of particular importance is the influence of Neo-Platonism on his Trinitarian thought. Chadwick's *Augustine* notes how Plotinus' thought helped to shape his explanation of his Trinity:

In his philosophical system Plotinus ... attached high importance to the dialectic of Plato's dialogues, Parmenides and Sophist, especially Plato's analysis of identity and difference. That is, if we say x and y are "the same", we imply distinction between them if the assertion of identity is to be interesting. Conversely, to point out that x and y are different implies an underlying bond of identity between them. So, beyond the multiplicity and the differences

perceived and experienced in the world, there lies a unity and a permanence.<sup>78</sup>

The book, *The Image of God*, by Francis Sullivan, furthers this observation by pointing out that through Plotinus' *Ennead*, Augustine found interesting indication of the widespread triple causes all over creation. The author regards these as vestiges which, for him, contained only faint reminiscences of three-ness in the cause of nature. Augustine recognized the use of the vestiges in the description of the Trinity and began with by speaking of interpersonal love, nevertheless, he would prefer to look at the inner person for a trace for the real "image" of God in the world, believing as his principle that the creature most capable of portraying such "images" (*the "capax naturalis"*) would be that which is made in the image of the triune God. He opines that Augustine implied *imago dei* to be the same as *imago trinitatis*.

In this Neo-platonian frame, Augustine understood Platonist ontology quite differently from the fundamental divide between the physical and the spiritual as taught by the Manicheans and the Gnostics. However, the dualism here is to be located within the supposed larger, unified hierarchy of beings that begins with absolute unity and progressively unfolds through various stages of increasing plurality and multiplicity, culminating in the lowest realm of isolated and fragmented material objects observed with the senses. In this ontology, God is identified as the ultimate source, the point of origin of all things which he equated with *Being* (*Conf. 7.10*), *Goodness* (*De Trin 8.5*), and *Truth* (*Conf. 10,23; De Libero arbitrio 3.16*). He is the unchanging point that unifies all things. This understanding would be very fundamental to his doctrine of God.

Okechukwu Ogbonnaya points to African communality as another major influence to the development of Augustine's Trinitarian

doctrine. In the book, *On Communitarian Divinity*, with a subtitle, “*An African Interpretation of the Trinity*”, sets the African sense of community as a rich heritage that profited the early Church through the help of earlier African theologians as Tertullian, Cyprian, and Athanasius, especially in the shaping of the Church’s doctrine of the Trinity and her quest for unity of faith and of the Church community. He uses Tertullian’s doctrine of “substance” and “person” as sample study. He explains that the persons in their multiplicity aided the understanding of the substance. By that, he intends to show the sense of community inherent in the very nature of God. He begins by distancing Tertullian’s “substance” from the Aristotelian substratum by positioning it as a relational principle based on African sense of the community. He has no difficulty in employing this into discussions about divine reality based on examples from African worldview.

Ogbonnaya asserts that this communitarian divinity derives from deep African cultural heritage and cosmology which he illustrates with the ancient Egyptian mythologies. His proposition is based on the study of Eric Hornung who lists three interpretations of Egyptian conceptions of the Divine: monotheism, polytheism, and thirdly, they held the presence of both oneness and plurality in their concept of the divine.<sup>79</sup> This corresponds by coincidence, to three kingdom histories prevalent in Egypt – the Old in which prevailed monotheism, the middle – in which polytheism emerged, this polytheism prevailed up to the late kingdom and, lastly, the new kingdom, which saw again the merger of the gods for political reasons and for the reason of which the three cities emerged; each city tried to harmonize their religious views to a point of Heliopolis, Hermerpolis and Memphis. The rise of *Iknathon* forced into the Egyptian religious consciousness an articulation of what the gods shared in common. In other periods, “such as the Old Kingdom period, this nature seems to have been represented by the primeval waters; in other times, by the blood that flowed from the

phallus of *Atum*” (middle kingdom), “which formed the various gods. Afterward *Iknathon*, the Sun, or *Re* with its universal efflorescence came to signify the nature that the gods share in common.”<sup>80</sup> This led to efforts to bring harmony among the gods. Morenz and Allen hold that ancient Egyptian theologians tried to show relationship between the single monad and the multiplicity of deities. They attempted to show their relation by developing the theory of the Divine personifications in the Ennead.<sup>81</sup>

Ogbonnaya’s thesis, pushing Hornung’s further, holds that Tertullian’s doctrine of the Trinity is a theory of the divine community built around the concept of “substance”. Substance refers to the divine nature common to the Three, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rather than the Aristotelian substratum. This leaves substance as a relational principle that forms the basis of that community. Augustine accepted this theory of substance which he identified with the Son and the Holy Spirit. He moved from there to derive the principle of relationality in a manner that reflects African theogonies. The whole notion of *principium sine principio* which the Father alone enjoys in relation to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, or by the Son and the Father in relation to the Holy Spirit, and by the Three in relation to the world (cosmogony), is to be understood in these terms. Augustine used these in expounding the doctrine of the Trinity. Inculturating all these into the Christian doctrine of God in Africa would not be strange since it is common to Africans to think in communitarian terms.

Whereas Tertullian was accused of polytheism, especially with regard to his explanation of the monarchia in God, Augustine’s strongest criticism is that he buried the person into the unity. Collin E. Gunton, in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, delineates three dangers to the Trinitarian development that arose from Augustine: the use of analogy apart from the economy of salvation – what actually happens in Christ and with the Spirit; the

development of the doctrine of *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*, especially when understood as refusing the ascription of any characteristic and distinctive form of action to the Father, Son and the Spirit. Thirdly, there is the inadequacy to his conception of the person. The whole problems summed up, jeopardize our understanding of the way God meets us and affects our response to him. The distinctive *Personae* of Father, Son and Spirit in the being of the one God falls short of adequate identification, so that the drive is to treat God impersonally, with his personhood located in his oneness, and not in his threeness.<sup>82</sup>

He castigates Augustine on a number of points: he caused the eclipse of the Trinitarian faith from lived article of faith into an ineffable mystery; he is equally at the centre and cradle of the theological crisis of the West for causing the tension that led to the rift between the Church of the East and the West. Of more doctrinal relevance are his criticisms of Augustine for relegating the role of the Son in human salvation. Augustine, says Gunton, had replaced the Son with the Angels. Books Three and Four of the *De Trinitate* are largely on the divine mission; maintained and taught a negative doctrine about materiality by which his neoplatonic assumptions are seen to have been a dominant influence. Hence, the prefiguring of the Son is not by the Word, but by angels; God is not substantially involved in the theophanies of the O.T (cf *De Trin* 3. 27; 4. 31). When angels take the place of the Word as mediators of God's relation with the world, then the mediatorship of the Word is lost, he distances God from the world, flattens the distinctions between the Persons of the Trinity, encourages belief in the irrelevance of conceiving distinct persons and therefore of a doctrine of the Trinity, and finally, of losing the incarnational value of theology. Thus when sided along with his predecessors like Irenaeus and Tertullian, Augustine proves a thorough defection and from the path of orthodoxy represented in these two Fathers. For Gunton therefore, either Augustine did not



understand the Trinitarian theology of his predecessors or he was beclouded by Neoplatonism. In place of this Augustinian approach, he opts for the replacement of Augustine with the Cappadocian doctrine of the Trinity which alone can guarantee a retrieval of the doctrine of the Trinity to its practical import.<sup>83</sup>

Gunton is quite hypocritical of Augustine and denies him of any positive contribution to the development of the Trinitarian thought. His evaluation of him reads: "Augustine's work is so brilliant that it blinded generations of theologians to its damaging weaknesses".<sup>84</sup> This castigation is reminiscent of Harnack who sees modalism as self-evident in the thoughts of Augustine. However, Lewis Ayres' *Augustine and the Trinity* presents an exposé of Augustine's doctrine of God, intending to see whether Augustine has been properly read and why such a flood of criticisms about him is rising on a daily basis despite the increasing influence he continues to wield over many intellectual quarters. This book takes into account the development of Augustine's Trinitarian thought and the factors, the background of such thoughts and identifies *De Trinitate* more importantly in its context. Ayres describes it as the *opus magnum* of St Augustine; other Trinitarian teachings prior to it are only preludes. Ayres sees in Augustine a good intent which is the defense of the orthodox faith. Augustine never ceased to castigate erroneous interpretations of the Trinity. For him therefore, the strong castigation of Augustine does not come in. *De Trinitate* which came as an anti-Monarchian treatise responds to the confusions set by the Arians and the relationship between the divine persons as witnessed in the economy (recorded in the deposits of faith).

Augustine identified the unity of the divine persons in the Godhead and yet maintained both their personal distinctiveness and communion. He identified the Trinity with the One God as repeatedly as possible in the phrase, "*Trinitas quae Deus est.*" In

the detail that followed this summary definition, Augustine teaches the equality and inseparability of the Divines Three, starting with arguments in favour of the logical irreducibility of the unity of the Trinity.<sup>85</sup> Ayres therefore treats as a fundamental error on the part of contemporary critics who still read Augustine with the lens of the old theology before the renovations of Barth and Rahner and consequently fail to see the enriching results from contemporary exegetical scholarship where his work reveals only a difference of approach from the Cappadocians to whom such critics always refer. Contemporary hermeneutics arising from these latest studies of Augustine demand a rereading of *De Trinitate* which Ayres among many others has undertaken in *Augustine and the Trinity*.

An understanding of the African notion of community which is the unseen but underlying thread behind the thought of such African writers as Tertullian, Athanasius, Cyprian, and now Augustine, reemphasizes this need to re-read Augustine. It seems to suggest that no one's idea can be understood comprehensibly when taken in isolation of the person's worldview. This means much to Africans and Egyptologists. In this cultural perspective, for instance, one would appreciate the African sense of a unity which is not absolutely solitary but constitutive and communitarian. For Ayres therefore, Augustine balances himself against his critics by this explanation:

to understand the Scriptures is to understand that Father, Son and Spirit slowly reveal themselves to be a unity: *divinam insinuent unitatem*. Augustine's decision to put the matter thus is not, I suggest, accidental, but the announcement of a programme that will run through the first books of the *De Trinitate*.<sup>86</sup>

Through these pieces of literature, the importance of Augustine in the development of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is thus very central. The middle ages had focused on it and rightly, as

Gunton observed, the whole excursus of the scholastic Trinitarian doctrine was a shift from the real God to the analogies which in consequence resulted to the eclipse of the Trinity and its relegation to mere dogmatic formula. Thus, should we accept that Augustine is responsible for this eclipse? Ayres' exposition of Augustine's Trinity is set in the perspective of retrieval through a return and a re-reading of Augustine, especially in the light of present-day situation. It is in the light of this that we tend to study the Trinity in Igboland, using Augustine's *De Trinitate* for our guide.

## **Summary**

Our study of the various pieces of literature reveals the inadequacy of living in solitude. This Chesters pointed to what we may take as a theological realism: we are made to be in plural, that is, not alone as individuals but in community. these literatures, starting from the earliest Christian times, indicate that the Church has ever been a community, but of one which distances herself from the rest types of human communities, but a religious one yet distinguishing herself as a call to communion and reflective on earth as the window for perceiving and experiencing the Trinitarian community. Studying the Trinity is therefore manifests an obvious implication of how we, humans, can model our community to reach its full potentialities after the image of the Trinity. The Church herself becomes manifest as the window of the Trinity or his icon. A closer look will be made in the fourth chapter where these images of the Trinity will be weighed and harmonized with the tools proper to Catholic theology (though not hampering the openness characteristic of an academic work). Meanwhile, we turn our gaze to the local context to see how the Church could be understood as community and as reflector of the Trinitarian community.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> John Courtney Murray, *The Problem of God*, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Murray 7.

<sup>3</sup> Murray 26.

<sup>4</sup> John MacQuarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, (revised edition), (London: SCM, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> MacQuarrie, 7

<sup>6</sup> Francois Bourassa, *Questions de Théologie Trinitaire*, 19.

<sup>7</sup> George F. McLean, "Knowledge of God and the Discovery of Man: Crisis of

Man and the Response of God, Classical and Contemporary Approaches" in *Lectures in Wuhan, China*, published by the Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series III, Asia, Vol. 19, (2003).

<sup>8</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Towards Doctrinal Agreement*

(Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999) 105.

<sup>9</sup> Torrance, 142 – 143.

<sup>10</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New

York: HarperCollins, 1992) 223.

<sup>11</sup> MowryLaCugna, 228.

<sup>12</sup> MowryLaCugna, 229.

<sup>13</sup> MowryLaCugna, 215.

<sup>14</sup> Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity*, (London: T&T Clark, 2002) 4.

<sup>15</sup> Anthony Nwachukwu, *The Church and Trinitarian Communion* (Port Harcourt: Unpublished Masters' Thesis in the Department of Dogmatic Theology, Catholic Institute of West Africa, 2007) 21.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Bracken, *The Triune Symbols: Persons, Process, Community* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985) 7.

<sup>17</sup> Bracken 180.

<sup>18</sup> Bracken 26.

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<sup>25</sup> William Hill, *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation*, 255.

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<sup>47</sup>Nwachukwu Anthony, *The Church and Trinitarian Communion*, 67.

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<sup>49</sup>Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Pilgrims Fellowship of Faith* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005) 41.

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<sup>52</sup>Heinrich Heim 288.

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<sup>68</sup>Grdzeldze 216.

<sup>69</sup>Leonardo Boff, "Trinity" in Jon Sobrino & Ignacio Ellacuria, *Systematic Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996) 75.

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<sup>71</sup>Boff 78.

<sup>72</sup>Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 4.

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<sup>75</sup>Johnson 108.

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<sup>78</sup>Henry Chadwick, *Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University) 17 -18.

<sup>79</sup>A. Okechukwu Ogbonnaya, *On Communitarian Divinity: A African Interpretation of the Trinity* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1998) 33.

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<sup>83</sup>cf Gunton 42.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### THE LOSS OF THE TRINITARIAN EXPERIENCE

Humans are becoming more and more interconnected in the present age than ever. People, nations, economies, have become more connected. The global environmental concerns, technology, migration and globalization trends that saw the shrinking and bridging of distance, socio-economic, even cultural and linguistic barriers and the eventual emergence of a global culture bear frequent testimony to the inner yearning in the human person for unity and communion with others. This exposes in another way, human existential reality: looking for the self in the face of the other, or as Mbiti says of Africans, “I am because we are”.

Despite the above indications of mankind’s yearning for companionship and communion, conflicts remain the norm in many parts of the world than the exception. According to Smith (2011), systemic violence poses a chronic development problem. He highlights the prevalence of conflict across the globe in the 1994 study report to the UNDP on conflict. This report reads that there were 52 wars in 1993 involving war-torn countries; but in a further 100 violent countries, political violence was widespread and even endemic without quite meriting the name of war. He observed too that of the total 79 conflict countries, 65 are in the Third World and almost all the 52 wars are civil wars.<sup>1</sup> A similar result has been recorded in the 2018 report of the Human Development Indicators and Indices by the 2018 Statistical Update Team of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),

Violence not only threatens human security but also erodes development progress. Between 2012 and 2017, the conflicts in Syria, Libya and Yemen contributed to those countries’ slipping down the HDI, due to significant

declines in their life expectancy or economic setbacks. It will take years, if not decades for them to return to pre-violence levels of development.<sup>2</sup>

The 1994 Rwandan genocidal war between the Tutsi and the Hutu and the many violent conflicts Nigeria since the late 1990s indicate the same wave of global conflicts on the African soil. Johnson Aremu shows how the number of recorded intra and interstate wars and conflicts in Africa have made a bad press of Africa. The continent has become regrettably known as the home of wars and instability. These conflagrations have defied any meaningful solution and left behind those their negative impacts that have retarded growth and development in Africa. They have weakened cohesion, unity and the potential development of the African continent.<sup>3</sup> Nigeria, for example, has witnessed many violent conflicts in the forms of ethnic cleansing, militancy, ritual killings and many others. Much bloodletting has been reported that a serving Senator had to confess that Nigeria has become a valley of death.<sup>4</sup>

All the above reports are indicative of the disintegration of the Trinitarian experience at the global scene. As the Latin American Liberation theologian, Leonardo Boff, points out, communion constitutes both the essence of God and, at the same time, the concrete dynamic of every being of the whole creation. One can draw by inference then that in a highly relativistic age as the present, where relentless individualism, exclusiveness, rejection, intolerance and even barbaric violent conflict characterizes the social sphere, what distinguishes our present age from the previous epochs is the disintegration of the Trinitarian experience. This is all about the “neglect of the principal, essential perspective of the mystery of the triune God, which is communion among the divine persons.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, Boff indicates the precarious condition of man and woman today as a consequence of the tradition of brokenness

which results as a shift from antecedent social concerns expressed in earlier epochs to the declaration of individualism, radical freedom, and ethical relativism of the more recent times. Frederick Buechner captures this more vividly with the picture of the great threats of brokenness that menace the human communities in the more recent times. These, according to him, are patchworks of light and darkness, of hope and despair. He writes:

The world floods in on all of us. The world can be kind, and it can be cruel. It can be beautiful, it can be appalling. It can give us good reason to hope and good reason to give up hope. It can strengthen our faith in a loving God, and it can crush our faith. In our lives in the world, the temptation is always to go where the world takes us, to drift with whatever currents happens to be running strongest. When good things happen, we are in heaven; when bad things happen, we are in hell. When the world strikes out at us, we strike back, and when one way or another the world blesses us, our spirits soar. Do we all know how just the weather can affect our state of mind for good or ill, how just getting stuck in traffic jam can ruin an afternoon that in every other way is so beautiful it dazzles the heart. We are in constant danger of being, not actors, in the drama of our own lives, but reactors. The fragmentary nature of our experience shatters us into fragments. Instead of being whole, most of the time we are in pieces and we see the world in pieces, full of darkness at one moment and full of light the next.<sup>6</sup>

Whereas Boff and Liberation theologians use the economic situation of South America to illustrate the reality of broken relationships among humans, African theologians look at the socio-political, economic and socio-cultural condition of Africa today, a living condition so much characterized by the wounds, scars and marks of “brokenness.” These manifest themselves in

both selfishness, greed, and ambitious crave for both economic and political power and position; currents which require the mercenary of oppression for their enforcement. The consequences have been so negative and have left people crawling in underdevelopment and desperation. *Ecclesia in Africa* (EIA), for example, pictures the African scenario in precise terms when it described Africa as a “continent full of bad news”.<sup>7</sup> The overall picture of Africa shows one of failed hope. The actual situation is thus presented as:

One common situation, without any doubt, is that Africa is full of problem. In almost all our nations, there is abject poverty, tragic mismanagement of available scarce resources, political instability and social disorientation. The results stare us in the face: misery, wars, despair. In a world controlled by rich and powerful nations, African has practically become an irrelevant appendix, often forgotten and neglected.<sup>8</sup>

In its probing questions, the Document asks among others, “What has become of Africa?” What is the true overall situation of the African continent today...?”<sup>9</sup> These heart- rending questions had the motif of presenting the Christian message as real “Good News” to and for the African peoples today.<sup>10</sup>

In a more dramatic manner, the Document used the Gospel parable of the unfortunate man who fell into the hands of brigands on the road to Jericho to describe the situation of Africa in the recent times (cf. Luke 10:30-37). Africa, as it were, fell into the hands of robbers who stripped her, raped her, beat her and departed, leaving her half dead. The Synod Fathers put it thus:

Africa is a continent where countless human beings – men and women, children and young people – are lying, as it were, on the edge of the road, sick, injured,

disabled, marginalized and abandoned. They are in dire need of Good Samaritans who will come to their aid.<sup>11</sup>

The Synod Fathers of the first Special Synod of Bishops for Africa in 1994 testified to the reality of brokenness on African soil. I regarded it as the determinant of the face of Africa today. In a press interview in preparation for the second of this Synod, fifteen years later, Wilfred Cardinal Napier, Archbishop of Durban, highlighted some of the hopes and expectations of the Second Special Synod. These concern areas that make the African continent continue to bleed. According to him, poverty, global crises' effects, conflicts that explode over the population's will for resource grabbing, and, at the end, AIDS – still there, never giving back and keeping on with the mowing down of victims.<sup>12</sup> Many of the perpetrators of this crime are, according to the momentum laboris of the second Special Synod for Africa,

Outside forces in complicity with men and women on the African continent exploit the wounded state of the human heart... they fuel wars so as to sell arms. They back those in power, irrespective of human rights and democratic principles, so as to guarantee economic benefit (exploitation of natural resources, the acquisition of important markets, etc). They threaten to destabilize entire nations and to eliminate persons who wish to free themselves from their oppression.<sup>13</sup>

The document indicated that persons in Africa are disheartened because of incessant political instabilities and conflicts, intermittent wars, tragic scenes of xenophobia, religious intolerance, ethnicity, poverty and social, political, and economic injustices.

Back home in Nigeria, tales of oppression, injustice, and money laundering are becoming too familiar vocabularies in Nigeria. The scourge of Boko Haram, IPOB, herdsmen – farmer clashes, and the more recent crises in the Niger Delta reveal a lot about injustice in the country. Magnus Anyanugo and Chinasa F. Okoh in Nwanna Nzewunwa explained that the discovery of crude oil in 1956 in parts of the Niger Delta region is the background to what is referred today as the Niger Delta crisis. They state that:

Till date, Nigeria has rather witnessed/experienced decades of dictatorship, breakdown of civil society and a near lack of attention to the environmental concerns of the region which has, in consequence, turned into one of the world's most endangered ecosystems, an epicenter of human rights abuses and environmental injustice.<sup>14</sup>

This situation has led to a number of agitations in the area. These agitations which had started as protests had to burst like tornadoes into what we have today as the Niger Delta crisis. Dwindling economy in the midst of abundance and the avowed cases of unemployment, injustice, insecurity of life and property, and marginalization all indicate that Nigeria is still far from her point of destination. Cases of corruption among public office holders, money laundering, money politics – vote buying, injustice, insecurity of life, job and property, which of course, lead to underdevelopment and consequently, to the rape of the nation, make it apparently difficult to live a wholeness of life that is characteristic of the *imago Dei*, a vocation to which humankind is called.

The problems outlined are all indicators of brokenness and still the disintegration of the Trinitarian experience in a social setting. Life is no longer valued; it is threatened. Personal fame, position and



power seat in judgement over proper human values, while economy becomes displaces the humanity. Humankind is a sociable animal (*ens socialis*), a “being-with,” a companion with, and an *imago Trinitatis* (image of the Trinity) who is in the world as “caretaker”, not alone as a solitary individual, but as a being who marches alongside others in the sands of history. As the human personality is estranged, and his life is gauged, harassed and devalued, so is his/her voice in the society. He reacts and struggles for survival and in the course of this, sets the self above the other. He often gets lost in this struggle for self assertion that he quickly forgets the principles of belongingness and communion which characterizes his being. Since the society is about a dynamic of persons in relationship, once human persons in a society are defaced and devalued, that society showcases a value bereft of the Trinitarian spirit and experience. This is harmful to the human world and remains an obstacle to the Church’s mission as an agent of unity in the world. This poses more challenges to the Church.

Igbo land and Nigeria as a whole is an arena, a nexus point where the full realization of the Trinitarian life and love is greatly challenged today. The Owerri-Igbo people, for example, are a homogeneously happy people who lived in harmony with one another and prided themselves in their strong ties at different levels: family, *Umunna*, kindred, village, town and clan levels, etc. Their common adage, “*Onye aghala nwanne ya*” (be your brother’s keeper) highlights their value for social and communitarian ties. This manifested in the formation of *Otu ebiri* (Age Grade), *Umuada/Umuokpu* (daughters from the town); and in modern times, strong town and village unions, which enlists especially the sons and daughters of the community living outside their home town. Everybody belonged to one group or the other as an individual is believed to be more easily identifiable where he or she belongs. Through these organizations, social life is coordinated; social coherence is achieved and a common purpose

is pursued. No wonder the Igbo town unions of the 1940s remain referrals in social psychology. As a homogenous people, outstanding commonality was the monument for which each community boasted among the comity of towns and villages in wherever Ndigbo find themselves. In singleness of purpose, and communal spirit as one people and a united front, they conducted their daily affairs – cultural, religious, social, economic, agricultural, sanitary or even political. Despite their closeness to such large groups as the Bini, Ijaw, Igala and the Efik/Ibibio, for instance, they displayed a high sense of solidarity that made them remain resilient in the midst of challenges with the new social reality that dawned with colonization and the new post-colonial and post Nigeria-Biafran war era. Their adages like “*umunna wu ike*” and “*Ibu anyi ndanda*” (through collective efforts, we accomplish great tasks) served as spiritual and emotional reinforcements in front of challenging tasks and difficulties.

Today, the story is becoming something different. Igboland for instance is passing through new experiences of rugged individualism, relativism and selfishness at the expense of the spirit of togetherness for which they were known. The influx of modernist tendencies has brought with it a change of attitudes that are decried by the older generations by the day. Other modernist attitudes as migration to urban centres in search of white collar jobs and greener pastures, preference for foreign values as effects of the “global village” syndrome and the “get rich quick” syndrome give vent to a cultural alienation where the worst hit is the family spirit which hitherto has been held in high esteem in Igboland. The effects of modernism and globalized culture have led to a corrosion of the people’s value system and have, in consequence, exposed the land to ravaging tensions characteristic of modernism. So the *Ala Igbo* (Igboland) is at a cultural crossroad needing a direction. It is at the verge of cultural disintegration.

An indication of the impact of the above mentioned modernistic tendencies, are the divisive tendencies that have become the new marks of Ndigbo. These become indicative of the impact of cultural corrosion on a once homogeneous people. Instances abound where economic, political, social and even recreational interests cause intractable inter and even intra-communal conflicts. For instance, traditional politics had the credit of bringing and binding people together, but it is noticed with dismay today that with the creation of new autonomous communities, local government administrative units, new council wards and even the issues of succession to *Ezeship* offices have recently become the major bones of contention in many communities. The most appalling side of it is that these problems, when they erupt, know no demarcation between church and community. When factions are created and people, rather than drawing close to one another to resolve it, have instead drifted from one another. In many of the cases, the perpetrators, as much as the victims, are sons and daughters of the Church. And in many cases, the arena of vendetta is the Church while in some still, church workers have often suffered as a result. The corrosion of communal values has reached such a height that the concepts used in extolling excellence and communality such as *Umunna wu ike* and *Igwe bu ike* (there is strength in brotherhood and united we stand) are often replaced with individualistic values, attitudes that have found expression in parabolic remarks and usages such as “*eruru si na ha zuru ezu tuda ngwo, kama onye obula no na nke ya*” (the beetle said that though they collectively felled the palm tree, but each one is on its own). As a consequence the communities in Igboland have become exposed to various kinds of social conditions and circumstances that inhibit togetherness, brotherliness, and common values systems. For, as the institutions and factors of social cohesion are put to question and often destroyed, the moral order and even faith are not left out. Thus almost nothing again is held sacrosanct: for instance, the proliferation of Christian sects

(as a sign modernism) has relativized faith and morals among a once homogeneous people. Where good neighbourliness is estranged, there arises a replication of Hobbesian primitive societies where man, summarized as “short”, “solitary”, and “brutish”, as in a stage where each one ever engages himself/herself in a constant warfare of all against all, becoming thus, wolf to other men (*homo lupus hominem*).<sup>15</sup> So as the family spirit is destroyed the sense of community and interdependence is estranged. Everyone is thus subjected to struggle to assert oneself. The corrosion of the cultural fabrics that bound people together opens Igboland up for underdevelopment, social unrest, estrangement of peace, amidst those present day crimes experienced today in the land such as kidnapping, armed robbery, rape and ritual murder. In the face of this, Ndigbo are becoming more scattered than before, and just like Isaiah would say, “All we like sheep, have gone astray; everyone to his own way” (Isaiah, 53:6). The consequence however is that the people and their communities continue to drift more and more from unity, peace and development which God had intended when He created humankind in His image and likeness and placed humans in communities.

The problem now is how to reconcile this new face of reality of divisiveness and fragmentation with the divine image as social beings? He who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit made us in his own image and likeness (Gen 1:26, 27), and sent us to image him in creation, having been sent to “increase”, “fill”, and “conquer” the earth (Gen 1: 28) mission where Since we learn from St Augustine that the God who made us in his own image and likeness (Gen 1:26, 27), who has sent us to “increase”, “fill”, and “conquer” the earth (Gen 1: 28) is a social being. The church too is a community of faith whose missionary nature demands her to “go out and make disciples of all nations” and to bring the converts into one family of God’s people. Our question now is: in this

period of new evangelization, what constitutes the new mission of the church in Igboland?

This is of great concern to the Church in Igboland. Many references will be made on the Church in Mbaiseland, especially as an illustration of the new situation in which the church in Igboland finds herself. Mbaise is a locus where the gospel message as proclaimed by Church of Christ has found much fertile ground. With the Catholics making up an approximated 78% of the total population which is nearly zero percent pagan, one can deduce that the Gospel message and mission has borne much fruit in the land. Yet, this statistics and experiences of this Church reflect more or less an average picture of the Church in many other parts of Igboland today. Yet, the Church in Mbaise exemplifies this new reality of the Church where the influx of modernist tendencies is posing difficult challenges to the mission of the Church in Igboland. Yet, she exemplifies the local community church where the ills in the society flow very easily into the Church. Given the high percentage of the Catholic population, both the victims and the perpetrators of this disoriented life could well be said to be the sons and daughters of the Church.

Since the overall interest of this paper is the emergence of full Christian culture where Trinitarian life becomes a model of life also in both church and community, it becomes the concern of the work to reflect and come up with practicable answers to the new challenges that impact on the Church mission today, vis-à-vis the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ (GS, 1). Would the Church in Igboland be responsible to her vocation and mission if she keeps mute over the groaning and despair of her members? How long could she remain unabashed in this situation? As mother, she will most certainly feel the pangs of her sons and daughters in travail, hence she assumes her prophetic role as salt of the earth and light of the world in the land where she sojourns as

missionary. If the Church is at home in Igboland, how much hope and joy does she radiate within the locality where the human beings are harassed and molested daily by human and structural factors and imbalance? The ecclesiology of the Vatican II Council identifies the Church in the Gospel terminologies of "Body of Christ" and "People of God", where Christ is the head and we are members, where, as a "people" who are brought into the "one body", where injury to one would mean injury to the entire body. Ordinarily, this would imply an amazing solidarity among the members of the Church as one family of God's people and as a community. But given the level of brokenness and disintegration of the Trinitarian experience mentioned above in present age, one is forced to ask: how much of this unity, communion and solidarity does the Church in Igboland reflect before the local communities and in the larger world community? As a reality in the world, a reality which not only treads on the sands of time but which also feels the pangs and grieves of the world,<sup>16</sup> serving as salt of the earth and light of the world (Matt 5:13 – 14), how does this Church go ahead to play her prophetic role in order to raise the hope and joy of people in the light of their present circumstances? Does the Church in Igboland portray within her bosom the hope and joy which she proclaims? In a situation as we find ourselves, in Igboland, and in both multicultural societies like Nigeria and her religious pluralism, as much as in the world today, how and in what ways the Church could best present wholeness as a way of life? What examples and explanations could she present to show her audience that though many, they could still be one? In union with the Fathers of the first Special Synod of Bishops for Africa, how can the gospel be presented as good news to a people who hitherto have only been victims, perpetrators, promoters and facilitators of brokenness, of conflict, and who have only experienced pain and nursed injuries caused by brokenness?

## NOTES

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<sup>4</sup>*Senator Dino Melaye, Nigeria Becoming Valley of Death”, reported by Todays Impact Newspaper of 17 April, 2018.*

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<sup>6</sup>Frederick Beuchner, “Journey Towards Wholeness”

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<sup>7</sup>John Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa, 39.

<sup>8</sup>John Paul II, no. 40.

<sup>9</sup>John Paul II, no. 48.

<sup>10</sup>John Paul II, no. 40.

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<sup>12</sup>Wilfred Napier, Africa's Expectations for the Second Synod, Interview granted to Emmanuela Citterio of Afronline in Rome, October 4, 2009, <http://www.newsfromafrica.org/newsfromafrica/articles/art-11693.html> accessed 5/5/2010.

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<sup>14</sup>Magnus Anyanugo and Chinasa F. Okoh, Niger Delta Crisis in Oledinma Nwanna-Nzewunwa, Niger Delta Crisis, Yesterday and Today (2008) 12.

<sup>15</sup>Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan.

<sup>16</sup>Vatican II Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes, (GS) in Austin Flannery, ed., Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, Vol. 1 (Leominster: Fowler and Wright Book) nn.1, 2.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### ST AUGUSTINE'S DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY (IN DE TRINITATE)

#### 4.0 Introduction

The English adage which says that “necessity is the mother of invention” holds true when it comes to the development of the Christian doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. This is against the background of philosophy which says that “philosophy begins with wonder”. The context in which what the Church calls its doctrine of the Trinity developed in the early Church is one of challenges, tensions, oppositions, misplaced and erroneous interpretations of the revealed truth, human rationalization and application of the Gospel message to life situations and diverse cultural milieu in which the nascent Church found herself. The articulation of the very position of the Church on the numerous contending questions and issues amounted to what is what we have in our Creedal Symbols as the faith of the Church and of the Christians. This faith says that God is one (*credo in unum Deum*) who is Three in Persons. The summary of this faith as articulated in the Creedal Symbols of Nicaea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381) reads: “We believe in one God... the Father ... the Son ... the Holy Spirit” (*The Roman Missal*). The confession of this faith professes the nature of God as Trinitarian. The post-Apostolic Church went through the recesses of positive revelation to assert affirmatively the belief of the Church which was then practiced in the various liturgies, especially in the baptismal catecheses and celebrations, of the early Church.

The Magisterium and the theological tradition have lent themselves to its proof, elaboration and defence against the numerous challenges that confronted the Church on account of its novel

teaching of plurality in God. One Council after another, Synod after Synod, and one Symbol after another, each in its turn, arising from the bosom of the Church and backed with scriptural foundations, faced the issue of the Trinitarian faith and gave clarifications on specific aspects of the faith with increasing sharpness to meet each heresy as it came along. For instance, the Council of Nicaea I dwelt on the divinity of God the Son and, through the concept of "Substance" (*ousion*), laid the intellectual foundation for addressing the unity of God. Constantinople I focused on the Holy Spirit and developed the concept of procession with regard to the origin of the Holy Spirit. Secondly the Council, modifying Nicaea I and supplying the missing link in the relationship between the Son and the Spirit, developed the doctrine, not of the *Ousion*, but of the distinct hypostases of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and thus laid the foundation for discussing the dynamic conception of God as a relational being characteristic of the Eastern Trinitarian theology. Subsequent Councils and symbols either took to one position or the other, for instance the *Tome of Damasus* and *Quicumque of Athanasius*, some, like Constantinople II (AD 553) tried a synthesis of the two approaches. It would rather be left to the theology of the Fathers at that early age to make further clarification through their writings and teachings. The summary of these magisterial teachings of the Church holds and explains that the mystery of the Holy Trinity is the central mystery of the Christian faith. *The General Catechetical Directory of April 11, 1971* of the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy explained that its revelation (communication) corresponds to the way and the plan by which God reveals Himself to humankind in the economy. This summary reflects in essence the opening words of the *Quicumque Vult*: "We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity."

St Augustine, among many others of his time laboured in this respect to preserve the deposit of the faith by giving it an authentic interpretation that has remained across the ages, a distinctive trait of Christian theology in the West. It is along this background that we are going to study Augustine's Trinitarian theology with special focus on his *De Trinitate*. Augustine, as both theologian and bishop, and therefore a member of the Church hierarchy, stands on a strategic ground, to teach us on the being of God and what it has for us. We shall first have a glance at the theological tradition of Augustine so as to appreciate more the problematic Augustine sets himself to handle and its implication(s) for today's challenges of brokenness in human interpersonal relationships and communities.

#### 4.1 Augustine's Trinitarian Theology

The importance of St Augustine's Trinitarian theology is felt largely on account of the overwhelming influence it has on Western theology in particular and on Western thought in general. He is said to have given the Western tradition its mature and final expression.<sup>1</sup> This is largely on account of his work on the Trinity (*De Trinitate*) to which he had committed much of his time: "All his life as a Christian he was meditating the problem of Trinity, explaining the Church's doctrine to inquire and defend it against attack..."<sup>2</sup> He drew largely from his wealth of philosophical knowledge and the fruit of experiences and from the benefices of a long period of arduous training, mixture in the values of the world and from his long quest for truth which he exhilaratingly found in the ineffable God. The mystery of this ineffable God becomes the subject matter of his long and elaborate discussion, the *De Trinitate*.<sup>3</sup>

Our concern at this stage is the exegesis of this work so as to prepare a ground for discussing its theology. This objective

motivates us to probe into why it was written and the influence of the work on the development of Trinitarian theology in the Church today.

#### 4.1.1 De Trinitate, Augustine's Magna Carta on the Trinity

St. Augustine of Hippo's theological *opus magnum* is *De Trinitate* (*On the Holy Trinity*). Perhaps this book may be less popular than either his *City of God* or *Confessions*, the *De Trinitate* is reputed to be perhaps the most strictly theological of the works of St. Augustine. The circumstances of its composition had not been dictated by any particular pressing occasion of controversy or pastoral need, even though Augustine expounded in it the Christian doctrine and defended the faith against the Sabellian Modalism and the heterodox beliefs of the Arians. The serene intellectual concern with the Mystery of the Trinity whose centrality and fundamental status had been imprinted on the minds of the believers by the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople make it very unique among all the other writings of St. Augustine. Joseph S. O'Leary says that it is second in eminence among theological works to the *Summa* of St. Thomas Aquinas.<sup>4</sup>

Its main concern, as already indicated, is the articulation of his faith in a style that blends personal experience of this faith and the teaching of the Church and the rules of reason (mediated in Neoplatonic lens). Augustine wrote from the bosom of the Church armed with the deposits of faith (*De Trin* 1.4.7) and with philosophical tools, such that the work, is at once both ecclesial and philosophical in outlook. The doctrinal theological highpoint of *De Trinitate* is a confession of the Blessed Trinity as "believed, taught and confessed by the Catholic Church which is the orthodox faith which Augustine has not hesitated to profess openly (cf *De Trinitate* 1.4.7). The uniqueness of the work lies in the manner and style in which the faith of the Church, as taught from the earliest

times of the Christian and bequeathed to the faithful of Christ from the Apostles, is taught and presented by Augustine to his audience in response to the questions it set to address *ab initio*.

#### 4.1.2 Definition of *De Trinitate*

Augustine's *De Trinitate*, obviously presents itself as this convergence tool by which all the different traditions would be synthesized into a tool of faith. This synthetic nature dresses it with such a finesse and beauty that stand unsurpassed in the history of Western thought that the book is a "Must Read" on issues regarding the Blessed Trinity.

Yves Congar observes that Augustine's *De Trinitate* is less dominated than the writings of Athanasius and the Cappadocians by immediate polemics against the fourth-century heretics, although his adversaries were the same as theirs - the Arians and Eunomius. Arianism still had its followers and was at times favoured by those in authority. Augustine had it consciously in mind.<sup>5</sup> The specific features of Augustine's Trinitarian doctrine can be found in a number of his other works. But the *De Trinitate* stands out in its whole emphasis on bringing to synthesis the Christian faith on the Trinity. He devoted time to address the issues arising out of this doctrine and this entails an affirmation of the ineffable nature of this Trinitarian mystery and the intricacies involved in the exercise. Fortman rightly classed the work as a product of as much more contemplative as a theologian, at once thoroughly traditional and intensely personal.<sup>6</sup> It becomes therefore expedient to undertake an exposé of the work by taking a look at its purpose, language, structure and presentation as well as its receptivity by its intended audience. We will begin with its dating.

### 4.1.3 The Dating of the Work

There is no consensus over the exact date of the writing of *De Trinitate*. The only agreement among authors is that the drafting of the book took a long time. Augustine himself bore testimony to this on many occasions. In the Letter to Aurelius, Bishop of Carthage (416), he attests thus: "I began as a very young man, and have published in my old age, some books concerning the Trinity, who is the supreme and true God."<sup>7</sup> In his Letters – to Dioscorus and Aurelius - Augustine had made known his original intention of publishing them all at once but the known completed books were hurriedly published, first under the urge of his brethren and above all to prevent the surreptitious circulation of the incomplete text.<sup>8</sup> However some people locate other grounds for the delay also in the Donatist controversy which distracted his attention for too long.<sup>9</sup>

The actual date he began the writing is equally under dispute. Stephen Mckenna opines that it took Augustine at least 16 (sixteen) years, beginning around AD 400 and finished it in AD 416.<sup>10</sup> Joseph S. O'Leary's study shows that authors are really disagreed over that. He discusses this discrepancy in his *Methods and Structures in Augustine's De Trinitate*. His findings reveal that Augustine began the work about the time of the completion of the *Confessions*. O'Leary reports that Gustave Bardy (*Saint Augustin*, 1946, pp. 338-41) and Schindler favour the years, AD 399 - 400. François Glorié suggests AD 397. E. Hendrickx suggests that a first draft was completed by 406. Glorié deduces from the phrase *quindecim per aliquot annos* (*Retr.* II 15.1) that a first draft was completed by AD 411. But these are rather speculative datings: a study of *Letter 120* which dates from 410 suggests that Augustine had not then embarked on the path followed in *De Trinitate IX ff* and, in *Letter 169* dating from AD 415, he bemoans his slow progress at the work. In any case, although Glorié claims that the

final version of *De Trinitate* was published in 413 and Bardy suggests AD 416, Hendrickx (in *La Trinité*, Paris, 1955, I, p. 559) along with Schindler and others favours a later dating – about AD 419 - 420. The quotation of *Civitate Dei XII, 12* in *De Trinitate XIII, 12* shows that the latter is at least as late as 417. The most probable dating for the edition of the *De Trinitate* to which *Letter 174* is the dedicatory epistle is AD 420.<sup>11</sup> This is late enough for the new themes noted in Books II and IV by Anne-Marie La Bonnardière (*Recherches de chronologie augustiniennne*, 1965), which she connects with the debate against the Arians recorded in such works as *Contra Sermonem Arianorum*.<sup>12</sup>

According to Lewis Ayres, La Bonnardière has the dating split into the following:

1. After 404 beginning of the work
2. 411 - 414 the bulk of *De Trinitate* 2- 4 as a literary unity, except the prefaces and later additions which she identifies;
3. 416 – 417 Augustine wrote or redacted *De Trinitate* 5 – 7 (at the same time as *De Civitate Dei*, 11) after he acquired some knowledge of the Eunomian doctrine;
4. 417 – 418 Augustine compiled *De Trinitate* 8 – 12a (ending at 12.14.23);
5. In a final period beginning in 419 Augustine finished the work, ending sometime between 420 and 425.

To this Hombert made a supplement to Bonnardière's work concerning the first four books:

1. 400 – 403      *De Trinitate* 1;
2. 411 – 413      *De Trinitate* 2- 3
3. 414 – 415      *De Trinitate* 4.<sup>13</sup>

Whichever be the case, these disagreements only show the extent of the complexity of the work and the developments in Augustine's Trinitarian thought as contained in the work.

#### 4.1.4 The Background and Writing of *De Trinitate*

We have pointed out that Augustine's *De Trinitate* was a fruit of long years of meditation. The number of years it took to write and the intermittent interventions and breaks, all, add to its unique beauty. Ever since discovering this mystery of the Christian religion which was far beyond the excitements he got in the various thought-camps he had tarried, thoughts on the Trinity became a subject of Augustine's life-time meditation. So *De Trinitate* was neither his first or last work to discuss the Trinity. Fortman notes that Augustine's *Enchiridion ad Laurentium, De Fide et Symbolo, De Doctrina Christiana*, had been, in his anti-Manichaeic and Arian polemics, all concerned with the Trinity. The *De fide et Symbolo* which is an expression of the Apostle's and the Nicene creed, is very explicit in its elaborations on the Trinity as believed and taught at Nicaea and coded in the faith Symbol of Nicaea. These contain full expression of his faith in the Trinity. In these works, among many others, Augustine showed the Trinity to be at the very centre and heart of the Christian faith. However, *De Trinitate* is different both in style and intent though it contains some polemics. Fortman remarks that in this work, "Augustine is not so much a controversialist as a theologian and contemplative..."<sup>14</sup> Oshitelu calls Augustine's *De Trinitate* "an exposition rather than an attempt at proof."<sup>15</sup> True to Oshitelu's observation, it is Augustine's commitment to expound the Trinitarian faith which had been drawn from the Bible, inherited from the Apostles and handed down by Tradition and the teaching of the Fathers (*Augustine, De Trin. 1.1.1*).



The proximate cause and strength behind this “laborious” task that Augustine embarked upon may be attributed to the challenges of the faith as Augustine pointed out in the text cited already – at the beginning of the work. His work, however, rather than a polemic, makes a clarification by expounding the mystery whose reality lies beyond full human comprehension. Most importantly, we have the Arians (book five is very particular on this) and those who use philosophical language and reasoning (*cf. Civ. 10.29; De Trin 13.19.24*). So in the writing, Augustine pursues his main purpose: to present the Trinity as a mystery of faith and to bring illustrations that can help us come to a firm grasp of this mystery of faith. This is manifest even in his work *De Trinitate*. He had split into the attempt to interpret the scripture and seek a formulation of the faith and secondly the search through analogies for an understanding of the mystery. There are equally the influences from the very many controversies that menaced the Church at the time – the Donatists and the Pelagians which added and affected the strong language of the *De Trinitate* in a manner different from the simple style of his confessions and *De Civitate Dei*.

In all these, Augustine combined his faith, his contemplative experience, pastoral zeal, diverse philosophical traditions of his training –scepticism, stoicism and neo-Platonism, his rhetoric, as much as his active involvement in his youth with concupiscent life style and its fancies and his experience with Manichaeism. All the traditions and factors that shaped his mind and above all, his contact with the work of the Fathers, provided him with a foundation for his thought and all these in one way or the other reflect on his *De Trinitate*.<sup>16</sup>

Augustine felt that Anti-Arian arguments had been less effective and forceful. He therefore comes up with illustrations on how God could be truly One in Three Persons without confusion (against Arians and to lead forth to a yonder point the work of orthodox

theologians) with the use of different analogies. As Chadwick puts it, “Augustine showed effortlessly that the concept of being both One and Three is so far from being gobbled gook that simple reflection on the nature of human personality offers an immediate example.”<sup>17</sup>

The background to his *De Trinitate* cannot therefore be pinned to any particular event or development but it is rather to be seen along the historical development of the work itself as much as his varied formation trend. In all, the *sitz in leben* is the Church. Augustine wrote as a bishop, a contemplative and a philosopher, teacher and rhetorician. The combination of these trends blended by the *sensus fidei* result to the richness and complexity of the work that many consider too dry to understanding.

#### 4.1.5 The Aim of the Book

The intent of *De Trinitate* is indicated loud and clear in the first book, the introduction. The caption of the first chapter of this book, according to the *New Advent online Catholic Encyclopedia*, reads: “This work is written against those who sophistically assail the faith of the Trinity either through misuse of reason, or those who through dispute or error form a threefold cause” (*cf., De Trin. Book 1.1.1-3*). Commentaries on this work, like Mckenna, hold that Augustine’s main reason for writing this work was probably to strengthen the faith of his fellow Christians (his brethren) that is, his fellow Catholics on the greatest of the mysteries. He intends also to spur love among his followers/audience and to love God.<sup>18</sup> Though he tended to give answer to the faith’s assailants by making use of their own arguments, his main concern was merely a clarification, a fact that can be seen in the major division into two—the actual exposition of the doctrine and speculative reasoning (the second part).

#### 4.1.6 Audience and Reception of the Book

A sentence in the *Letter to Aurelius* indicates that the books were anticipated by Augustine's confidants and particularly by Aurelius himself. He wrote: "compelled, however, by the eager demands of many of my brethren, and above all by your command, I have taken the pains, by God's help, to complete the work, laborious as it is...." The *Letter* brings to our knowledge Augustine's targeted audience: "to be heard, copied, and read by every one that pleases".

Since, it was anticipated, it must have met with very wide acceptance that it had become a compendium for Trinitarian discussion across many generations in the West. Stephen Mckenna, though remarked that it is not as famous as Augustine's *Confessions* and his *City of God*, yet between the Ninth and the Fifteenth centuries, about Two Hundred and Thirty-Three (233) manuscripts of this work alone had been found. By 1350 already, a Greek translation was made in a manner, as recorded by Mckenna, that was rare of a Latin writer then. The book is still a "must read" in theological quarters.

#### 4.1.7. The Style and Method of the *De Trinitate*

He began by setting before himself the orthodox faith and followed it in style by what has been tagged his 'unique contribution' to Trinitarian thought: the psychological analogies. Every other argument and method of approach is set in this perspective. The pursuit of this work is at the same time dialectical and argumentative.

The work shows to a large extent the labours of coordinated reason and style and ordered faith. Nevertheless, there is equally a manifest discontinuity and disconnection due largely to his voluble

use of language, a probable influence from his training in Rhetoric. These join together to bring a single corpus that articulates in the loudest form possible, the mystery of the Triune God in a style that remains to be beaten after a millennium.

The logic of the *De Trinitate* follows after this fashion. Conscious of the approach of the Cappadocian Fathers and obviously of his immediate predecessors from the West, particularly Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, Augustine wishing to underscore the unity in the Godhead, moving in the opposite direction from his predecessors where he descended from the major premise of what God is and moved deductively down to the Persons. Perhaps he may have undertaken this approach not to undermine the efforts of his predecessors to whom he owed much reverence, but largely because of the problem he had with the language of Persons (cf. Bk 5. 9.10; Bk 7.4; 6). This, for him, is in consonance with the biblical tradition which in no way speaks of one God in Three Persons, but rather speaks of God who through his works and in the testimony of the Word, reveals himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (the Trinity). He felt then that the most appropriate way to begin the talk about God is to begin with the divine nature itself, which our unaided reason cannot of itself access (*De Trin.* 1.3). This simple, indivisible nature is the Trinity (cf. *De Civitate Dei* 11, 10; *Letters* 120, 17).

Augustine's numerous short-scale methods and structures employed – his techniques of argumentation and the rhetorical features of his writing, betray his capacious methods of composition which allows him to absorb elements from both philosophy and theology, without forcing them into union. Yet he created a personal synthesis of these by setting these elements in characteristically 'Augustinian' structures – an instance is the hierarchical arrangements of Books XI-XIV or in the sequence from metaphysical themes to faith and charity in Book VIII. This

is the generative mechanism with which he operated and which will be employed all through the book in his arguments.

#### 4.1.8 Presentation

*De Trinitate* as presented in its final draft is divided into Fifteen books. Each book is split into a number of chapters, the totality of which is Two Hundred and Twenty-One. Each chapter is in turn divided into paragraphs. The total number of paragraphs in the *De Trinitate* is Three Hundred and Sixty-One. Often, he abandons an issue intending to return to it at a more opportune moment. An instance of this is a revisit in Book Fourteen to the analogy of memory, understanding and will (love) which he left in Book 10. John Edward Sullivan remarks that his presentation of the analogies is in staccato form, with no recognizable logical ordering. He instantiates this with an analysis of the analogies used by Augustine into images and vestiges. Beginning with vestiges in Books 9, he moved to the images in Book 10 only to return to the vestiges again in Book 11 and plunging the down slope into the lowest grade of the vestiges into Book 12, and finally to return to the images again in Book 14. To Sullivan, Augustine rigmaroles seeming not clear where he goes all lost in his vociferousness.

#### 4.1.9 Content and Structure of *De Trinitate*

A search into the content and presentation of Augustine's argument in the work reveals, as many authors have intimated, that the book can be split into two major parts. The first (1-7) establishes the doctrine of the Triune God according to Sacred Scripture, the teaching of the Fathers and answers to objections to the doctrine while Books 8 – 15 constitute the "Book of Analogies" which is the second part.<sup>19</sup> John O' Meara and Thomas Ayres make a further division of the first part into two: Books 1-4 which elucidate the scriptural teachings on the unity and equality

of the Persons, their manifestations and functions and 5-7, discusses rationally the technical terms involved.<sup>20</sup> O'Meara, Robert Letham<sup>21</sup> and Ayres agree that in the second part, Augustine sought in humans some analogy of the Triune God.

The breakdown of the book by O'Leary is more appealing and easier to grasp. He breaks the *De Trinitate* into six parts and explains each thus:

We see the book as consisting in six discrete but sequential stages and as moving from level to level as various aspects of the Mystery present themselves to be thought. Books I-IV offers a relatively straightforward dogmatic and biblical approach. Books V-VII move into the realm of abstract logic. As a path to knowledge of God this realm of discourse soon proves itself to be a cul-de-sac. The frontal, metaphysical and contemplative approaches of Book VIII also lead to a theological dead-end, but for different reasons: where Books V-VII show that 'concepts without intuition are empty', Book VIII shows that intuition (into the divine nature) is blind to the mystery of the Trinity without some analogical foothold in human concepts. Books IX-X attain the desired unity of concept and intuition in their study of the human *mens*, whose nature is known by a combination of logical and introspective methods. Books XI-XIV then set the triad thus brought to light in its embodied and historical contexts, describing the salvific relationship between the divine image in man and its heavenly Archetype. Finally Book XV again attempts a speculative approach to the Trinity, using the analogy of the mental triad. The partial and qualified success of this venture sends us back to the beginning, to faith in the Church's dogma and to a renewal of the quest for theological *intellectus*.<sup>22</sup>

The First book which serves as the introduction to the whole edifice is captioned: "The unity and the equality of that highest Trinity is shown."<sup>23</sup> Here he nearly runs a commentary on the profession of faith in the Trinity in a fashion that he had composed. Books 2-4 discuss the same subject, but from a different perspective. Here he proves the equal dignity of the Holy Spirit and the Son with Father. The question of the equality is deepened in the Fifth book where he answers the detractors of the faith, confronting their pretensions with the appeal to their relation of origin. He employs the concept of begetting and unbegottenness with regard, for instance, to the Father and the Son, there is implied no diversity of substances between the two. Augustine employs the Categories of Aristotle – subject and predicate in speaking about the Trinity. He argues here that not everything predicated is predicted according to substance, in the case of Father and the Son, the predication is done relatively, hence the Father is called father in respect to the Son and Lord in respect to creatures.

Whereas the Sixth Book, a continuation of Book 5, probes the Scriptural text of Paul that Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1: 24), the Seventh concerns itself with the theological terms and concepts employed to safeguard the unity of the divine nature without diminishing the distinction between the Three Persons.<sup>24</sup> These constitute the concern of the first part of the *De Trinitate*, that is, an outline of Augustine teachings on the Trinitarian God in accordance with the preceding theological tradition before him.

The rest of the work (Books 8-15) as we have already said, centre on how best we can reflect in the Trinity, how best we can explain it and what illustration can be found within the human person. These contain Augustine's psychological models/analogies in which he looks at the mind as the most perfect created image of

the Blessed Trinity. Book Eight uses an interpersonal analogy of lover, beloved and the love which he later dislodged because of its lack of consubstantiality among the three. Book Nine the mind, its knowledge of itself, its love of itself the tenth Book focuses on memory, understanding, and love. He even introduces the senses (particularly the sense of sight) into the analogies (the Eleventh Book). Book Twelve seems to be a revisit to the study of the mind as a reflector of the Trinitarian being whereas in book thirteen, the appeals to the testimony of scripture for insight. The last two books, fourteen and fifteen go back to the investigation of the Trinity through the windows of memory, understanding and love. He however warns as he did in the beginning of the Eighth Book, that analogy is not identity just as likeness does not mean the same as exact similarity. In this brief, Augustine laboured for about 20years, amidst interruptions as bishop and scholar to emphasize the nature of unity that one finds in God. He began with the unity of the divine nature, a contrary view from the point of departure taken by the Cappadocians in the East and the Western writers before him in the Persons of Hilary of Poitiers and St Ambrose.

#### 4.1.10 The Language of *De Trinitate* in Explaining the Mystery of the Triune God

We have indicated that the greatest tool in the hands of the Patristic for the development of theology is the invention or development of theological language. It was the greatest contribution of Tertullian in the West for the development of Trinitarian theology. Much later in the West, Augustine harnessing the legacy of such Fathers as Irenaeus, Tertullian and Hilary of Poitiers (some of the “commentators and theologians”) to his advantage in his Trinitarian clarifications (in the *De Trinitate*), takes this to a nexus point that would remain effective and nearly unchallenged for several centuries, till the time of Thomas Aquinas and even beyond. Thus but language, we are trying to



take a look at the concepts either coined or adopted or interpreted in a new light of St. Augustine in the *De Trinitate* for his clarifications or responses and answers to the “assailants” of the faith. John O’Meara had located these concepts in the second subsection of the first part of St. Augustine *De Trinitate*. Such are identified as relations, *trinitas*, triplex, predicables.<sup>25</sup> His use of begetting, being begotten, generating and being generated, gift and communion, derive special attention since they remain greatly influential to the development of Trinitarian theology in subsequent epochs.

He considers these languages: substance, person, or even their Greek equivalents of *ousia* (essence, substance), *hypostasis* (substance, person) and *prosopon* (person), in these words “Both modes of expression arise from the necessities of speech, that we might have an answer to give when asked what three, while truly confessing that there are three, viz. The Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit”.<sup>26</sup>

Of particular importance is Augustine’s recognition of the paucity of human language in expressing the mystery of the ineffable God as exemplified in the language “*persona*”. He would most willingly wish to replace it with “relations”, of which he found three within the Godhead.<sup>27</sup> But this perplexity was noted early enough by Augustine himself who had complained thus:

For in truth since the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Father, and the Holy Spirit, who is called the gift of God, is neither the Father nor the Son, then certainly there are three. Therefore, it was said in the plural number: “I and the Father are one”.... but when it is asked three what, then the great poverty from which our language suffers becomes apparent.<sup>28</sup>

Augustine would add rather “Persons” to say something rather than remaining silent. According to Augustine himself this expression “three Persons” does not give a complete explanation of the reality it is referring.

Across the remainder of the book, Augustine under the guise of analogies tries to uncover the meaning inherent in these concepts and use same in explaining the mystery of God – “putting into words that which they understood without words”. It is within this understanding that Augustine wishes his work to be understood – substance, persona, and then help in understanding the unity of the Three Persons in the Godhead.

#### 4.1.11 Influence of *De Trinitate* in the Development of Trinitarian Theology in Subsequent Epochs

Augustine left such a large land mark in theology of the Blessed Trinity such that after him, subsequent Trinitarian theologians were more or less commentators in the arena. Schwane had commented that his *De Trinitate* synthesizes and adds the finishing touches to the most profound and exact statements which had been made about this great mystery, especially in harmonising the divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit – never afterward to be questioned – with the unity of the divine being.”<sup>29</sup>

The traits of Augustine which now characterize the Latin Church have been articulated by E. J. Fortman in these three-fold points: the concept of nature before the Persons; the insistence on attributing all the operations *ad extra* to the entire Trinity; and the psychological explanation of the Trinity. These are the traits that characterize the Latin way of conceiving the Triune God. This development becomes very remarkable because the Trinitarian teachings of subsequent generations in the West would be moulded by the Scholastics using this Augustinian frame to direct

the thought of all the Western theologies.<sup>30</sup> This simply shows how and why Augustine's doctrinal influence remained generally dominant in the West.<sup>31</sup> The Council of Florence' Decrees show pervasive influence of Augustine while Pius XI bore testimony to the pervasive influence of Augustine over subsequent Magisterial teachings on the Blessed Trinity.<sup>32</sup> Gerald O'Collins however remarked that for over a century after Augustine's death Trinitarian theology enjoyed a significant development towards a little more precision in the language of "Persons"<sup>33</sup> otherwise, the works of Boethius, Thomas Aquinas, Richard of St. Victor and Bonaventure could best be described as commentaries or footnotes to Augustine's *De Trinitate*.

The particular area where Augustine's *De Trinitate* wielded much influence is in the area of the analogies which dominated the Trinitarian reflection and development of the Medieval and Scholastic periods. This approach was only rejected in the contemporary times, especially by Karl Barth and Karl Rahner.<sup>34</sup> Rahner accuses such theological methodologies as robbing the Trinity from being a central concern of life and relegating such principal and all important doctrines to mere text book journals as it was in his days.

Generally, even his critics agree, Augustine made a greatly pervasive influence in the West. The greatest of this is this use of analogies in explains the Trinity. His Trinitarian doctrine, especially on the loving unity among the Persons and the mutual correspondence among the Father, Son and Spirit (distinct Persons) is our impetus for discussing the Trinity as a model of community.

#### 4.1.12 A Synopsis of St Augustine's *De Trinitate*

The main concern of *De Trinitate*, as already indicated above, is the articulation of his faith in a style that blends his personal experience of this faith and the teaching of the Church and the rules of reasoning (mediated in Neo-platonic lends). Its doctrinal theological highpoint is the unity of the Three Divine Persons as believed, taught and confessed by the Catholic Church, which is the orthodox faith, which Augustine has not hesitated to profess openly (cf *De Trinitate* 1.4.7).

A resumé of Augustine's *De Trinitate* could be seen in the precise presentation of the Christian faith in the Seventh paragraph of the Fourth chapter of Book One of the *De Trinitate*. The text reads:

All those Catholic expounders of the divine Scriptures, both Old and New, whom I have been able to read, who have written before me concerning the Trinity, who is God, have purpose to teach, according to the Scriptures, this doctrine, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit intimate a divine unity of one and the same substance in an indivisible equality; and therefore that they are not three Gods; out one God: although the Father has begotten the Son, and so He who is the Father is not the Son, and the Son is begotten by the Father, and so He is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but only the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, Himself also co-equal with the Father and the Son, and pertaining to the unity of the Holy Trinity. Yet not that this Trinity was born of the Virgin Mary... but only the Son. Nor, again that this Trinity descended in the form of a dove upon Jesus when he was baptized; nor that, on the day of Pentecost...but only the Holy Spirit. Nor yet that this Trinity said from heaven, you are my Son .... But it was a word of the Father

only, spoken to the Son; although the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as they are indivisible, so work indivisibly. This is also my faith, since it is the catholic faith.<sup>35</sup>

It is all about the orthodox faith of the Church, drawn from the Bible taught from the earliest times of Christian history and bequeathed to the faithful of Christ from the Apostles. This early confession of Augustine faith (1.4.7), in a flash, serves as summary both to Augustine twenty years of intellectual excursions in the work as well as a pointer to Augustine's orthodoxy of faith. It provides us the core or the matter of which the rest part of the book are mere elaborations and expatiations.

Through this single text, Augustine expresses the cell, the kernel and the tiny egg that will harsh into the whole chicken. The elaborations would be the concern of the entire *De Trinitate* and will distinguish the authentic Christian faith from other religions and belief systems. And yet Augustine was aware that this talk is very dicey and the projectile to misunderstandings, misrepresentations and errors and hence he first submitted himself to the coverage of the Church under the protection of God and the Christian charity of this accidence because "... in no other subject is error more dangerous, or inquiry more laborious, or discovery of truth more profitable."<sup>36</sup>

#### 4.2 The Distinctive Features of Augustine's Trinitarian Perspectives in the *De Trinitate*

The study of Augustine *De Trinitate* reveals some basic features that characterize his faith. Following the distribution of his thought in the book, one distinguishes the following:

##### 1. The Unity of God

2. Personal distinction and relationship among the Three
3. The use of analogies in illustrating the Trinity

In the first, the unity of God finds an inexhaustible expression in the Trinity; the second leads us to assert the relationality of the Three within the Godhead; the third speaks of the personal distinctness of each of the Three from one another. By this both the unity and the personal distinction receives attention in Augustine.<sup>37</sup> This in turn provides us with the ground for discussing the notion that the Trinity is a community especially when studies in the light of modern notions of personhood and communion and the Church as a community of faith.

#### 4.2.1 The Unity of God

The *point de départ* of Augustine is the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity. He started not with the doctrine of the divinity of each of the Divine Persons, but with their unity. He was abreast with the philosophical understanding of God at his time; of this Hans Kung remarks: Augustine holds that it is impossible to conceive the imperfect without assuming the perfect.<sup>38</sup> He therefore entertains no doubt in the faith of the Church in the existence of God and his nature as Trinity. He sets himself to explain this orthodox doctrine to "... enquirers and defending it against attack..."<sup>39</sup>

He does not need to begin a new apologetics of the doctrine since he clarified it already in other works and supposed it this time to be the faith of the Church and as such his own faith too. He was presumptuous of the Catholic faith which, no doubt, is Trinitarian. In other works, *On Eighty-three different Questions*; *On Freedom of Choice* (11,3-15, 7-24) and *the Confessions* (VVI, 10,16), he presented proofs of the existence of God in which he argued from common sense (*Commentary on the Gospel of John* 108. 4) and

gave a metaphysical proof (*Sermon 141, 2,2*) as well as explained the knowability or unknowability of God of which he concluded that though “God is hidden everywhere, he is manifest everywhere. No one can know him as he is, but no one is permitted not to know him” (*Enerrations on the Psalms, 74.9*). But to explain God as he is in himself, Augustine confessed the incapacity of our human concepts or words to exhaust the infinite (*De Trin. 1.1-3*). This is summed up in two statements of Augustine found in the Sermons and in the Enerrations: “If you understand, it is not God” (*Sermon 117, 3.5*); and “We can more easily say what he is not than what he is” (*Enarrations, 85, 12*). *De Trinitate* therefore presumes existence of God or the divine attributes since he has expressed so in those other works. Edmund J. Dobbin rightly pointed out that he “completely accepted the Trinitarian dogma and took to reflect upon and teach this “rule of faith” that the Trinity is God, one identical substance, subsiding in Three Persons”.<sup>40</sup>

He took the Nicene definition of the Trinity as a preamble of faith and orthodoxy, but more so as a guide to orthodoxy and to theological reflection. He had in 393 at the Synod of African Bishops at Hippo made an *expositio* of the pro-Nicene anti-Monarchian teachings<sup>41</sup> in the *De Fide et Symbolo*. This book is subtitled *De Fide et Symbolo* “*Treatise on Faith & the Creed*” in English.

From the *Retractations* we learn that ... It an exposition of the several clauses of the so-called Apostles' Creed. The questions concerning the mutual relations of the three Persons in the Godhead are handled in ways which are also repeated in the *City of God*, the books on the Trinity, and others of his doctrinal writings.<sup>42</sup>

His quest then in the *De Trinitate* is to expound this and defend this faith from errors. In this explanation and defence, he began with an elaboration that entails a harmonization of the Church's faith in the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Philosophy had taught him that God in his nature is one, simple and indivisible, possessing by nature the entire superlative attributes of perfection, he found this image of God confirmed and in consonance with the teachings of Scripture and the faith of the Church. Thus, in the *De Trinitate*, he combines the fruits of scriptural research, tradition and reason (philosophy) with faith and scripture as harmonizers. Faith and Scripture, for instance are "medicine" for "healing the feebleness of the mind".<sup>43</sup> From his predecessors he learnt that "this doctrine, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit intimate a divine unity of one and the same substance in an indivisible equality; and therefore they are not three Gods but one God... they are indivisible, so work indivisibly. This is also my faith, since it is the catholic faith" (*De Trin* 1.4.7). The one God is the Trinity and the Trinity is the one God. Tertullian and the Nicene – Constantinopolitan Creed, the Cappadocians and Hilary of Poitiers taught so; Augustine would therefore hold that there are Three Persons in one God or inversely put, one essence/substance in Three Persons (*cf. De Trin.* 5.9.10).

He explores the portals of revelation and history of salvation, for the activities, actions and missions of the Triune God in the economy. He could confirm the identity of the one God with the Trinity from these sources though with greater intensity from the Scripture and Magisterium, that whatever is affirmed of the one God is equally affirmed of Trinity. He could therefore talk of the Trinity as "one God, alone, good, great, eternal, omnipotent; itself in its own unity, deity, greatness, goodness, eternity, omnipotence" (*De Trin.* 5. 11.13). as God is one in his being, with one indivisible will (*De Trin* 3.3.8; 3.4.9), so is he in his actions both within and outside. Such is the argument of Augustine that the three as one



principle are united in creation, redemption and in sanctification. No action of God is perfected or carried out by the Father alone in isolation of the Son and the Holy Spirit nor does the Father do anything which remains unknown to the Son and the Spirit. The economy reflects the joint action of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that either creates, saves or inspires (*cf., De Trin 1.6.12*). And this unity of action reflects on the other hand what God is in his intimate self. Pittenger finely explains Augustine's teaching this point this way:

... He accepted the divine unity in substance, in majesty, in activity, and in will. He stressed this unity to the point of insisting that even in that which God "does in creation" the unity is present: *Opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* – the works of God externally (in creation, revelation, redemption, and inspiration) are absolutely indivisible. Hence in each of these "works", the whole Godhead is involved and active. On the other hand, the several works are "appropriated" to the differentiations of Father (creation), Son (revelation and redemption), and Spirit (inspirations).<sup>44</sup>

Augustine needs now make some classification to this understanding of the unity of the Trinity (Trinity) against any form of misrepresentation. He says for instance, that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit – the Three Persons – as Three separate and different individuals. Here lies the centrality of his clarifications of the doctrine in the *De Trinitate 53* writing Johannes tract.39, 2 – 4).

#### 4.2.2 Personal Distinction and Relationship Within the Godhead

Part of the orthodox faith which Augustine professes is that God is Tri-personal. The perennial teaching he inherited says that there

are three persons in one God. This is an article of faith which he finds no reason to doubt but which he lends his energy to defending and elaborating in conformity with those who have done so before him. However the distinguishing mark of his explanation of the doctrine lies in the pain he took in outlining the rules of relationality pertaining to the divine being and the implication underlying such explanations for the human community. He opines that the unity of the Godhead emerges in the diversity of persons and in their relationality. It is obvious that the oneness of substance is the ground of unity in God which entertains neither division nor separation; but the revelation of God in the saving action in the economy cannot but indicate that beside consubstantiality, evidence of plurality of persons in the same one of God abound. The scriptures as well as the testimony of the Fathers show that the Father is distinct from the Son and the Son from the Father and that the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son. His *De Fide et Symbolo*, he teaches:

... for this Trinity is one God, not to the effect that the Father is the same (Person) as the Son and the Holy Spirit, but to the effect that the Father is the Father, and the Son is the Son, and the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit; and this Trinity is one God, according as it is written, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one God." For of all those who have been made and fashioned of the Father, through the Son, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, none are gods according to nature. For it is this same Trinity that is signified when an apostle says, "For of him, and in him, and through him, are all things."? <sup>45</sup>

The Father is not the son, and the son is not the Father, and the Holy Spirit who is also called the Gift of God is neither the Father nor the Son, certainly they are three" (*De Trin* 5.9.10; *cf also De Trin* 1.4.7; 5.9.9; 6.2.3; 7.1.1; 7.2.2 – 7.2.3; 7.4.7; 8.1.1; 9.1.1).

This explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity opens a new range of questions bothering on the personal distinctions among the members of the Triune community and their relationship. How do they relate, one to the other?

The concepts of begetting and being Begotten, and proceeding are employed to mark both the distinction of persons and trace a relation of origin by which the Father is said to be the sole principle of the Son and the Holy Spirit. He is the Unoriginate origin of the Son and the Spirit. He is the principle of the Son with whom together as one principle is the principle of the Spirit, himself being the principle without principle - *principium sine principio*, (*De Trin* 5.13.14; 5.14.15). All three together as one principle are the principle of everything that is created. As begetter to the Son, he is not the Begotten (*De Trin* 2.2.4). The Son too, is not the Father since it is not the Father that is Begotten. The Holy Spirit is not the Father since the Begotten is not begotten by him nor is he also begotten since there is only one Begotten Son of the Father (*De Trin* 2.3.4; 1.7.14). In such and similar arguments, Augustine distinguishes the Father from the Son and from the Holy Spirit and still brings them together in his theory of relations of origin. The Father begets; the Son is begotten and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son is the Gift, the unutterable communion of the Father and the Son (*De Trin* 5.11.12).

He used the language of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as relational terms by which we express the relationship within the Godhead which has been revealed in the economy. For instance, he states that the Father is "Father in relation to the Son and the Son in relation to the Father, which is not accident; because both the one is always Father, and the other is always Son" he is not Father in relation to himself, nor Son in relation to himself (*De Trin* 5.5.6). Augustine furthered his explanation of this bond of relationship by illustrating the quality of relating among the three in his concepts

of coequality, coeternity mutual openness, transparency and collaboration both within and outside the Trinitarian family (in the economy), as illustrated by the concepts of mutual reference, reciprocal reference, and communion (*De Trin 5.11.12-13*); all yielding to a life of love, felicity, delight, blessedness and sweetness to which too is poured and communicated to the creature by extension (*De Trin 6. 10.11-12*).

He thus summarizes his principal exposition of the Orthodox Trinitarian faith. The second part of his work would now be devoted to the use of analogies and images in explication of the Trinitarian mystery, being and relations as his speculative arguments in the first part has already shown. To their analogies, we turn our gaze.

#### 4.2.3 The Use of Analogies in Illustrating the Trinity

Augustine's *De Trinitate* is best known for its various Trinitarian analogies. The use of analogies stands out more in Augustine than in his predecessors. He uses these analogies as illustrations and explications of the Trinitarian mystery. This constitutes the content of the second part of *De Trinitate*, Books 8 – 15. This is regarded as the most important contribution of Augustine to the development of Trinitarian theology. Some of these analogies are intensely experiential but however, they are tenuous examples of how three things may be in some sense one.<sup>46</sup> Augustine made a comparison of the two of the two divine processions with the human self-knowledge and self-love. According to him, this companion stands as a perpetual monument of the genius of Augustine.<sup>47</sup>

Stephen Mckenna reports that E. Portalié, in the article, "Augustine: Saint", published in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique I*, p.2348-2355, found thirteen of the Twenty-Two

“trinities” in Augustine’s works in his *De Trinitate* alone.<sup>48</sup> These obviously include the *vestigia trinitatis* and the *imago trinitatis*, which are all efforts by Augustine to look for reflections of the Trinity among creatures.<sup>49</sup> The bid to understand the use of analogies goes deeper than the *De Trinitate* to Augustine’s deepest past in his Neo-platonic background. Thomas Aquinas had said that he “was imbued with Platonism.”<sup>50</sup> Irenaeus, Justin, Tertullian all used imageries from the Bible. Augustine, in like manner, coupled with a lens of Neo-Platonism by which he sees a form of triplicity scattered everywhere in the world, but goes beyond them by an appeal to a novel order in the inner man to locate an intrapersonal relationship, emphasizing strongly on the unity of substance and yet the reality of distinctness among the relatants. This explains the number of “trinities” as reported by Portalié and why such trinities are scattered everywhere in Augustine’s works.

*De Trinitate* itself treats the analogies only after expounding the Catholic “rule of faith”. Following this arrangement, one might adjudge that this is what Augustine wants to add to what he has already said in his *De Fide et Symbolo* concerning the nature of God as tripersonal. He begins by distinguishing between image and *vestigia trinitatis* and concluded that something would image the divine Trinity where it meets the following conditions:

1. The image must be found in the inner man
2. The object must be eternal, so the Trinity has to be operative in the realm of wisdom.
3. It must have permanent roots in the nature of man not in something adventitious to the mind.
4. Member of the Trinity must be on the level of intellectual knowledge and love.

### 4.3 The Theological Debate of Augustine in *De Trinitate*

Two assessments made by Harnack and Robert Letham help place us in a position to really look for the theological issues raised by Augustine in the *De Trinitate* that would help us in our discussing the Trinity as a model of life and community. First of all, Adolf Harnack remarked that Augustine repeatedly distances himself from Sabellianism, although this was mere assertion since nothing else would lead the reader to recognize a difference. Our question bothers on finding out to what extent this could be true of Augustine's *De Trinitate*.

On the other hand, Letham reports that Augustine was responding to the challenges arising in the wake of the Constantinopolitan settlement in which clarification is needed to prove with illustration how the Persons of the Trinity are distinct, and particular actions are attributable to particular Persons, while at the same time, the being (and work) of the Trinity is indivisible.<sup>51</sup> Letham's position receives a further corroboration in Paul M. Collin's vision of the Trinitarian doctrine as a hermeneutical tradition in a hermeneutical community. Clearly put then, one needs to know what Augustine taught in the light of orthodox theology and the contextual issues that warranted the *De Trinitate*.

Thus the question of the context of Augustine's *De Trinitate* demands us to find out what actually Augustine set himself to clarify when he set out to write the *De Trinitate* coupled with the criticism of Harnack, to what extent did he go in this clarification without jeopardizing his orthodoxy? We make bold to say here that a look at his work itself, particularly, his *De Trinitate* itself will provide us with the answers.

#### 4.3.1 The Theological Issue at Stake

History locates Augustine at the end of the Patristic era, especially as he occupies the rank of the last renowned great Father of the Latin Church. He appeared, as an ecclesiastic at the peak of the Donatist controversy that tore the Church of North Africa into factions. The importance of the definitions of the orthodox faith which Augustine claimed to be his faith too, come out in bolder letters when one explores into the doctrino-political and social situation of North Africa when Augustine was composing the *De Trinitate* of which the study of Lewis Ayres and the complaint of Augustine in his *Retractiones* and his *Letters* lead us in great wise. Augustine insinuated danger of surreptitious circulation of the incomplete text.<sup>52</sup> Stanley Anyanwu adds too that he was so distracted that his episcopacy was characterised by his controversies to which he gave apt attention.<sup>53</sup>

On the other hand, Ayres in his recent study reveals the background to some of the tensions that surrounded the writing of the *De Trinitate*. He has this observation:

The summary of his predecessors' faith with which Augustine begins the *De Trinitate* shows how clearly Augustine locates himself within the Latin anti-Homoian theological traditions. Because of his location in this literary tradition, Augustine's articulations of Trinitarian theology have clear polemical edge....<sup>54</sup>

The homoians, while upholding the unity of God, taught that there is a substantial differentiation among the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. While the Father is the *arche*, the Son too, in view of biblical evidence is also God in a lesser degree. His substance is like the Father. This teaching is championed by Arius.

Of greater importance to the development of his *De Trinitate* is the deeper anti-Monarchian and anti-Sabellian traditions of Trinitarian definitions that characterize Latin theology which Augustine imbibed early enough even before the composition of *De Trinitate*. He expressed this tradition very openly at the 393 Council of African Bishops in Hippo. In his address he took a significant shift from his anti-Manichaean Trinitarian thought to anti-Monarchian and anti-Sabellian wider traditions of the Latin pro-Nicene theology.<sup>55</sup> The ensuing *De Fide et Symbolo* from the discourse reflects anti-Monarchian tradition of the West, we suppose assert too that it could be regarded as a theological prolegomenon of his later *De Trinitate* in which he continued his clarifications of the heretical views of the Monarchians as much as defending and clarifying the Christian faith of the Nicene tradition. We say so because of the pervading presence of those terminologies and conceptions such as “persona”, “natura”, and “substantia”; the designation of the Son as the “Word” and of the Holy Spirit as “Spiritus”, “Deitas” and “Communio” which are obviously traceable to Tertullian, appropriated at Nicaea and in the teachings of the theologians just mentioned. Augustine’s use of these in the *De Trinitate* then shows more of elaborative usage than a discovery.

Historical evidences support the view that Augustine swam against the currents of the time, particularly the growing teachings in the shores of Africa of Homoian refugees following the sack of Rome by the Vandals in 410 AD, and the deployment of Homoian troops to Africa. There came a gradual increase of anti – Nicene theologians in Africa of Augustine’s time. He had obviously come across them, especially in his reading of Latin authors like Ambrose whose *De Fide* was written at the peak of the Homoian debate in Northern Italy. Coming across the teachings and oppositions to them, he set out to give clarifications to these



erroneous teachings and thus streamline the Christian faith against any incursions or hijack from the heretical views.

#### 4.3.2 De Fide Orthodoxa Catholica

The questions he set to clarify are: Is there One God or three Gods? If God is one then how is this to be reconciled with the Christian encounter of Christ and the Christian experience of the Holy Spirit especially when juxtaposed with the religio-cultural milieu in which the young Church found itself? This underlying question is infective His reliance was his faith which is informed by the biblical teachings and the teachings of the Fathers. He took the Nicene definition of the Trinitarian teaching as a preamble of faith and orthodoxy, but more so as a guide to orthodoxy and to theological reflection. His set then in the work to expound it and defend it from errors. In this project, he began with an elaboration which entails naturally a harmonization of the Church's faith in the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit which is taught in the Scripture and underlined at Nicaea. This Catholic Faith says that "the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit intimate a divine unity of one and the same substance in an indivisible equality; and therefore they are not three Gods but one God... they are indivisible, so work indivisibly" he claimed it as his own faith as it is the faith of the Church also. "This is also my faith, since it is the catholic faith". (De Trin I.4.7).

He uses this formula of faith then to defend the faith of the Church against the errors of Subordinationism and its extreme opposite case of Modalism that tormented the Church of the era. He finds his succour in the teachings of scripture and the works of his catholic predecessors. Central to this faith are the confessions of a peculiar form of monotheism and a distinction of Persons identified since the earliest Christian traditions as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and the identification of the One God and the Three

Person to be one and the same, hence the formula: One God in Three Persons. It is for Augustine to clarify in the *De Trinitate* that the Three together are the One God. Before going into that, we shall first of all look at the tools in the hands of Augustine for his work: reason, scripture and faith.

Augustine's *De Trinitate*, presupposes that his audience already possesses a basic understanding of the Christian faith as taught from the time of the apostles and streamlined at the Ecumenical Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople. This faith, expressed aphoristically, maintains an ontological disjunction between God and the world in which case God is totally other from the world. However, this disjunction does not turn God neither into a *Deus ex machina* nor into a *Deus absconditus*; he relates with the world in the status of Creator as to creature in which the second depends on the first for its cause and sustenance and government. This is the faith of the Church which Augustine defends with the aid of Scripture, Tradition and Reason. We shall first take Scripture and Tradition before delving into philosophy.

#### 4.4 Theological Conclusions in the De Trinitate

Augustine does not see the need to recite the Creed of the Nicaea. He has done so already in his earlier piece, *De Fide et Symbolo*. In *De Trinitate* he embarks rather on a hermeneutical excursion in which the articles of the faith would be explored along the lines of their interpretational value. This would address the faith as read, as taught, as believed and celebrated. This faith states that God is one but within this One God there are three divine persons.

##### 4.4.1 There is only One God

On this note Augustine, alongside with orthodox theologians would stick to the principle of unity in God: "If God is not one,

then there is no God;”<sup>56</sup> while at the same time he expounds the catholic teaching and understanding of this unity against the erroneous interpretation of the Sabellians who misconstrue this unity to the extent of denying the evidence of scripture that God is a Trinity. God is not only one (*unus*) but also unique (*unicus*). Walter Kasper reflects Augustine when he writes that

The oneness of God involves far often more than a quantitative and numerical unity. The creed does not mean simply that there is only one God and not three or four gods. The singleness and uniqueness of God is qualitative... as the one God, God is also the only God.<sup>57</sup>

Augustine declares his intention in these words: 'to undertake, with the help of the Lord and as far as we can ourselves, a justification (*reddere rationem*) of this affirmation: the Trinity is one true God and it is exactly true to say, believe and think that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are of one single and the same substance or essence'.<sup>58</sup> And states more precisely the means that he intends to employ. The authority of Scripture - Books I to IV of *De Trinitate* – and then a rational process of discussion - Books V to VII.

Augustine has turned his searchlight beginning, as we saw with the *De Fide et Symbolo*, by employing the concepts and vocabularies of the Nicene definitions and those of either Pre-Nicene and as well Pro-Nicene theologians. Augustine's summary is: the Trinity is one true God and it is exactly true to say, believe and think that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are of one single and the same substance or essence'.<sup>59</sup> His elaboration of this doctrine relies heavily on the three sharing in common the one substance of divinity which is the nature of God. That which shares one nature with another can be spoken of individually as distinct from the other, but with regard to divinity, He distinguishes the difference

by positing alongside catholic teaching that there is one will, one essence, one power, one nature which is divinity. The unity of will and essence characterizes the unity of God such that what the Father is, the Son and the Holy Spirit also are.<sup>60</sup> Thus he affirms with both traditions from East and West, the principle of *mian ousia, tries substantia / hypostaseis / prosopon* for the Greeks, and among the Latins: One substance in Three Persons. God's unity is unique. The error of the contrivers of the Trinitarian faith is that they confuse the notion of the tri-unity in the Aristotelian lenses of genus and species<sup>61</sup> even though the term 'person' itself is not very exact in explaining the mystery of the Trinity.

He repeatedly sounded that there are not three Gods but one God such that despite the fact that the Father is God, the Son as well as the Spirit, God is never two but one as Tertullian's dictum holds: "if he is not one, is not God." Going through the portals of revelation and history of salvation, he discovers in the activities, actions and missions of the Triune God both within the immanent being of God and in the economy a unity which is made more manifest and pronounced in diversity.

The unity of God is so pervasive that Augustine would solicit its presence through the pages of salvation history beginning with the OT theophanies. The Scholastics explained this in the metaphysical principle by which action comes after being (*agere sequitur esse*). Since the substance of God is one and cannot be divided, Augustine draws the inference to the conclusion then that there is never a time one operates in isolation of the other. At creation, redemption or even at sanctification which is mostly attributed to separate actions of the Father, the Son or the Spirit, he does not see a 'time' when one is absent. Thus the principal actions of God with respect to human salvation are never at any rate exercised by the Father in isolation. The substance of God is one and unique that it can neither be split nor differentiated;

neither can anything be added to it nor can it be multiplied or divided. Augustine argues that since unity characterises the nature of God and his essence, it is untenable to conceive anytime when the Father is alone without the Son and the Spirit. This holds as true for him both in consideration of the *opera trinitatis ad extra* – in the creation of the world, the incarnation, and the world’s transfiguration, and in his *opera ad intra* “meaning by that the love of the Father and the Son, the love of the Son for the Father, and the glorification of the Father and the Son through the Spirit”.<sup>62</sup> The instantiations Augustine gave with the biblical images and theophanies suffice since for him, there may not be a clear demarcation of which of the three appeared to Abraham and the Patriarchs of Israel, or to the prophets.<sup>63</sup>

As God is one in his being, nature essence, substance, will, energy, he is equally one in his missions in the internal operations as in his external operations. What he is in his inner self becomes revealed in his *opera ad extra*. He is one both in his substance and in his essence. In his perfection, he cannot be one thing in the Godhead and show another thing of himself in the economy. Thus for Augustine, the action of God in the outside, too, is one. But the ascription of such as creation, redemption or sanctification/transfiguration to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is done by only appropriation. Thus the unity of the Three in the work of salvation is thus defended and elaborated to meet the intellectual demands of his time. In actual fact Augustine does not distinguish the one God from the Trinity since the one God is the Trinity and the Trinity also is the one God.

The economy reflects the action of the one God in the economy which are ascribed by appropriation to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that such that in this we say that the Father, the Son saves or the Spirit inspires.<sup>64</sup> And this unity of action reflects on

the other hand what God is in his intima self. Pittenger finely explains Augustine's teaching of this point this way:

... He accepted the divine unity in substance, in majesty, in activity, and in will. He stressed this unity to the point of insisting that even in that which God "does in creation" the unity is present: *Opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* – the works of God externally (in creation, revelation, redemption, and inspiration) are absolutely indivisible. Hence in each of these "works", the whole Godhead is involved and active. On the other hand, the several works are "appropriated" to the differentiations of Father (creation), Son (revelation and redemption), and Spirit (inspirations).<sup>65</sup>

According to this faith, in the one God there are Three Persons who, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is One God. In this lies the centrality of the clarifications he made on the doctrine of faith in the *De Trinitate* 6.7.8; 7.6.12; 2.13.23

#### 4.4.2 God is Trinity

The specific characteristic of the Christian faith lies in its confession in a Tri-une or Tri-personal God. Here oneness is figurative and yet real. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which this confession evokes and which Augustine vigorously defended and expounded, states that there are three persons in one God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Simply put, God is substantially one but three in Persons. The substance becomes a gauge against any misrepresentation of the divine nature. He put it straight and clear that God is not a triplex but Trinity.<sup>66</sup> The confusion with Aristotle's classification leads to a distinction within the Trinity that tends to multiply the being of God by positing a difference in God as in three different individuals in an

additive or divisive sense. For Augustine, the only one God is a Trinity. And against those who confuse the difference within the Godhead, he teaches that God is Trinity and the Trinity is one God.<sup>67</sup> He thus argues: “Neither in the Trinity is it one thing to be and another to be God; therefore the Father, son, and Holy Spirit, are one God” (*De Trin* 7.3.6). He stresses this by positing that each person is God, for instance, “both the Father singly is light, and the Son singly is light; and the Father singly is God, and the Son singly is God” (*De Trin* 7.3.4). He reiterates this in later in the last book: “For so also both the Father is God, and the Son God, and the Holy Spirit God, and all three together one God” (*De Trin* 15.17.28).

Over and over again, he addresses a theology of personal distinctions enunciated by the use of concepts. He chooses consubstantiality, person, nature, essence, generation, begetting and procession for this purpose, having for his guide an eye over the perennial teaching of the Church and the catholic theologians (his predecessors as well as contemporaries), but of note, he marks out the distinctions between the Trinitarian persons such that none contradicts the other. By substance he refers to the nature common to the Father and the Son and the Spirit by reason of which, in the first instance, the three intimate one divine unity. But by consubstantiality he refers to the very being of the three in the same divine nature such that the Son and the Holy Spirit have the same being and share the same nature with the Father as light from light; this as well hints to their personal distinctions by reason of which there is no confusion neither of nature nor of the being of each or all: “... He who is the Father is not the Son, and the Son is begotten by the Father, and so He is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but only the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, Himself also co-equal with the Father and the Son, and pertaining to the unity of the Holy Trinity” (*De Trin* 1.4.7). A little later, in the assertion, “the Father is not the Son and

the Holy Spirit, which is the Gift of God is neither the Father nor the Son” (*De Trin.* 7.3.5), he presents a basis to the ontological ground for the differentiation in the Godhead without touching the unity of substance through the employment of such relational terms as Father, Son, Gift, Generating, begetting.

#### 4.4.3 God is Relational

God is not only and simply one, he is thee; yet, he is not only and simply a Trinity, he is a dynamic of persons in relation. The terms used by Christian theology in speaking about the Trinity of God as ‘person’, ‘Father’, ‘Son’, ‘Gift’, ‘Generating’, ‘begetting,’ ‘proceeding,’ ‘sending,’ ‘sent,’ ‘communion’ and many others are used by Augustine to illustrate this relationality of God. Each evokes an idea of ‘otherness’ in the being of God. The relatants are distinct from one another. In this wise, a person, distinct from a substance, is a distinct subsistence.

While actually affirming the personal distinctions within God in his intimate self, Augustine uses them to highlight the relationship in the inner being of God in which the Lover, the Beloved and the Love between the two illustrate an interpersonal relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father is the Unbegotten Begetter of the Son; the Spirit is the spirit of the Father and the Son who proceeds from the Father and the Son. Their relationship in its perfection is described as communion and reciprocal reference such that the unity in God is a communion, hence its uniqueness. God becomes a community of persons bound up in a communion of love and life, marked by reciprocity and mutuality. Secondly, Augustine traces the relation of origin among the three where, like the East, especially the Cappadocians and later John of Damascus, the Father becomes the *mon-arche*, the source and principle of origin of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Thirdly, in the free flow of life and love, the Three, together join in the one mission *ad extra*.



He holds that no action of God is perfected or carried out by the Father alone in isolation of the Son and the Holy Spirit nor does the Father do anything which remains unknown to the Son and the Spirit. God who is one and three is at the same time a relational being.

The notions of the Father generating or begetting the Son which is taken by Praxeas to mean the same thing as creating<sup>68</sup> form the basis upon which Augustine introduces and explains the relationality inherent in the being and nature of God. Though the Arians led by Praxeas used these concepts along the same line with the certain statements of Jesus where he calls the Father and himself as the Son as well as the addresses in which Jesus depicts the Father as greater than the Son and the Spirit taking from the Son which are obvious languages of subordination. Augustine considers such an error of interpretations consequent upon the paucity of human language in expressing the inexpressible mystery. On the contrary, these concepts contain inherent richness of treasure for illumination. Begetting and generating do not evoke any idea of calling into either from something or out of nothing, into being, that which is quite distinct or similar from the begetter. Like Justin's analogy of the emission of light from source without suffering of diminution, so does divinity beget that which is same as itself without suffering or loss. The Father is such as Father for He begets, as in a principle from whom the Begotten is begotten. Moreover it is in the bestowal of the Spirit upon creation that Jesus sends the Spirit, he gives and the Spirit 'takes' from the Son. In this chiasmic presentation, especially in the *opera trinitatis ad extra*, there is no confusion neither of being nor action among the three Persons. The Three intimate a unity that there are not three Gods but one God, neither is there division, gradation, diminution or suppression of one by the others.

The language of 'person' and the theory of origination, where the concepts of begetting, being begotten, procession and principle remain the principal features of relationality within the being of God. Augustine affirms that God is a relational being by virtue of these concepts since there would be no idea of God as Father when, in relation to the Trinity, he is not Father to the Son, or conceiving the Son without evoking the idea of the Father. The Father is the Father because the Son is the Son and vice versa. Since the father and the Son are in a perfect flow of life and love, the Spirit is that which the Father and the Son give and receive from each other. He is defined as the Love of God, the Gift, Use, blessedness communion, of the Father and the Son. Thus the being of God is what it is by virtue of what each is to the other(s). Moreover, the Trinity presents God as a dynamic of persons in relation. The matrix of this relationship is not only to be seen in the unity of substance but the communion enunciated in the mutual indwelling from eternity of one in the other from all eternity.

#### 4.5 A Theological Synthesis of Augustine's *De Trinitate*

Out of the summary preface of *De Trinitate* 1.4.7, one draws three major theological themes that cut across the entire corpus of the entire work. The first is the unity of the Godhead expressed in the expression "on the Trinity which is God" (*De Trinitate quae Deus est*) in which the Father and Son and Holy Spirit make known a divine unity in the inseparable equality of one substance (*unius substantiae inseparabili aequalitate divinam insinuent unitatem*); the second, the Three persons belong equally to the unity of the Trinity since in the Father begetting the Son, the Father therefore is not the Son and the Son is not the Father (*et ideo filius non sit qui pater est*), in the same way, the Holy Spirit, is neither the Father nor the Son but only the Spirit of the Father and the Son, Himself co-equal to the Father and the Son, and belonging to the unity of

the Trinity. Thirdly, God reveals Himself as personally distinct in the economy since it was not the Three that was born of the Virgin Mary, nor experienced the passion and death nor rose from the dead nor ascended into heaven, but only the Son; in similar way, only the Holy Spirit was seen as a dove, only him came down in violent rushing gust and in divided tongues of fire; only the Father's voice was spoke from heaven, You are my Son either at the baptism (Mark 1:11), or on the mount (Matt 17:5), or when the resounding voice was heard: I have both glorified it (referring to the Son's name) and I will glorify it again (John 12:28). These events bespeak of separate actions of distinct persons with different personal characteristics, yet just as the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are inseparable, Augustine argues that the Three work inseparably (*inseparabiliter operunt*). This stresses the "otherness" inherent in the meaning of the term, "relationship".

A threefold understanding that best captures Augustine's argument and at the same time facilitates our reflection of God, the Blessed Trinity, not only in the dynamics of salvation history but moreso as a model of life for the human community imposes itself on us. In the first place we have the doctrinal import of the faith in one God. God is one and never two or more. The fundamental basis for this equality and inseparability is their being from one substance. The second, according to Ayres, there is an expansion of what it means for the Three to be one God by stating the logical irreducibility of the Three. The third is hermeneutical since it expands on this personal irreducibility to the point of according each of the divine Three a specific role in accordance with the example of evidence from Sacred Scripture and in accord with and fidelity to the practice of the Catholic Church.<sup>69</sup>

Augustine explains that the inseparable unity of the Divine Three does not contradict or conflict with the personal distinctiveness of each Divine Person. For him none is separated in the absolute

sense from the divine substance which is common to the Three and constitutes their common nature. Therefore what one is, the others are, and yet neither is the being of one consumed or annihilated by the being of another. One is where the others are and what one does, others also do.

Armed with this understanding of his teaching he embarks on a refutation of the *Homoian* demonstrations of Christ's subordination to the Father which he regards as a failure to understand the full implication and meaning of the incarnation. Books one to Three show the poise of Augustine against these pretensions. Defending the unity of the Three and the co-equality and thus denying any form of subordination, Augustine opens a vista for further inquiry into the nature of the unity in God which is rather 'constituted' in otherness or in plurality as we have seen. He gives a clarification therefore to those biblical texts which are held the Homoians in support of their subordinationist teachings. These elaborations, which have been more often used as basis for such distinction in Trinitarian treatises such as *de Deo Uno* and *de Deo Trino*, is interpreted today as favourable ground for discussing the Trinity as a model of life and a community. Faithful to this, we shall now turn to this new hermeneutic. We shall begin with its development along the line of theological history.

#### 4.6 The Trinity is a Community

The implication of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity comes out more in the light of the new hermeneutic. Against Kant who values the Trinity as a mere speculative conjecture, providing nothing, absolutely nothing, of value, even if one claims to understand it; still less when one is convinced that it far surpasses human understanding.<sup>70</sup> But today, the doctrine becoming a rich asset to humanity along the journey of rediscovery of meaning and life in a community, and belongingness. Contemporary theologians today

have arrived at such discovery in the Trinity. Augustine's theology and indeed the whole doctrine as expounded by both the Magisterium and individual theologians all point to the fact that God is interpersonal. He is relational; he is a community. A being that is at the same time one but who within his being is interpersonal as relational, a being within which the 'members' relate with each other in such a communion of life and self-giving such that despite the personal distinctions, there is no domination or oppression, there is no subordination of any kind, becomes a model and archetypal for the human community called to unity by the one God who subsists in unity.

We have drawn from Augustine that there is one God, that this one God is a Trinity and that there is relationality within the being of this one God, a relationship best described as a communion and which late Patristic and medieval theology has variously described as perichoresis, circumincession or its variant form, circuminsession, but which looked at in the modern lens today in the modern need for belonging, is not only called a community but presented as a model for living in society. The contemporary mindset challenged by the tragedy of brokenness is setting itself in search of a model of life that not only could soothe the wounds of factionalism and totalitarian forms of administration in all strata of life of which theologians propose that unless we take a return to the image of the maker in the world, humankind would continue to drift. In Augustine, the search was to explain and understand the mystery of God in the light of the Christian faith and to foster unity of faith among the doctrinally scattered Christians. But the emphasis in recent times goes beyond this and rather takes the direction of setting the faith on its redemptive mission. As Augustine sawn that the best place to seek the image of the maker would be in no other place than in the *imago trinitatis*, so has the contemporary theologians arrived at the unanimous conclusion that the Trinity is our "social programme" and way out of the human

quagmire in which the present age is enmeshed. Barth and Rahner began this demarche in their criticism of methods of Trinitarian theology which according to Rahner condemned the Trinity to mere textbook dogmatics, and picked up in the new hermeneutics by the appearance in history of such theologies that are built on the contexts in which the Church and the theologian, understanding the redemptive import of theology for life, finds himself or herself. Liberation theologians for instance has the Trinity as their social agenda, Thomas Bracken considers the collective substance as the basis of community, not supra-individuality, while Scirghi sees the Trinity as the model for belonging in contemporary society. Eco-feminist theologians see a trace in the rape of the woman as a reflection of the rape of the earth and call for a balance. In all these, there is a critique of the contemporary society in the light of a Trinitarian hermeneutics in which the human community is discovered to be drifting from the image of the maker. The call of these theologians and theology in general is the awakening in the human mind the image of the Trinity in mankind which St Augustine made more than a thousand years ago.

The argumentative justification that the Trinity is a community and as such the perfect one could be made when we take a look in the pages of the Sacred Writ and, beyond that, in the works of theologians across the ages. We may only take a cursory look at some of these instances.

#### 4.7 Scripture and the Tradition on the Doctrine of the Triune God

The Christian doctrine expresses a faith in One God who is a Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Though there is evidently no mention of the word "Trinity" nor is there anywhere in Scripture where it is stated categorically that God is One in Three persons, everywhere in Scripture are scattered indications (like pebbles for

the construction of a great mosaic) with which this doctrine of the Church would be constructed. Obviously, this confession, a specifically Christian form of speaking about God, emerges first as a synthesis of biblical faith in God and a recapitulation and summary of the entire Christian mystery of salvation. But to say the least, this Christian doctrine of the Trinity, though not clearly defined in Scripture, has its foundations in the OT expressions of the Jewish monotheistic faith but more clearly in the NT writings. In whichever, these Testaments paint the One God in a “we-image”. Since Biblical witness is the first source of theological research, we are going to take a cursory look at both Testaments to see what they have about this doctrine.

#### 4.7.1 The Old Testament

In consequence, belief in this One God is never to be compromised. Such a conception of God led to a development in early Jewish history of a vision of God that is uncompromising, unapproachable, all-holy, all-perfect, a totally other with whom humans. Like what exists between the potter and the earthenware jar, there exists between Him and humans a creator-creature relationship. It would be absurd therefore to imagine an inclusive language of God, or discuss shared life God as the “Trinity” suggests. The other two Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Islam stress this Oneness of God as unshared life, unshared divinity and unabridged Oneness: “I am the Lord, there is no other” (Isaiah 45:5; Deut 4: 35).

Nevertheless, in faint and veiled manners, the Old Testament contains indications and concepts upon which the Christian notion of a communitarian God is built. This finds basis in many OT imageries that showcase a form of “we-ness” or plurality in God (cf. Ps 42:3; 84:3; Jer. 10:10; 23:26; Dan 6:27, etc), the language-metaphors of “paternity – filiation” and the many personifications

of such concepts as the Divine Word (Ps. 119: 89; 147:15ff; Wisdom 16:12 and the Divine Spirit (Haggai 2:5, Neh 9:30; Is 63:10, Wisdom 1:7). In all this, God in his oneness and uniqueness is at the same time characterised by a “shared” life where God is speaking of himself in the plural. Indications are seen in Gen 1:26; cf 3:22; 11:7; Isaiah 6:8. According to the Fathers, these texts suggest an idea of plurality in God or that there is more than one person in God. Walter Kasper agrees that the “we – formulas” in the OT suggest that the God of the OT is a living God characterized by a superabundant fullness of vitality and compassion that depicts in a veiled form an idea of otherness. This provides us with a ground for a Trinitarian exegesis of various OT passages by the Church Fathers.

Accordingly, Anne Hunt makes this appraisal:

While the Old Testament evinces no sense of plurality in the Godhead, what it does provide is, first, a climate within which plurality was later conceivable and, second, a terminology with which to express that plurality. It is no accident, then that in the light of Trinitarian revelation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the New Testament writers employ notions of God as Father, Son, Word, Messiah, Wisdom, and Spirit to describe and to name the experience of the plurality of God in New Testament times. The Old Testament provided terminology and conceptuality for the threefold experience of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>71</sup>

**These are obvious blueprints with which later (NT and Christian) writers would apply in their God-talk. Summarily then, OT picture of the living God is not complete and finished but is rather open to the definitive revelation of God. It is only a shadow, of the good things to come (Heb 10:1).<sup>72</sup>**



#### 4.7.2 New Testament

The NT unequivocally gives answers to much of the questions left open in the OT. The oneness of God and the plurality of hypostases in the Godhead are expressed. The revelation of the Word in concrete human form in the Incarnation begins a clear manifestation of the mysteries spoken of in the OT in veiled and hidden language forms. This revelation is of utmost importance; upon it depend other revelations concerning the Trinity. The NT would no longer adopt the style of OT personification of concepts and ideas, but would rather speak of actual ontology through the use of direct, personal (*hypostases*), and relational terminologies (cf Heb. 1:1 – 3). God would now be spoken of as the Father and Holy Spirit and Son of God and Son of Man. Yet there is no place the NT specifically called God “Trinity”. Neither in the Synoptic, the Johannine, Pauline nor in other Christian literatures is such expression contained or clearly articulated. Nevertheless, the NT biblical data used by later ages (the Patristic, Medieval and even magisterial) in the articulation of this doctrine abound.

Theologians unanimously agree that these hypostasizations are contained in the speeches and teachings of Jesus about himself, the Father and the Holy Spirit (in the Gospel tradition – of both Synoptic and Johannine) while the Christian writings contain an expression of the faith of the authors, and invariably of the near apostolic times in a triadic form of speaking about the one God. Hunt writes:

... there are, of course, a number of scriptural cameos that iconically attest to an experience of the Three: the infancy narrative, the baptismal theophany, the story of Jesus’ temptations, the transfiguration, the farewell discourses in John’s Gospel, the ascension, Peter’s speech at Pentecost, the martyrdom of Stephen, and most importantly, of course,

the narrative of Jesus' paschal mystery of death and resurrection.<sup>73</sup>

But her study reveals that only very few texts make reference to the 'three *dramatis personae*' in the one text, the most notable example of which is the Matthean baptismal commissioning (Matt 28:19). Many texts refer to two of the three. While the Father – Son relationship is highly privileged, yet the Holy Spirit, according to Hunt, emerges with considerable vibrancy and with distinct personal reality. She instantiates this with the Paraclete passages in the Fourth Gospel and in Paul's Letters.

In these writings, God is more clearly presented in the image of the plurality of persons than in the OT. The clearest instances of these come from the baptismal theophanies (Matt 3:16-18; Luke 3:22) but more specifically and particularly the Matthean baptismal formula (Matt 28:19).<sup>74</sup> Paul in a similar vein presents in his Letters an image of three persons acting in concert in the drama of human salvation (Gal 4:4-6, Eph 4:4-6; Tit 3:4-6). Yet his explanation of the unity and multiplicity of charisma in the Church explain in a unique fashion Pauline Trinitarian faith; the unity of the Godhead (1Cor 12:4-6) and the personal distinctions. He uses this faith in a striking manner in his invocation of Trinitarian blessings upon his audience (2Cor 13:33). Kasper comments that Paul always resorted to a Trinitarian formula whenever he wished to express the fullness of the saving event and the reality of salvation.<sup>75</sup> His Trinitarian structure of the unity of the Church (Eph 4, 4-6) paraphrased by Cyprian of Carthage became definitive in the Vatican II definition of the unity of the Church (LG 4). The Johannine corpus, though does not contain in any clear fashion comparable to the Synoptic baptismal theophanies as in Matthean baptismal command, yet provides us with solid grounds for developing the Trinitarian dogma and theology. He distinguishes the personality of the Son and the Holy Spirit and their divinity

alongside those of the Father (John 14-16; John 17). The Johannine Comma which seems a later addition to the Johannine corpus is of particular importance in summarizing his Trinitarian faith (1John 4:2; 5:6-8) and especially the statement “There are three who give testimony in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these are one” (1John 5:7f) is of particular importance. The particular definition of God as love would be used greatly by St. Augustine in explaining the nature of God and relationality in God.

In summary, the NT does not contain any formal doctrine of the Trinity but it rather shows a triadic ground plan and formula upon which the Trinitarian doctrine of God would be developed. It leaves open the issue of the relation of the Son and the Holy Spirit to the Father as later controversies would amply demonstrate. However in a manner more explicit than the OT, the NT presents us, though not with the Trinitarian details, with its basic structure. We may notice that they never reflected on abstract terminologies like nature, substance, person, relation, etc. But in their simplicity of thought, they present the ideas imbedded in these in their own ways of expression or as Anne Hunt put it, they paved the way for the doctrine and

... attest to the vibrant lived experience in the early Christian community of the threefold structure of God’s self-revelation; they witnessed to the threefoldness of God as expressed in liturgical and sacramental practice; they provide intimations of a Trinitarian pattern; they provide a rhetoric for the expression of Trinitarian faith; and they provide the basis for later development of Trinitarian doctrine.<sup>76</sup>

The Johannine definition of God as love goes a long way to present the frame for developing these interpersonal and relational characteristics of divine life and to illustrate this in more

comprehensible terms. Suffice to say here that this threefoldness of God is the basis for any discussion of the Trinity as the community of God. The texts lay the foundation that will lead to the edifice that sees the one God who Augustine professed to be also the Trinity as a community of persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit in communion. Subsequent generation of Christian thinkers and Magisterial statements would offer distillation of the Trinitarian doctrine from these data.

#### 4.7.3 Tradition and Church Magisterium

The Magisterium which has ever understood her role and mission in interpreting the mysteries of faith, guarding it against error and exciting faith, has never failed to play this role in regard to explaining and defending as well as elaborating the Church's Trinitarian faith. First of all, "No other single doctrine of the Catholic faith has been more frequently or precisely taught by the Church than the mystery of the Trinity".<sup>77</sup> Invoking the power of the key, Peter began to play this role for the universal Church early enough in his post Pentecost catechesis and other activities recorded in the Acts (like at the election of Matthias (Acts 1: 15-26 for instance). In the opening of his pastoral letter, Peter writes:

Πέτρος ἀπόστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐκλεκτοῖς παρεπιδημοῖς  
διασπορᾶς ... κατὰ πρόγνωσιν Θεοῦ πατρὸς, ἐν ἀγίᾳ σμῶ  
πνεύματος εἰς ὑπακοὴν καὶ ῥαντισμὸν αἵματος Ἰησοῦ  
Χριστοῦ: χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη πλῆθυνθει

**(Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ to (the) chosen sojourners of dispersion... according to (the) foreknowledge of God Father, in sanctification of Spirit, to obedience and sprinkling of (the) blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace may it be multiplied; IPeter 1:1-2), Peter directly links the work of the Magisterium and its universal scope directly to the interpretation and explication of**

the Trinitarian mystery which is at the heart of the Christian faith. It is to Peter a pastoral concern in his duty as a shepherd to cater for the wellbeing of the flock of Christ entrusted to his care (cf. John 21:15-17).

One Synod after Synod, one Council after another, and one Symbol after another, arising from the bosom of the Church, each in its turn faced the issue of the Trinitarian faith giving clarifications on specific aspects of the faith with increasing sharpness to address each controversy as its came along. Nicaea I, for instance, dwelt on the divinity of God the Son and, through the concept of “Substance” (*ousion*), laid the intellectual foundation for addressing the unity of the Trinity in the One God. Constantinople I focused on the Holy Spirit and developed the concept of procession in regard to the origin of the Holy Spirit. Secondly the Council, modifying Nicaea I and supplying the missing link in the relationship between the Son and the Spirit developed the doctrine, not of the Ousion, but of the distinct hypostases of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and thus laid the foundation for discussing the dynamic conception of God as a relational being characteristic of the Eastern Trinitarian theology. The Council was convoked by Constantine at the instance of some strange doctrines of Arius in the Fourth Century, which denied the divinity of Christ by teaching a doctrine of the in a manner reminiscent to the subordinationism of Origen, stating in his Thalia that the Son therefore is “neither equal nor yet consubstantial with the Father (Thalia 8-9) and holding in consequence the following:

1. God is not always Father, for there was not always a Son
2. The Son, Logos, is a creature, made out of nonexistence.
3. The Son is variable- changeable by nature, and is stable by the gift of God
4. His knowledge of God and of himself is imperfect.

5. The Son was created by God as an instrument for creating the universe.
6. The Trinity is of unlike *hypostaseis*, any unity is purely moral, not ontological, dependent on will not essence.<sup>78</sup>

Kelly outlines some of the theological implications of Arius'.<sup>79</sup>

Summarily, the pre-Nicene Christianity saw a development of Trinitarian language to effectively discuss to a convincing point, the new phenomenon of plurality within the Godhead by which in unique a way, Christianity perceives the unity of God and expresses the faith in one God.

Without doubt that the written Tradition is the rich resource upon which the faith of the early Church was strongly built, we have in the various creedal Symbols an outline of this Trinitarian faith. Joseph Neuner and Jacques Dupuis have recorded about eleven of them (or twelve if we include the Athanasian *Quiquaque Vult*) up to the time of St. Augustine. In their compendium of the doctrinal documents of the Catholic Church, they explained that the Trinitarian faith is a further development to the basic (earliest) profession of faith in the apostolic Church. According to them, this is a natural evolution; for the Trinitarian confession was latent in the Christological (Acts 2:33) and implied in the early Kerygma (Acts 2:14-39; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32; 10:34-43; 13:16-41). The Trinitarian profession of faith in the New Testament is best witnessed to by Mt 28:19-20 and 2Cor 13:13; it corresponds to the Trinitarian teachings of the apostles (Eph. 1:3-4). The post-apostolic Church had inherited this apostolic faith in its elaborate form, and shown how the various expressions of this faith (the various faith Symbols), starting from the Apostles' Creed down the line of history had evolved. The Church's faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is the basic structure and secondly these Symbols have shown how in the course of history and under

specific concrete circumstances further precisions have been made to the primitive structure. These additions characteristically do not alter or obscure the fundamental aspects of the dogmatic truths, rather they highlight some or the other aspects of the faith.

The theology of these magisterial teachings holds and explains that the central mystery of the Christian faith is the mystery of the Holy Trinity. The General Catechetical Directory of April 11, 1971 of the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy (SCC) explained that its revelation (communication) corresponds to the way and the plan by which God reveals himself to humankind in the economy.<sup>80</sup> Its summary reflects in essence the opening words of the *Quicumque Vult*: “We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity.”

The magisterial decrees in Nicaea I and Constantinople I guard the articles of faith on two fronts: the truth of the relationships of the divine Nature and the divine persons by emphasizing the unity of Nature against those who obscure the distinction of Persons (Sabellians), or exaggerate the distinction of Persons at the expense of the unity of Nature (Tritheists). Secondly, it defends the understanding of the relationships between the Persons which have been attacked by the Arians (who proposed a false doctrine about the Son’s begottenness by the Father) or the Macedonians on the Holy Spirit’s procession from the Father and the Son. These Magisterial answers reveal an unfolding of the basic facts of revelation: the mystery of the one Triune God. The statements attest that there is one personal God; but in this God there are Three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Dionysius of Rome’s Letter to Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria (ca.260) concerning the unity and Trinity in God).<sup>81</sup> Each of the divine persons possesses the one divine nature<sup>82</sup> and in each, there is the whole undivided Godhead (fullness of divinity).<sup>83</sup> There is real distinction between the Three Persons.<sup>84</sup>

Later Councils after Augustine would further the clarifications. But suffice at this point that up to this time, the Magisterial teachings of the early Church had focused on the clarification of the Trinitarian faith of the Christians which originally was taken for granted but which had then come under heavy attack against the backgrounds of the Jewish monotheistic faith and the pantheistic background of the Greco-Roman world in which the pagan philosophy flourished. These clarifications became more demanding with sophisticated elaborations with the influx of Greek philosophy into the nascent Church. These currents were confrontational to the simple faith of the Christians and the Magisterial clarifications went a long way to provide a deepened insight into the Christian faith, protecting it from syncretism with the philosophical concepts and thus defending its purity from contamination while at the same time providing a base and a guide for theological reflection. The consequence is the rich Trinitarian heritage of the Christian faith.

Augustine, as both theologian and member of the Church hierarchy, stands a privileged ground to teach us on the being of God and what it has for us with the authority of an ecclesiastic. But before delving into Augustine, we shall first have a glance at the theological tradition before Augustine so as to appreciate more the problematic Augustine sets himself to handle.

#### 4.8 Theological Development Among the Patristics

John R. Wills has noted that the faith of the post-Apostolic Church was never shaken on the Triune God. indeed, he notes, it is clear from Tradition that God is Triune.<sup>85</sup> This is supported by Walter Kasper's definition that the Trinitarian confession is a specifically Christian characteristic since it is the Christian form of speaking about God.<sup>86</sup> The early post-Apostolic Church was fully aware of this Trinitarian structure of Christian salvation they had inherited it



from the Apostles and incorporated it in their worship: “The context from which the Trinitarian confession drew its life was not the pleasure in theoretical speculations but the life and practice of the Church, especially baptism and the Eucharist. The most important vital context (*Sitz in Leben*) for the Trinitarian confession of faith was baptism”.<sup>87</sup>

#### 4.8.1 The Post Apostolic Age

The writers of this age, drawing from the teaching of the Apostles and their experience of faith in the liturgical worship, put their wealth of knowledge and learning first to the explanations required from their pagan counterparts, and thus contributed in shaping and harmonizing the precise Christian belief about God who has, from biblical evidences revealed himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Walter Kasper<sup>88</sup> and Robert Letham<sup>89</sup> testify to this experience of faith as the predisposition for developing the Trinitarian faith. Their main concern was the bid to understand and speak about God who they know is uniquely one.<sup>90</sup> On the other hand, the appearance of the NT writings (including the Apocrypha), the Apostolic Tradition, and the popular faith of the Church has intimated a new nuance of plurality of divine persons in the one God. More exactly, the liturgical formulas and early catechetical practices of the Church referred to the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ or to the Father the creator, His Son and the Holy Spirit.<sup>91</sup> Their contribution lies more on laying down of a tradition of a triadic schema upon which a “...more developed description of the Christian doctrine of God would come”.<sup>92</sup>

#### 4.8.2 The Apologists and the Pre-Nicene Patristic Theologians

J. N. D. Kelly states that the discussion on the Divine Triad was the most important in pre-Nicene theology.<sup>93</sup> From both East and West, along parallel lines, these developed from the deposits of

faith as the young Church penetrated the more into the milieu in which it found herself. As guide, the Church relied on the Apostolic and Post-Apostolic teachings; it never lost focus on the witness of the Sacred Writ as it sought to interpret the Sacred Texts in Greco-Roman philosophical conceptual template. Particularly, the context provided the raw data based on the *rencontre* of the biblical faith, the apostolic teachings, and the fruits of learning from the then academic world, fanned by the zeal to preach the Gospel and the urgent demand to sharpen its perspective against the intellectual trends of the time, which the Magisterium and her theologians would use for the definition of the Trinitarian confessions and implicitly attest to the reality of community life in God. Faced with sincere challenges of strict monotheistic faith and the account of salvation experienced through Christ's life and resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit and most importantly the illuminating authority of the scriptures in a religiously heterodox society, "... the insights of cultivated reason as it strove to understand and interpret the created world and human life..." were the first factors that fuelled the development of Trinitarian theology.<sup>94</sup> The bone of contention was firstly, how to relate this encounter with their experience of the encounter with Jesus, the Son of God who, together with Abba, gave them the divine Spirit. In consequence, the Letter of Pope Dionysius (d. 268) showed a fear of the heterodox option of Tritheism while Sabellians took rigidly the monotheistic faith to the point of sacrificing the personal distinctions of the Son and the Spirit. Against such polarities, the theologians sought "a fine line" between tritheism and modalism.<sup>95</sup> This was the case Augustine is addressing in his *De Trinitate*.

The Apologists taking over from the Apostolic Fathers continued in the outline of their predecessors, in defending the triadic structure of their faith that would result in subsequent generations to the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. Doctrinally, they affirmed

the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the personal distinctions of the Three in the Godhead and more specifically, identified Christ with the Son of God and largely defended the Logos. However they did not have much on the Holy Spirit despite the efforts of Justin and Athenagoras who, using the vocabulary of the Apostolic Fathers, “coordinated” the Spirit with the Father and the Son in baptismal and Eucharistic formulas. Athenagoras for instance called him “an effluence of God” while Theophilus identified him with wisdom. They merely ascribed to him the work of prophetic inspiration and often confuse the use of “Spirit” to express the pre-existent nature of Christ. At any rate, there was still no clearly distinct conception of divine person or divine nature though Theophilus was the first to use the term “*trias*” in speaking about the being of God. Their stress over the unity of God only came later to be expressed as a unity of substance or ‘essence’.<sup>96</sup>

Later generation of theologians, beginning with Justin the Martyr (d. ca 165), Irenaeus of Lyons (d. ca 200), Tertullian (d. ca 220) and Origen (d. ca 254) would add clarity to the Trinitarian development of their time. They “...lived, taught, and wrote at a time when the Christian canon, or normative list of authoritative scriptures, was being formed”.<sup>97</sup> Of particular importance is Justin’s introduction of the analogous technique into theological discourse. The sun, ray or fire kindling another fire, are used as analogies to explain the shared life in God. By the use of these analogies, he cancels the notion of “amputation” in the divine “essence” (*Dialogue*, 128) and thus anticipates the Nicene “consubstantiality” of the Father and the Son, and applied the Light from Light (*Lumen de Luminem*) metaphor in this understanding (expressing this the eternal begetting from the divine essence (*ousia*). He spoke of God in relation to Gen 2:26 in the plural (*Elohim*).<sup>98</sup> Irenaeus, like Justin, defended the one God, the eternal pre-existence of Jesus and his divinity. His *Adversus Haeresus* contained an outline of his Trinitarian doctrines and his

major objections to the heretical teachings of Marcion and the Gnostics.<sup>99</sup> He “identifies the one true God with the creator of the world, the God of OT, and the Father of the Logos and proves the existence of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>100</sup> And set up what is called the “true gnosis”, which was “the teaching of the apostles and the ancient doctrinal structure of the Church that is meant for the entire world” (*Adv. Haer* 4.33.8) as his specific response to Gnostic claim of “special illumination”.

The highpoint of his doctrine of God takes the form of his “rule of faith” which states:

For the Church, although scattered throughout the whole world as far as the limits of the earth, has received as handed down from the apostles and their disciples its faith in one God the Father almighty, who made the heaven and the earth and the seas and all the things in them; and in one Christ Jesus the Son of God, who was made flesh for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets proclaimed the saving dispensation.<sup>101</sup>

This served him as the kernel of the Christian doctrine. It is Trinitarian in structure. He illustrates the personal distinction and the unity of the three as well as the transcendence of Father (interpreting alongside Justin, Genesis 1:26)<sup>102</sup> with the analogy of the human body with two hands. The Son and the Holy Spirit are the two hands with which the Father carried out the work of creation. He thus safeguarded the transcendence and invisibility of the Father. For Irenaeus, these two hands played mediating roles in the work of creation and providence.<sup>103</sup> Thus he unflinchingly taught that there is one God, the Father and the Son who was with the Father and the Spirit who was present with him before all creation (*Adv Haer.* 4.20.2-4). These constitute a clear and lasting

major objections to the heretical teachings of Marcion and the Gnostics.<sup>99</sup> He “identifies the one true God with the creator of the world, the God of OT, and the Father of the Logos and proves the existence of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>100</sup> And set up what is called the “true gnosis”, which was “the teaching of the apostles and the ancient doctrinal structure of the Church that is meant for the entire world” (*Adv. Haer* 4.33.8) as his specific response to Gnostic claim of “special illumination”.

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contribution to theology.<sup>104</sup> Tertullian made a laudable contribution to the development of this doctrine with the aid of a theological language with which an advanced clarification of the doctrine was made before St. Augustine. His most important contribution to the development of Trinitarian doctrine lies in his use of a novel theological language in speaking about the Trinity. He wrestled the word “*persona*” (person) out from pagan usage and used it to describe the ineffable mystery of the Trinity and while dropping the Latin “*essentia*” (essence), he employed the Latin “*substantia*” - Greek *Ousia* - (substance) in speaking about the common fundamental reality shared by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. “*Persona*” (Greek *prosopon*) meant the principle of operative individuality. He wrote of God’s one “substance” and three but undivided “persons” in which the distinction (not separation) of the persons does not compromise the unity of the substance and the true divine monarchy.<sup>105</sup> This formula “One God three persons” is summarized in the concept of “*Trinitas*” (Trinity). He was the first to apply it to God (*De Pudicitia* 21.16; *Adv. Prax.* 8). By this, he would speak of an unruffled unity in diversity witnessed first in Gen 1: 26. Tertullian’s works stand out most in his painstaking effort to show how God is differentiated in the form of a Triune unity and with the use of three material analogies picked from the Scripture of the sun light and radiance (cf Ps 27:1; Luke 2: 78-79; John 9:5; Acts 2:3 and Heb 1:3); tree, root and shoot (cf., 1 Cor. 15:20; Gal 5: 22; 6:8); and source, river and canal (cf Jer 2: 13; John 7:38-39; Rev 22:1; *Adv. Prax.* 8): He shows thus the unity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in the substance with the Father, by which the three share the same nature (being, divinity) while at the same time being distinct persons:

The Son not other than the Father by separation from him but by difference neither of function, nor by division but by distinction... The Father is the whole substance (of deity), while the Son is derivative and a portion of the whole ...

The Father is other than the Son, as being greater, as he who beget is other than the begotten, the sender than the sent, the creator than the agent of creation.<sup>106</sup>

Thus, for Tertullian, the monarchy is preserved. The two (Son and Holy Spirit) distinct persons who had been with the Father from all eternity are different from the Father as can be seen from the names (*Adv Prax*, 10). His concepts are not only influential to Nicene and Latin theologies, Ayres would find them very resourceful for the development of Augustine's Trinitarian doctrine.

Origen continued the tradition of his immediate predecessors in upholding the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three hypostases or distinct subsistent realities who share in the one divine nature. But he had a problem in his effort to illustrate the oneness of being with the Father in the analogy of "Light from Light" as Justin and Tertullian had done. His statement that "God is Light, according to John, the beam of this Light is the only Son; he proceeds inseparably from him as the beam from the light, and illumines all creation..." (*De Principii*, 1.27) is imbedded with Subordinationism since, according to him, the Father alone is "Unbegotten"; the Holy Spirit in came into being through the Word who is anterior to the Spirit (*Comm. in Ioanem* 2.10). There is then sequence in God, though he explained this to be in the "supra-temporal" sense (*De Principiis*, 4.4 28). But it implies that the Father excelled the Son and the Holy Spirit "to the same or even greater degree" as the two excel all created things (*Comm. in Ioanem*, 13.25). Arius would exploit this in denying the true divinity of the Son and the Spirit.

Summarily, the pre-Nicene Christianity saw a development of Trinitarian language to effectively discuss to a convincing point, the new phenomenon of plurality within the Godhead by which in

unique way, Christianity perceives the unity of God and expresses the faith in one God. During the age, two traditions emerged: the Apostolic Fathers who laboured to explain the tradition they got from the Apostles, and the Apologists who, first, defended the Church against attack from without and from within and went further to seek a language that would appreciate the elements of Christianity without compromising the fundamental contents of the faith. Through the help of Greek philosophy and in the bid to clarify orthodoxy against heretical and syncretistic views, the Church of the time clarified her belief in a God who is a community of persons who live and share a community of life. The climax of such clarifications is at Nicene I. The clarifications of the Council were very fundamental to the theologians of the era in the ensuing debates against the Arians and other Homoians. For the Council, God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a Trinity of being, a community of persons where there is one and one is three.

#### 4.8.3 Post Nicene - Constantinopolitan Trinitarian Teaching

The Council of Nicaea (325 AD), as we have seen in the earlier section, clarified in an authoritative manner the position of the Church against the unorthodox teachings of Arius and other heterodox groups. The Council's position and concepts, reflecting the thought of the time, laid the foundation which subsequent generations of Christians would see as the benchmark for orthodoxy. This Council affirms in the concept of "consubstantiality" and the being of God as shared life, as a community bound in communion. It confesses at the same time the oneness of God as well as the unity of Three distinct Persons within this Godhead. Its

“... creedal confession presents a divine communication in creation and salvation history that presupposes an eternal communion within God: the Father, the only begotten Son,



and the “proceeding” Holy Spirit. In particular, God’s self-communication ad extra through the mission of the Son... and the Spirit... in the history or “economy” of salvation presupposes and reflects the self-communication ad intra: the eternal generation of the Son and procession of the Spirit”.<sup>107</sup>

The 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the development of the Magisterial Trinitarian definition in its golden age. The development showed that the reception and interpretation of the pronouncements of Nicaea and Constantinople were an on-going process. This includes a realization that there were ‘divergences’ in the reception of those definitions, especially among theologians. Anne Hunt observes that this period was marked by a need: how to talk coherently and intelligibly about the reality of God as both three and one. Clearly, precision in terminology and clarity in conceptuality are required. Conceptual clarity demanded terminological clarity.<sup>108</sup> Paul M. Collins remarks that such divergence in reception may be more than hermeneutical and even so political.<sup>109</sup> True to Hunt’s remark, the difference arises from the basic language of speaking about God.<sup>110</sup> With this was born the two traditions of East and West. This was the case during the time of Augustine who is blamed for initiating a new curve in Trinitarian reflections particularly, the Cappadocian Fathers.

Prestige explains this divergence between the East and the West (Latin). Through different routes, according to him, Fathers of the Fourth Century constructed a classic exposition of the Trinitarian doctrine of the Nicene orthodoxy. As the Latin, aware of the subtlety of Greek thought, following the lead of Augustine, conceived God as one object and three subjects (*una substantia tres personae*), the Greeks, in defence of the language of tradition and the teaching of the Bible, wished to infer from the Biblical data what God really is, and thus understood God to be an

objective being who is also three objects.<sup>111</sup> The Greeks, led by the Cappadocians, emphasized as their starting point, the social or communal lay out of this doctrine of God drawing from their communal experience of worship, while the West, through Augustine, “riveted on the essential unity involved in the divine triplicity, and a road was paved to the conception of the mutual interpenetration of the Three Persons”.<sup>112</sup> Since all these are efforts to assimilate fully the Tome of Constantinople 1 (one God in three Persons) and so solidly establish it, the concern of both East and West including Augustine was how to reply to the problem.

#### 4.8.3.1 The Eastern Fathers

Among these theologians from the East are St Athanasius and the development of his Trinitarian doctrine shines out more in his long controversy with Arianism and the background history of the Nicene Council of 325 AD. He defended the non-biblical terms of Nicaea I in his *De decretum (Letter concerning the Decrees of the Council of Nicaea)* and developed his doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the *Letter to Serapion* against the Macedonians/Pneumatomachi where he taught the strict identity of substance as the divinity of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit<sup>113</sup> and taught the unity in the Trinitarian activity as a portrayal of the power of communitarian life characteristic of God: “The Father does all things through the Word in the Spirit. Thus the unity of the Holy Triad is preserved”.<sup>114</sup> The questions arising from these thus provided the spark that determined the take-off approach of the Cappadocian Fathers: Basil, Gregory Nazienzus and Gregory of Nyassa. Each highlighted an aspect of the question. For instance, Basil’s *De Spiritu Sancto* argues from what the Holy Spirit does: sanctification to establish his divinity. Gregory Nyassa argued that there are not three gods or three separate divine subjects. Their formula of *mian ousia, tries hypostaseis* depended, according to LaCugna, on a precise distinction between *ousia and hypostasis*.

*Ousia* (*physis, theotēs*) is equivalent to what is common (*koinon*) to the persons, *hypostasis* (along with *idiotēs* and *prosopon*) to what is proper and distinct.<sup>115</sup> Since the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the *hypostaseis* of the *ousia*, the distinctiveness of the *hypostaseis* then lies in their identified characteristics (*gnōristikai idiotētes*) which for Gregory Nazianzus are seen in the two principles of “unbegottenness” and “begottenness”. The Father is identified as the Unbegotten (*agennetos, αγεννητος*), hence the Principium sine principio in Latin while the Son is the Begotten (*γεννητος, gennetos*)<sup>116</sup> whose “begottenness” is from all eternity. Between them exists a relationship of origin where the Father, as the “Unbegotten Begetter”, is the origin or source of the Son while the Son is the eternally “Begotten” of the Father, hence the appellation: the Eternal Son of the Father. Basically, they taught that the Three – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – are distinct from one another to the point that the Father (the Unbegotten) is neither the Son (the Begotten) nor the Holy Spirit; the Begotten not the Holy Spirit (the Breathe) nor the Father, and so on, since there is a relative opposition between them.

The next element in Eastern Trinitarian theology is the unity of the Godhead. Whereas the West could insinuate an idea of “substantial unity” which is commonly possessed by the Three Divine Persons, the East subscribed to a relational unity whereby the Three relate with one another in a manner quite strange to any form of created relationalities. The East hold on to the same inherited truth of faith which confesses that there are Three Persons in One God. Not three Gods; there is rather a “three-in-one” where as the three distinct hypostaseis are enjoying a unique unity, infinitely closer than that between any three human persons. Central to the theology of the Cappadocians, is the interpersonal communion or Koinonia among the Divine Persons. Thus the One God is presented as a relational being in his inner self. Each person is conceived as being totally related to the other two in “a reciprocal delight”. Basil, for

instance wrote: "We cannot conceive of either Father or Son apart from their relationship with each other"<sup>117</sup> Thus, by this communion, which will reach its full theological hiatus in John of Damascus, we see the being-in-one-another of the Trinity as a form of speaking of the community in God. While underscoring, in such conceptions, an infinitely radical intersubjectivity in God, the Cappadocians favoured a descending view of the Trinity where the Father becomes the unoriginated fountainhead of divinity.

The vision of the shared life of the Trinity reached its climax in John of Damascus' doctrine of "perichoresis." Following the trend of the Cappadocians, the centre point of Damascene's Trinitarian writings would be found in the third part of his *De fide Orthodoxa*. His distinctive contribution is the full development of the social or communal orientation of the doctrine of the Trinity in the concepts of "perichoresis". In line with Basil for whom there is unity of *ousia* and unity of rule, and John of Damascus taught the indivisibility and the unity of God: "For verily there is one God, and his Word and Spirit".<sup>118</sup> By this, he explains the inner relationship among the Three:

the Persons dwelling one another, in no wise confused but cleaving together... for... they are made one not so as to commingle, but so as to cleave to each other, and they have their being in each other without any coalescence or commingling.<sup>119</sup>

The Three thus help, open up to, and depend upon each other in mutuality of love and self-accomplishment and in their origin, such that, in respect to their origin, the Father is the only cause in the Trinity. Through the dominating ideals of *Nous*, *Logos* and *pneuma*, John expresses in a single movement the fact that the Spirit reveals the Word and the Word reveals the Father. Finally,

the Son himself provides the basis of the work that is wanted by the Father and perfected by the Holy Spirit.<sup>120</sup>

In a manner characteristic of all Eastern Fathers, John began from the distinctness of the Three Divine Persons. He followed this up with his gradual moved towards the unity in the Godhead through the relationship among the Three Divine Hypostaseis. But in this reflection, the Holy Spirit stands the unique ground of being the medium (middle position) between the Father and the Son. Chiastically, he is connected to the Father through the Son (John of Damascus, *De fide orth.* 1, 13).

Fortman comments that despite the apparent subordinationism of the approach from the Persons to the nature and the overwhelming importance of the Father as against the Son and the Spirit, the East resorted to avoiding elaborate systematization of Trinitarian doctrine, but preferred to present a simple Trinity as the object of their faith and worship. He expressed the charge of many theologians that their Trinity is limited to the Trinitarian doctrine of the first Seven Councils which had no serious issue over the *filioque* before Photius in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The Eastern Fathers have ever since John of Damascus harnessed the import and developed the doctrine of the social Trinity. This has assumed a noble dimension since the Twentieth century especially in the works of Lossky, Frank Gavin, Thomas Hopko, Aristotle Papanikolaou and more importantly, John Zizioulas. Their motto which has been appropriated by Liberation theologians of Latin America says: “the Trinity is our social agenda”. The stress here is on the place of the Holy Spirit in the mission of God and in the economy. In the economy, Hopko summarises this agenda: “he is the Spirit whom Christ sent into his Church to complete his work and make him present to the world in the unity of the one body as well as in the multiplicity of the brothers who are anointed with him as ‘Christ’s to be also sons of the heavenly Father: gods by the gracious

unction of the Holy Spirit”.<sup>121</sup> They anticipate to a large extent the theological language of a much later age which speaks of God as a communion, as much as it foreshadows the contemporary definition of personhood in today’s world as a being who is predisposed to relationship with the “other”. It is gaining much attention in the West today.

#### 4.8.3.2 The Western Fathers

The doctrinal content of the Trinitarian doctrine which has been definitively synthesized into the faith Symbols of Nicaea I and Constantinople I continued to be firmly defended and elaborated (classified) in the works of subsequent theologians, especially by Ambrose, Victorinus, Hilary of Poitiers and many others in the West. Ayres reports that Augustine had been greatly influenced by the works of his predecessors. According to LaCugna, they achieved their feat by the use of certain (chosen) technical concepts like “person” (Greek, *hypostasis*) and substance (*ousia*) “and refined them to accommodate theological concerns in order to affirm that the nature of the one God is unthinkable apart from God’s concrete existence in the economy of redemption in the Persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”.<sup>122</sup> Among this long list of Post-Conciliar theologians, Augustine occupies a special position in the Western Church and is highly recognised as the brain behind the split in the theological traditions of the East and the West. However, John R. Willis, in the two-fold schemata of his *The Teachings of the Church Fathers*, acknowledges the contribution of other Fathers, but asserted that “Augustine towers over all of them in significance,” especially in articulations on the One God.<sup>123</sup> Concerning the Triune God, however, Willis asserts in like manner, that “All of these strands,” in reference to the teachings of the other Fathers on the Triune God, “come together and are integrated in a complete and meaningful whole by St. Augustine where the monumental work, “On the Trinity” (*De*

*Trinitate*) is a summary statement of Trinitarian doctrine”<sup>124</sup>. Augustine towed the line of his pro-Nicene predecessors, in maintaining the unity of the Godhead as well as the personal distinctions between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity. Though *De Trinitate* is not his only Trinitarian writing,<sup>125</sup> it is his most significant work on this subject.<sup>126</sup> He holds on to the Church’s Trinitarian faith and teaches the divinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit while maintaining their substantial unity.

He argues in his *De Trinitate* against the notion that the substance of the Trinity is anything other than the Father, Son, and Spirit:

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are the Trinity, but they are only one God; not that the divinity, which they have in common, is a sort of fourth person, but the Godhead is ineffably and inseparably a Trinity.<sup>127</sup>

The ground for the unity of the three is ascribed to be their inseparable one and the same substance, or, essence. The Trinity is of one substance and that the essence is nothing else than the Trinity itself.

Significantly, Augustine:

... distinguished between the visible (incarnation and Pentecost) and invisible missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit. With remarkable insight, he recognised that the missions reveal the processions; in other words, the missions are the processions revealed in time. He distinguished between mission and procession, in terms of temporal and eternal, ad extra and ad intra. He distinguished between substantial and relational categories (categories relating to substance and categories relating to

relations), and this distinction provided a coherent framework within which to accommodate both the distinction among the Three (in terms of relational categories) and the unity of the one God (in terms of substantial categories).<sup>128</sup>

As the Three are united in their intimate being, the works of the Trinity *ad extra* are indivisible, as from one principle.<sup>129</sup> However since each possesses the divine nature in a particular manner, it becomes proper to attribute to each of the Three a role that is appropriate to the particular divine person. By virtue of this doctrine, wisdom is appropriated to the Son, love to the Holy Spirit; and the work of creation to the Father, redemption to the Son, and sanctification to the Spirit.<sup>130</sup>

Though in content, Augustine shares a lot of similarities with the Cappadocians, such as the distinction of the Three in terms of relations of origin or mutual relations within the one Godhead (Father, Unbegotten; Son Begotten; the Holy Spirit their common gift, bond of communion, the mutual love of Father and Son) and an understanding their unity in a perichoretic way, for the Three are “each in each, and all in each, and each in all, and all in all, and all are one”.<sup>131</sup> Yet he differs from the Cappadocians by choosing a different starting point. He began his reflections in the *De Trinitate* with the unity in God and only moved gradually towards the Persons thus moving in the opposite direction from the Cappadocians. Above all, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. This inclusion of the Son to the principle of origin of the Holy Spirit<sup>132</sup> heightened the tension between the East and the West and became a cardinal point in the divergence of the theological approaches of the East and the West as much as it served the doctrinal basis for the Schism of 1054.<sup>133</sup> The inclusion of “and the Son” (*filioque*) to third section of the Nicene Creed was



to prove so vexatious and so costly, contributing in a large measure to the schism between the Church in the East and in the West.<sup>134</sup>

Augustine invokes the use of a number of illustrations which he split between vestiges and analogies to explain the mystery of the Trinity. His final adoption of the psychological analogies was fundamentally based on the biblical understanding of the human person as created in the image of God (Gen 1:26). In this analogy, the inner-Trinitarian processions of Word and Spirit are tentatively explained chiefly in terms of our conscious experience of the mental acts of knowledge and loving and willing. They help us to grasp how God can be at the same time one and three. Augustine has nearly twenty triadic psychological analogies in the *De Trinitate* (Augustine, *De Trinitate* 9 – 11; 14). At the end of it all, he concludes: “Now this Trinity of the mind is God’s image, not because it has the power also to remember, understand and love its Maker”.<sup>135</sup> Pius XI gave a wonderful appraisal of Augustine and his *De Trinitate* in the *Encyclical, Ad Salutem* of April 30, 1930 on St Augustine commemorating by it the 15<sup>th</sup> centenary of Augustine’s death. According to the Holy Father, Augustine taught about the “Trinity of Father and Son and Holy Spirit in the unity of the Divine Nature” and recalled the exact words that are central to his doctrine of the Trinity:

In the Trinity we predicate as distinctive of the several Persons the relations that exist among them, as Father and Son, and Holy Spirit, the Gift of both. For the Father is not the Trinity, nor is the Son the Trinity, nor is the Gift the Trinity. But this distinction of Persons with respect to one another, is not to speak to them in the plural as three (in nature), but as one, namely, the Trinity itself. Thus the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Ghost is God. So too the Father is good, the Son is good, the Holy Ghost is good. Again the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the

Holy Ghost is almighty. But that does not mean that there are three gods, three goods, three almighty natures, but one God who is good, almighty, the Trinity. The same form is to be followed, when there is question, not of their relations to one another, but of any attribute shared by each and all in common. For in this way they are described according to their essence. In the Trinity the essence, greatness, goodness, wisdom are without difference, and so every absolute attribute predicable of a Person in himself or of the whole Trinity.<sup>136</sup>

He explained Augustine's analogies as illustrations to enable some understanding of the mystery<sup>137</sup> and speaks of the consubstantiality of the Persons (*cf.*, *De Trin.* 15. 21. 40) the relation of origin by which the Spirit is recognized as the mutual love of the Father and the Son (*cf.*, *De Trin.* 15. 17. 27) and the eschatological moment for the perfection of the Divine Image which had already been impressed within us (*cf.*, *De Trin.* 14. 19. 25).

#### 4.8.4 Trinitarian Theology In Medieval And The Scholastic Period

Post – Augustinian West copied from his approach in upholding as point of departure the nature of God before the persons as much as the inclusion and defence of the *filioque* clause in the creed. Along these lines, there was no much advancement. They carried on with the use of analogies as metaphors in the bid to understand the Trinity. The area that witnessed the greatest is on the concept of the person which Augustine had found very problematic, especially in explaining the infinite mystery of God. In this respect Boethius, Thomas Aquinas and Richard of St Victor were very outstanding. But more importantly, doctrinal developments on the Trinity reached a great height during the Scholastic period

especially in the works of Thomas Aquinas, Richard of St Victor, Bonaventure and Julian of Norwich.

For Thomas Aquinas, God is the perfection of being. Beginning under the influence of Augustine, he reverses Augustine's historical approach which begins with the missions of the Son and Spirit and rather chooses to begin with the explication of the mystery of the Trinity with a consideration of the processions, then moves to the relationships of the divine Persons ad intra, and finally to their missions ad extra.

His fundamental thesis holds that God exists in processions, relations and in persons. Relation, a development of Augustine's thesis, developed by Thomas, is the supreme ontological predicate of Being which may be real (belonging to the very nature of something eg, God the Father and the Son) same nature or logical (accidental, eg, location). Divine persons arise out of real relations. Thus the divine processions are therefore based on the immanent activity in God. In all, the divine persons are distinguished by two processions of Begetting and Spirating, four 'relations of opposition' (fatherhood, sonship, spiration and procession) that give rise to three persons since only three out of the four relations are self-constituting.<sup>138</sup> The consubstantiality of the Word and the Love is ensured by his clarification of the notion of procession in God: "... one must understand that in God procession corresponds only to an action which remains within the agent himself, not to one bent on something external" (*Summa Theol. 1, q. 27a3*). Thomas thus refines Augustine's more intuitively and subjective interior approach to the psychological analogy that was grounded on the experience of human consciousness in an exacting methodological rigour and finesse that made it the most privileged and essential method of explication of the Trinity for subsequent ages.<sup>139</sup>

As Augustine abandoned the analogy of interpersonal love because of its lack of consubstantiality in preference for the intrapersonal or psychological analogy (St Augustine, *De Trin* 8.14; 9.2; 15.10), Richard of St Victor rather undertakes a psychological exploration of interpersonal love in his set task of using human love to demonstrate the mystery of the Trinity. He considered human love to be an image of divine love. He agrees with Augustine that the human person is the image of God in creation. Thus human self-transcending love would provide an image of the exemplar which is God's intra-Trinitarian love. His theological assumption is that there must be a plurality of persons in the Godhead<sup>140</sup> and basing his work of the frame of the fullness and perfection with regard to God, then he holds that God must possess all attributes in their perfection. In this understanding, therefore, he possesses charity in its highest form (cf Richard of St Victor, *De Trinitate*, 5. 7). Charity involves another; hence the greatest charity would be self-transcending. Within God, this requires another who is equal with the Lover (*condimus*)<sup>141</sup> so as to facilitate mutuality in the love (cf Richard of St Victor, *De Trinitate*, 3.14). Supreme charity therefore requires a consummation of the mutual love of the lover and the beloved with a third coequal one. Thus the fulfilment of mutual love is not just love (*dilectio*) but shared love (*condilectus*). All three share the one love, each in a mode unique to a person (Richard of St Victor, *De Trinitate*, 5.16). Thus shifting from the Augustinian triad of Lover-Beloved-their Mutual Love to the triad of symmetrical and consubstantial interpersonal relations between equals, where there are no hierarchy and where each person is at once lover and beloved. Richard carried Augustine theory of mutual indwelling or circumincession to a higher plane. Commenting of Richard's book on the Trinity, in his *Weekly Catechesis of Nov.25, 2009*, Benedict XVI presents to his audience that the divine life is a community of Persons, characterized by mutual giving and receiving between two Persons which finds its

perfection in the creation of a third.<sup>142</sup> Summarily put, **God is a Trinity of love.**

Bonaventure and Julian of Norwich intimated the use of **the Trinity** as a model for creation. According to Bonaventure, **creation is a book** in which the Trinity shines (Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 2.12). The whole world is the handwork of God which like an artwork has profound implications for our understanding of our relationship to and responsibility regarding the cosmos and thus provides a rich resource for an eco-theology. And for Julian, a woman mystic who conceived God to be both our Father and our Mother, in her *Revelations of Divine Love*, presents an account of her visions of God in the language of Augustine:

suddenly the Trinity filled my heart fully of the great joy, and I understood that it will be so in heaven without end to all who will come there. For the Trinity is God, God is the Trinity. The Trinity is our maker, the Trinity is our protector, the Trinity is our everlasting lover, and the Trinity is our endless joy and our bliss, by our Lord Jesus Christ and in the Lord Jesus Christ".<sup>143</sup>

In *Showings (Long Text chap. 58)*, she spoke of the motherhood of God: "I saw the working of the whole blessed Trinity. In seeing this I saw and understood these three properties: the property of the Fatherhood, the property of the motherhood and the property of lordship in one God". She addresses God in this term: "As truly as God is our father, so truly is God our mother" (*Showings chap. 59*).

One of the greatest advancements made in this period is the **development of the concept of 'person'** which Augustine had found very problematic. Boethius used it first to distinguish **between a divine person'** from creatures. He saw a 'person' as an

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individual substance of a rational nature'.<sup>144</sup> This is found to create problems by insinuating three substances in the one God (for Aristotle, substance can be understood as the quiddity of a thing (*ousia, essence*) or that which underlies something (*hypostasis* – an individual substance). It could mean three substances in God. Richard of St Victor tried to remedy the divine substance by defining the divine person specially as an incommunicable existence of the divine nature' which ensures in the final analysis little or no difference from Boethius.<sup>145</sup> Thomas' redefinition sees the person as a "distinct subsistence in an intellectual nature".<sup>146</sup> Though with its own problems as witnessed by Augustine, they set the ball rolling with which contemporary thinkers would exploit in their studies on being, relatedness and communion.

In summary, the theologians of this epoch led the Trinitarian discourse of Augustine to a lofty hiatus, with a peak in Thomas Aquinas. For them the divine 'person' is constituted in relationship. With the definition of the concept of person they were to argue for the personal distinctions in the Godhead. The being of the Person is distinguished in relation. These relations are real and mutual. The one is not the other because there is opposition of relation (Decree against the Jacobites of the Council of Florence). And yet there is no division or separation in the being of God.<sup>147</sup> One surmises then that God subsists in relationship and goes forth to teach that it is only in relationship can human person made in the image of God flourish. For scholars of this epoch, the Trinity succinctly put then, is a mystery of relationship of a community of Persons, and Augustine, in strong terms / language, begins its exploration and sets a pace for a many others to follow upon which rest the community of God.

The Trinitarian doctrine developed alongside the works of these theologians also from Tradition and the Church Magisterium. A glaring instance is the *Quincumque vult* of Athanasius. The

doctrinal content of the popularly called “Athanasian Creed”, which had been earlier on ascribed to St. Athanasius, teaches what it called “the Catholic belief in the Trinity”.<sup>148</sup> The Creed concluded the first part of its doctrine with the statement: “But the entire three Persons are co-eternal and coequal with one another, so that ... we worship complete unity in Trinity and Trinity in unity. This then is what he who wishes to be saved must believe about the Trinity”.<sup>149</sup> Similar confession is made at 11<sup>th</sup> Council of Toledo, in Southern Spain. In like manner the pervasive influence of Augustine on Magisterial statements on the Trinity is stressed in Jaroslav Pelikan’s historical exposé of his Christian Tradition. He remarks that before the end of the Eighth and Ninth centuries, there was already a “comfortable assumption” that an Augustinian synthesis could be accepted by all as the Catholic Tradition.<sup>150</sup> He had earlier stated that:

When the doctrine to be discussed was the dogma of the Trinity, it was natural to cite “the reasons that Father Augustine in his books on the Holy Trinity regarded as of primary importance,” or to cite “Augustine and the other orthodox theologians as authorities in Trinitarian doctrines”.<sup>151</sup>

Among individual Popes who were greatly influenced by Augustinian Trinitarian views include Gregory the Great, Leo I and Gregory the Great. Alcuin, the Byzantine theologian at the service of Charlemagne undertook a thorough exposition of the Christian faith in the Trinity where he relied on the distinctive Western theologoumenon set in place by Augustine, particularly on the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son at the behest of the king. The Church has ever responded to contesting issues affecting faith in this doctrine of God. In respect of the Trinitarian faith which stands at the centre of the teachings of the Popes and through Ecumenical Councils and Synodal exhortations



from the West, whether parochial or universal, the Magisterium has ever dedicated herself to the defence, clarification and elaboration of this central mystery of faith in exercise of her prophetic mission in the light of the Augustinian Trinitarian insights.

Consequent upon the need of the various times and in response to arising questions calling for clarification in the light of the Gospel, the teaching Church has never at any point in time hesitated in giving light whenever the danger of darkness or ignorance looms large. Consequently, among the post-Constantinopolitan Magisterial clarifications such as those of the 11<sup>th</sup> Council of Toledo, Lateran IV Council (1215) and the two “Councils of Reunion” – Lyons (1274) and Florence (1438-1445) which capitalised on the Creeds of earlier Councils and their elaborations by theologians in the West in addressing the new tensions menacing the Church of their times, despite the defence against the tritheism of Joachim of Fiore,<sup>152</sup> and the shortlived reunion of the East and the West over the subject of the *filioque*,<sup>153</sup> the most important pronouncement of Trinitarian significance is the principle formulated by the Council of Florence that “everything in God is one except where there is opposition of relationship”. This affirms simultaneously both doctrines of “unity of substance” and the “diversity of Persons”. It affirms also that the divine Persons are who they are by virtue of their relationship to each other. Furthermore, it teaches the following: “the Father is wholly in the Son and wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Son is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Son”<sup>154</sup> and thus established, in a definitive manner, the foundation laid in Augustine for the doctrine of *circumincession* by virtue of the interdependence and essential unity of the divine Persons and their sharing of intellect, will, and freedom, thus acting in concert as one God. This would be the Latin version of the doctrine of *perichoresis* by which the

Greeks extolled that the Godhead originates with God the Father, and is passed to the Son and Spirit, and yet the divine unity is shared by the Three Persons in the ceaseless exchange of love and life. In each tradition (Latin or Greek) then, each Divine Person is thought to be in mutual relation to the others as to speak of their eternal openness to the one another.<sup>155</sup> The Florentine Council furthered the Trinity towards the unity of actions ad extra as manifest in the work of creation.

After Florence, there elapsed nearly four hundred years without any furtherance of the Trinitarian doctrine in the West. Rahner remarks that all seemed well for the Magisterium. His cry is: "Since the Council of Florence there has been no official doctrinal declaration in which the Magisterium might seem to sanction a real progress in the understanding of this mystery".<sup>156</sup> Fortman notes that "Dogmatically, the Church's solemn formulation of its Trinitarian faith that began with the Council of Nicaea in 325, reached its climax in the Florentine decrees for the Greeks and Jacobites in the 15<sup>th</sup> century".<sup>157</sup> The only advance or addition to the dogmatic formulation of Florence would be in the Third Session of the Vatican I Council, particularly in the Dogmatic Constitution, *Deus Filius*, on the Catholic Faith (1870). It was to address the numerous problems of the time, streaming from the enlightenment criticism of God, metaphysics, and religion to the elements of modernism that have characterized protestant liberal theologies and the high class destructive rationalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first chapter of the non-adopted schema of the second part of the Constitution is on the Holy Trinity.<sup>158</sup> The definitions of the chapter were elaborations and clarifications of the Trinitarian formulations of Florence in the light of the present errors posited by Günther<sup>159</sup> and particularly defended the unity of substance, distinction of three Persons, oneness of God and the unity of action in *extensa*, and anathematized anyone who taught otherwise.<sup>160</sup>

Pope Pius XII's *Mystici Corporis* initiated advancement into more pneumatological studies especially to understand and clarify the indwelling of the Spirit in the souls of the faithful.<sup>161</sup> Though this teaching had received first attention in Lco XIII's *Divinum illud munus*, in *Mystici Corporis* no 80, the Holy Father considers this union in the same regard for the mystery of our union with Christ in the mystical Body, the Church. He however admonished that such studies should be guided by the love of truth and the authority of the Church.

#### 4.9 Vatican II and Post Vatican Two Theology of the Trinity

Vatican II and post Vatican II Magisterial teachings do not have any explicit Trinitarian formulation but Trinitarian musings which are scattered in almost every page of the Sixteen Documents. Joseph Neuner and Josef Dupuis say that the Council did not treat systematically the theme of God and the Trinity. However, they assert that deeper reflections on human salvation, needs and aspirations in our time which are the central in the entire deliberations of the Council Fathers demanded a rethinking of our relation to God who is Triune. In addition to the pastoral needs mentioned above, they add the new perspectives on the mystery of salvation, of revelation and of the Church which imply and demand a more elaborate presentation of the Trinitarian mystery and of the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit.<sup>162</sup> To crown this observation, they remark that

The Trinitarian structure of the entire work of salvation is unfolded in LG 2-4, with the conclusion, borrowed from St Cyprian, that the Church is clearly a people whose unity derives from that of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The same perspective is found in Ag 2-4, with a special emphasis on the mission of the Church. Moreover

the Trinitarian life is presented as the model and source of the inter-personal relation in human society (G S 24).<sup>163</sup>

Though not deciding a Trinitarian definition, but rather presuming it, the Council defined the Church essentially as 'ecclesia *De Trinitate*' and this points to its origin and destination:

The architecture of the Council is thus simple and solid: the two pillars of that architecture are the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*). The former looks at the Church in itself, exploring its mystery; the latter considers the role of the Church in the world.<sup>164</sup>

The mystery obviously is the Trinity since this Church is brought into unity in the unity of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit; but at the same time it labours in the world to reconcile men and women to one another and by this lead them to their final destiny which is unity with the Trinity in the *parousia*.

The Council, occupied with pastoral concerns, initiates rather a new page in the Church's self-understanding as it sets the same Church on the path of her *missio ad gentes* as light and salt to the world. The Church is now set on mission with the duty of bringing what has been duly defined and clarified across the ages. The next generation of Papal, Synodal and Magisterial Documents, proclamations and teachings will now find themselves in the perspective of this hermeneutic of mission which has left Jerusalem, seen Athens, visited Rome and is now en route to the "utmost bounds of the earth" (Acts 1:8), under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the propelling force and principal agent of the Church's mission and evangelisation.<sup>165</sup> This new light is born witness to soon after the Council by a recall to the central

mysteries of the Christian faith in the language of today by Paul VI himself in the desideratum and breast plate of the people of God under the name “Credo of the People of God” (Paul VI, *Credo of the People of God*, 30 June, 1968). This document, as the “Shema” of Deuteronomy, is not setting a new code but serves as a restatement of faith given the vicissitudes of our time by calling to mind those elemental issues and features that constitute our faith in the Triune God and his relation to humanity and his world as creator, saviour and sanctifier as much as the final destiny that awaits the created order in the divine communion of the Father, the Son and in the Holy Spirit, within the Trinitarian community.

*More Post Conciliar Documents* have appeared since the Council to expound the teachings of the Council and to apply in the path already laid by the Council of these teachings bringing them thus at the service of God and humanity. The *General Catechetical Directory (Ad normam decreti)* of the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy (SCC) of 11 April, 1971 defined an outline for a “proper understanding of the nature and purpose of catechesis” that takes into account the recipients and “their social conditions” thus introducing the new nuances of contextualization and inculturation, though expressed then in the inadequate concept of adaptation. This document recognizes the universal value of the Trinitarian mystery and so explains the Trinity as the mystery of the one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit and stated that “the history of salvation is the story of how the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, revealed himself to the human race reconciled and joined to himself those who had turned away from their sins”.<sup>166</sup> The catechetical mission then consists in bringing to a “growing awareness” of the faithful this encounter with God one and Triune. This task is the central content of the mission entrusted to the Church and which expresses a Trinitarian theocentrism – expressive of the three elements from which the Christian message originated and towards which it is ordained: through Christ, to the

Father, in the Spirit (*Ad norman decreti*, no. 41; 69). This document serves according to John Paul II as “the basic document for encouraging and guiding catechetical renewal throughout the Church” (*Catechesis Tradendae*, on Catechesis in Our Time, John Paul II, of 16 Oct. 1979, n. 2). It served as the thrust behind Paul VI’s *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and the present *Catechesis Tradendae*. Following in the footsteps of *Ad norman Decreti*, the Declaration, *Mysterium Fidei* of the SCDF of 21<sup>st</sup> February 1972 provides a new hermeneutic in this light as a clarification for whatever challenges and confusions that may arise in the course of interpreting and implementing the pronouncements and declarations of the Council. Of great importance is the effort to set in proper perspective the relation of the content of divine revelation as the eternal Trinity in which the Father begets the Son, the Son is born, the Holy Spirit proceeds and all three are of the same substance, fully equal, equally almighty and equally eternal.<sup>167</sup>

Pope St John Paul II made a series of statements with great Trinitarian imports and highlights. Across his numerous Letters, Apostolic Constitutions, Exhortations and Encyclicals as well as his Messages, he continued to highlight the relation of the Triune God and his work in the mystery of salvation. His first two encyclicals, *Redemptor Hominis* and *Dives in Misericordia* of 1979 and 1980, and the Fifth, *Dominum et vivification* (1986) form a triad of his Trinitarian clarifications. Added to these are his Apostolic Letters, *A Concilio Constantinopolitano I, Augustinum Hipponensem* (On the 16<sup>th</sup> Centenary of the Conversion of St Augustine, 28 August 1986) and his *Duodecimum Saeculum* (On the occasion of the 1200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Second Nicaea of 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1987, the then Holy Father, in an unprecedented fashion, led the way to the novel manner of interpreting the doctrine of the Trinity from a mere doctrine of faith to a doctrine of life. Of great importance is his recalling to our mind of the

central issues of the mystery as demanded in each case by the need of the time and how these may receive a new hermeneutic in the light of the present times and contexts. Of special need are the two texts from *Redemptor Hominis* and *Dominum et vivification*: first of all, concerning the new light of interpretation of the personal distinction of the Son, the Holy Father taught that his entire life, his incarnation and paschal mystery become for human beings as persons in relation a big lesson. He exhorts that

... the man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly ... must with his unrest, uncertainty, and even his weakness, with his life and death, draw near to Christ. He must... enter into him with all his own self, he must 'appropriate' and assimilate the whole of the reality of the incarnation and redemption in order to find himself.<sup>168</sup>

And in the same ray of interpretation, concerning the Holy Spirit, John Paul II highlighted the love-gift image of the Holy Spirit and therefrom leads us to understand that God exists in the mode of gift and love. He himself is the personal expression of that self-giving and being-love. He is the Person-Love and the Person-Gift (John Paul II, *Dominum et vivificantem*, n. 10). In turn, this Person-Gift is poured unto the Church and the world on the return of Christ to the Father (*Dominum et vivification* n. 11). Finally in his pastoral Letter to Families, written in his capacity as *pastor universalis* of the Church of Christ, he brings out the role of God the Father as the primordial model of all fatherhood and motherhood in the universe and of the human motherhood and fatherhood in particular.<sup>169</sup>

The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU), in the bid to promote Christian unity through facilitating ecumenical dialogue, went back to those issues on procession that had characterized the deliberations of Constantinople I. These too had

been the theological bone of contention in the 1054 rift and the centre-point of the Councils of reunion at Lyons and Florence, but with a disposition to hearing the feeling of others and listening (in the spirit of dialogue).<sup>170</sup> Of special stress is the affirmation of the belief on God the Father as the source of the whole Trinity, the one origin both of the Son and of the Holy Spirit as taught by Augustine and subsequent traditions. In the light of these perennial teachings of the Church, however, the Catechism of the Catholic Church brings in a codified form, a retrieval of this doctrine of the Church through an elaboration of the articles of the faith, professed and moved forward to interpreting same in the light of present day exigencies. Of the most primordial place is the doctrine of the Trinity.

All these put together, we learn first that the magisterial definitions of the post-Florentine era, as those of earlier generations of the Church's life, particularly of Nicaea, Constantinople I and the those of the middle Ages we have studied, were all elaboration on the perennial teaching necessitated by the challenges of the times. First each tried a retrieval of the doctrine and within that purview, addressed the contending issue that necessitated it. Secondly, all of them in one way or the other elaborated or stressed one issue already highlighted by Augustine or the other. They thus project Augustine as an inspiration and rightly underscore the importance of his position on the development of the Christian doctrine in the West. Pius XI made this comment about him:

Aided by light from on high, he treated those central, this fundamental truth of the Catholic Faith with such depth and acuteness, that the Doctors who came after him had only to draw from Augustine's contributions their materials. From these they reared a staunch rampart of theological science to repel the missiles vainly aimed in



every age by perverse human reason, that opposed this mystery, the most baffling of all to the mind of man.<sup>171</sup>

Over and above all, the explanations given by these doctrines, particularly by the Council of Florence in the doctrine of circumincession - about the perichoretic life of God receives a new wave of theological interpretation in which the Trinity is no longer considered as a somewhat mystery of God who remains a '*mysterium tremendum fascinans*' or a God who dwells in an unapproachable light, but as a revelation of the face of God as *immanens* whose self-disclosure in the external works (*opera externa*) has the mission of teaching and coaching humanity on how to live in community with one another, with God and with the rest of the created order as the steward of the earth. God shows us himself above all as a God of love and life who subsists in love and relationship within his Trinitarian community and in the economy of salvation. His being is characterised by love and relationship; He invites us to a communion of love and relationship providing for Himself a model to us humans, to the Church and to the world.

#### 4.10 Contemporary Theology

The doctrine of the Trinity has emerged as a central issue in current theological inquiry. A host of recent books have taken up one aspect or another of the doctrine of the Trinity. Not only systematic theology, but also biblical studies, liturgics, ethics, missiology, and pastoral theology have felt, in one way or another, the influence of contemporary Trinitarian studies. Above all, it is used in context where it shades the redemptive light of Christ on the human situation, seeking to interpret the same in the light of the gospel (GS, 4) and thereby raise the hope and joy among the children of God (GS, 1).

Protestant theology dragged Trinitarian theology through the lens of the enlightenment and rationalism to the logic of liberalism to a dead end in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Karl Barth's *The Humanity of God* (1960 publication by John Knox Press) described the situation as one in which "Theology turned into philosophy of the history of religion in general, and of the Christian religion in particular," where the emphasis "moved from the centre to the periphery".<sup>172</sup> With this awareness, Barth resolved to a retreat finding his discovery in Jesus the image of the Revealer and Mediator and Reconciler as a big resource for reconstructing theology in the new age. His resolve was to reposition Trinitarian doctrine to its proper place by retrieving it from Schleiermacher's appendix, and repositioning it to a "prolegomena" of theology. Basing his logic on the Evangelical premise of the Bible, he found the Trinity as fundamental to all other articles of the Christian faith. There in the pages of scripture, he discovered both unity and variety in God.

The central statement in the Trinitarian formulation of Barth is that "God revealed Himself as the Lord." He considered the event of revelation as an instance and stepping stone into the mystery of the Trinity. We can make positive assertions about God only because God has revealed himself as the Triune Lord. From an analysis of this revelation event, he developed a Trinitarian hermeneutics that enabled him reinvent and retrieve the Trinity from the appendix of Schleiermacher. This forms part of his unique contribution is the construction of a doctrine of God from the scripture. Thus begins his dogmatic treatment of the Trinity. He asserts therein, that "God's Word is God Himself in His revelation". This revelation, for Barth, is God's own interpretation of himself. Barth would thus not solicit for any natural theology nor look for analogies to the Trinity (*vestigium trinitatis*) in nature, history, or psychology to bring him to a vision of the Trinity.<sup>173</sup> Neither would he dwell on the usual dependence on clarifications of the meaning of the Three

Persons. Indeed, he was cautious too with the understanding of the concept of person since, in the first place, “person” in the ordinary sense of the term, does not have much to do directly with Trinitarian understanding of personality, and secondly, three personalities would imply tritheism. In his *Doctrine of the Word of God*, he shows a preference for the concept of revelation as key to understanding the doctrine of the Triune nature of God: “We come to the doctrine of the Trinity by no other way than by that of analysis of the concept of revelation”.<sup>174</sup> This is supplied already in the threefold hypostasis: Revealer, Revelation and Revealedness.<sup>175</sup> The expansion of this highlights Christ as the summary content of the OT and NT, the most reliable sources of divine revelation. In the analysis of this statement, the doctrine of the Trinity emerges and there the entire Christian faith receives its basis.<sup>176</sup>

This has three imports as the subject of revelation implies what is revealed (the subject of Revelation), it equally suggests a presupposition of the Revealer; and thirdly, the recipient of the revelation. In this while, put in its proper perspective, in the perspective of divine revelation to humankind, revelation would be understood to mean in biblical terms, “the self-unveiling, imparted to men, of the God who according to his nature (unaided human power) cannot be unveiled to man.” The question, “does God need to reveal Himself to Himself in his inner nature?” leads Barth to show the essence of the divine self-unveiling in the dynamic of the economy, as God’s revealedness – his being imparted to men as the Spirit of the Father and the Son.<sup>177</sup> The economy is the starting point of theology.

There is a somewhat gap between the analysis of revelation to the ontological basis of the Holy Spirit. One could doubt the eternity and consubstantiality of the Third Person since He, according to Barth, has the economy as a necessary condition for existence. The

safeguards though are his reliance upon the traditional teaching of *una essential tres personae* and the classical doctrine of the divine origination of the Holy Spirit. Yet these two views seem contradictory to one another. In spite of that, Barth had set to redeem Evangelical theology from the near three centuries of wandering caused by the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the historicism of Schleiermacher and Harnack as well as even the “myth” concept of his contemporary Bultmann.

Barth is reckoned to have resuscitated the abandoned Trinity from the onslaught of Enlightenment rationalism and Protestant Liberal theology and repositioned it once again as the central mystery of the Christian faith. His work found much adherence across denominations of Christians. In the Catholic side, Karl Rahner would be given such fame for the contributions he made in the renewal of interest in the Trinitarian mystery. The Catholic theological tradition experienced a near halt after the Council of Florence. Karl Rahner reasoned about the attitude which suggested that the highpoint of speculative Trinitarian theology had been attained and needed not be the concern of the age again.<sup>178</sup> Between the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Catholic Trinitarian treatises were truncated and reduced to mere proofs for the five notions, four properties, three hypostases (persons), two missions and one nature. The use of these Thomistic lenses waned with the passage of time and thus paved a way that facilitated the infiltration of the troubling issues of the time to the Trinitarian doctrine. With the exaltation of reason and the denigration of metaphysics, and under the encroaching influence of Protestant Liberal theology of the early Twentieth century, the doctrine of the Trinity was subjected, according to Rahner, to a mere textbook treatise, expunged from real life. He set to retrieve this doctrine from the margin and to restore its place in the centre of Christian reflections.

Like Barth, Rahner begins by recognizing the centrality of the Trinity in Christian theology. There cannot be either pneumatology or Christology without implicit Trinity since in each case, at least One Person of the Blessed Trinity is involved. He faulted the separation of *De Deo Uno* from *De Deo Trino* and criticised the inordinate attention given to the psychological speculation in classical Trinitarian treatises. Rahner accuses this approach of neglecting the experience of the Trinity in the economy of salvation in favour of a seemingly almost Gnostic speculation of what goes on in the inner life of God:

In the process it really forgets that the countenance of God which turns towards us in this self-communication is, in the Trinitarian nature of this encounter, the very being of God as he is in himself, and must be if indeed the divine self-communication in grace and in glory is communication of God in his own self to us.<sup>179</sup>

Establishing thus his *Grundaxiom* that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity, and vice versa,<sup>180</sup> he picks up the analysis of the divine self-communication which is occasioned to us in grace as effective only in this economy or it is only in this economic action that we are brought into an insight of the immanent being and life of God. Thus the economic Trinity reveals to us what God is in himself since this divine self-communication is a true communication and revelation of the true Godself. The greatest instance of this is the Christ-event.

In his analysis of this divine self-communication, he presents creation as the necessary presupposition for the possibility of incarnation and grace. Creation of the cosmos is not only a calling into being things other than God, more so, it is a moment in the divine self-communication. The incarnation of the Word requires that creation be ordered towards the possible incarnation. Thus the

creation of the cosmos becomes the beginning of the Trinitarian self-revelation and from its beginning the cosmos exists in the order of grace). In this light, the human person can more clearly be seen as a being ordered to the possibility of the incarnation and to personal union with the indwelling Trinity. In grace we humans encounter not something but someone, not less than God indeed, in God's Triune self, whereby the three divine persons indwell in the graced human person. The nexus point of this teaching is that the world and the human person exist as the condition for the possibility of God's self-communication. Thus Rahner establishes an intrinsic link between Trinity, grace, incarnation and creation.<sup>181</sup>

Following in the path of Barth, Rahner also concludes that the word *person* is an unsatisfactory way of speaking of Father, Son, and Spirit as the term is freighted with individualistic definitions. Rahner, similar to Barth, argues that *hypostasis* be defined as "a distinct manner of subsisting." But his greatest worry is that:

Despite their orthodox confession of the Trinity, Christians are, in practical life, almost mere 'monotheists.' We must be willing to admit that, should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged.<sup>182</sup>

In an effort to bring clarity to the use of the traditional Trinitarian categories, Rahner asserted what would come to be known as Rahner's Rule: "*The 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity*" (a reconciliation of the two). Trinitarian theology for the remainder of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century is an engagement with or qualification of this axiom.

Barth and Rahner set the stage for a new 'Pentecost' on the Trinitarian doctrine. After them, a cream of theologians appeared

who have taken the doctrine in a new spirit contextualization into different areas of life and application into different settings and sectors of the human presence and endeavour. Their arguments reveal a big deposit of meanings that would set the Gospel message on its particular mission in world as "light" and "salt". Despite the fact that this new spring is not coming from the catholic Church alone, the impact of the aggiornamento programme of Vatican II Council which opened the Church to the world in the spirit of dialogue and requires the life of mankind today be interpreted in the light of the Gospel cannot be overemphasized. The fruit of such disposition of the Council is a thrust that, at least from both the Catholic and non-Catholic folds, a rich harvest of theological reflections is emerging as the Trinity is projected to the enviable lot of occupying a very central place in theological and ecumenical discourse and enterprise. It serves now as a theological paradigm and model for different life situations and contexts. Among the contemporary theologians include Wolfhart Pannenberg. While indebted to Barth's articulation of the necessity of revelation for theology, Pannenberg distinguishes himself from Barth by locating revelation in God's acts within history (in the economy). Thus, for Pannenberg, theology begins from below in the arena of history but can only be apprehended eschatologically from its fulfilment in the reign of the resurrected Jesus. It is from this perspective that Pannenberg develops his doctrine of the Trinity.

Like Barth, he opines that "one can know the inter-Trinitarian distinctions and relations, the inner life of God, only through the revelation of the one God, not through the different spheres of the operation of the one God in the world," and thus grounds his discussion of the Trinity in Jesus' relationship to the Father and the Spirit.<sup>183</sup> In a manner quite different from Barth, Pannenberg develops the doctrine of the Trinity from the data of historical revelation of the three persons, and thus engages the biblical

narrative that testifies to Jesus who in disclosing his relationship to the Father also disclosed his distinctness from the Father. More specifically, the Trinity can be known only through the events of the cross and resurrection. He holds that the medium of the unity of the Triune personality of God is Jesus' absolute practiced unity of will with the Father, as this was confirmed by God's raising him from the dead, is the medium of his unity of essence with the Father and the basis for all assertions about Jesus' divine sonship.

Relationship within the Triune community is marked by reciprocity, acknowledging that the traditional dogmatic language of *perichoresis* and circumincession point to this reality but "had only a limited impact because of the one-sided viewing of the intra-Trinitarian relations as relations of origin".<sup>184</sup> There is, according to Pannenberg, not only a relationship of origin (e.g., the Father begets the Son and sends the Spirit), but there also exists a relationship of giving within the Trinity (e.g., the Son glorifies the Father and is filled with the Spirit). While there is reciprocity between the persons of the Trinity, the relations between the persons are irreversible. The Father in every respect is God of himself.

This view seems to rule out genuine mutuality in the relations of the Trinitarian persons, since it has the order of origin running irreversibly from the Father to the Son and Spirit. Athanasius, however, argued forcibly against the Arians that the Father would not be the Father without the Son. Does that not mean that in some way the deity of the Father has to be dependent on the relation to the Son, although not in the same way as that of the Son is on the relation to the Father? The Father is not begotten of the Son or sent by him. These relations are irreversible. But in another way the relativity of fatherhood that finds expression in the designation 'Father' might well involve a



dependence of the Father on the Son and thus be the basis of true reciprocity in the Trinitarian relations.<sup>185</sup>

In contrast to theories of abstract transcendence of God or notions of divine unity that leave no space for plurality, Pannenberg asserts: "Christian trinitarian belief is concerned only with the concrete and intrinsically differentiated life of the divine unity. Thus the doctrine of the Trinity is in fact concrete monotheism".<sup>186</sup>

Jürgen Moltmann sets about an overall overhauling of the doctrine of the Trinity by finding "the relationship of God to God in the reality of the event of the cross".<sup>187</sup> While teaching that the death of Jesus is a "Trinitarian event" between God and God:

In the cross, Father and Son are most deeply separated in forsakenness and at the same time are most inwardly one in their surrender. What proceeds from this event between Father and Son is the Spirit which justifies the godless, fills the forsaken with love and even brings the dead alive, since even the fact that they are dead cannot exclude them from this event of the cross; the death in God also includes them<sup>188</sup>

He admits that the theology of the cross is the hermeneutical key that provides access to the mystery of the Trinity. He sees in the cross an interrelation between God and the world. God relates to the world in such a way as to determine its fate, however history also affects God. In this relationship the three persons of the Trinity relate reciprocally, both to each other and to the world. God relates to the world as he acts within history, making his love operative in the suffering of the crucified Christ, an event seen as both temporal and eternal. In the cross, Moltmann argues, God's own being is an open fellowship of love. Thus, the Trinitarian communion of the Three Persons of the Trinity is the source and

model for genuine human community characterized by love and freedom, openness and acceptance rather than domination and exclusion.

The history of salvation is the history of the eternally living, Triune God who draws us into and includes us in his eternal Triune life with all the fullness of its relationships. It is the love story of the God whose very life is the eternal process of engendering, responding and blissful love. God loves the world with the very same love which he is in himself. If, on the basis of salvation history and the experience of salvation, we have to recognize the unity of the Triune God in the perichoretic atoneness of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, then this does not correspond to the solitary human subject in his relationship to himself; nor does it correspond, either, to a human subject in his claim to lordship over the world. It only corresponds to a human fellowship of people without privileges and without subordinances. The perichoretic atoneness of the Triune God corresponds to the experience of the community of Christ, the community which the Spirit unites through respect, affection and love. The more open-mindedly people live with one another, for one another and in one another in the fellowship of the Spirit, the more they will become one with the Son and the Father, and one in the Son and the Father.<sup>189</sup>

Moltmann took the text of 1 Corinthians 15:28 ("that God may be all in all") to be a key text in his discussion of the eschatology of the Trinity. "The cross does not bring an end to the Trinitarian history in God between the Father and the Son in the Spirit as eschatological history, but rather opens it up".<sup>190</sup> Thus, the Triune identity is itself moving toward consummation; it is a becoming rather than a static being. The consummation of the Trinity will be a consummation of love as the Son surrenders the kingdom to his Father that "love may be all in all."<sup>191</sup>

Moltmann's trinitarian eschatology is necessarily universalistic as the Trinity is open and inclusive. For him, therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity is christologically anchored in the event of the cross. The doctrine of the Trinity is inexplicable apart from the death and resurrection of Jesus. Thus, what is revealed in the cross corresponds to the way God is within himself. It shows the relationality within God. God's involvement in history *ad extra* corresponds to the divine life *ad intra*.

Leonardo Boff and Catherine Mowry LaCugna stand as examples of contemporary theologians who espouse a social trinitarianism. Boff attempts to locate in the Trinity the basis for a liberated society. The divine unity that exists between the three persons of the Trinity is reflected in human beings living together in community. As God is a union of three uniques so the human society does not blot out individuality but maintains a unity of egalitarian persons who live in co-relatedness. The communal or social exposition of the Trinity is seen by Boff as a way to move beyond the categories of essence and substance, which he deems to be static. Boff's communal Trinity embraces both masculine and feminine dimensions in Father, Son, and Spirit. Boff anticipates the charge of tritheism and believes that he avoids it by means of his articulation of the *perichoresis* of the three persons.

Though vehemently rejected and heavily criticized by Barth, Boff reinvents with full force the ancient practice of seeking in creation analogies of and the *vestigia trinitatis* for illustrations of this mystery of faith. He remarks:

As there are traces of the Trinity in the whole cosmic order, so there are in human lives. Every human being is undoubtedly a mystery, with unfathomable depths not communicated to oneself or to others; this is the presence of the Father as deep, inner mystery in every human person.

All men and women possess a dimension of truth, self-knowledge and self-revelation, the light and wisdom of their own mystery; this expresses the presence of the Son (Word and Wisdom) acting in them, developing the communication of their mystery. All human beings feel an urge to commune with others and be united in love; the Holy Spirit is present in this desire and in the joys of its fulfilment in this life. Mystery, truth and communion live together in each individual; they are interwoven realities that together make up the unity of life. They provide a reflection of Trinitarian communion and are the ultimate foundation for humanity being the image and likeness of the Trinity.<sup>192</sup>

With the similar goal as the one Moltmann had set for himself, Boff seeks to bring creation into the life of the Trinity. For him (Boff), "Creation prolongs and reflects the outpouring of life and love that eternally constitute the being of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To use anthropomorphic language: the Trinity does not wish to live alone in its splendid Trinitarian communion; the Three Divine Persons do not love just one another, but seek companions in communion and love. Creation arose from this wish of the Three Divine Persons to meet others (created by them) so as to include them in their eternal communion. Creation is external to the Trinity only so as to be brought within it."<sup>193</sup>

Finally, Boff acknowledges the place of mystery and the access humankind may have to this great mystery:

What is manifested in our history is indeed God as God is, trinitarian. But the Trinity as absolute and sacramental mystery is much more than what is manifested . . . . What the Trinity is in itself is beyond our reach, hidden in unfathomable mystery, mystery that will be partially

revealed to us in the bliss of eternal life, but will always escape us in full, since the Trinity is a mystery in itself and not only for human beings. So we have to say: the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, but not the whole immanent Trinity".<sup>194</sup>

In addition to the elaborations made by Boff in this project of a social Trinitarian theology, LaCugna seeks to show the practicality of the doctrine of the Trinity with its consequences for the Christian life. LaCugna sees the Trinity in communal or relational categories. This informed her conviction to define Trinitarian theology within the ambience of relationship: "Trinitarian theology could be described as par excellence a theology of relationship, which explores the mysteries of love, relationship, personhood and community within the framework of God's self-revelation in the person of Christ and the activity of the Spirit".<sup>195</sup>

LaCugna's central argument in the book, *God for Us*, is that "soteriology and theology belong together because there is an essential unity between *oikonomia* and *theologia*".<sup>196</sup> Reviewing the history of the Trinitarian doctrine, LaCugna concludes that, from the late fourth century on, theologians in both the East and West deviated from the earlier pattern of approaching the Godhead through the economy and instead explored questions of intra-Trinitarian life such as the equality of the persons. This, she argues, led to "the defeat of the doctrine of the Trinity".<sup>197</sup> She confirms Rahner's conviction that most Christians are, in practice, mere monotheists. But she maintains further that insofar as contemporary theologians continue to focus on the immanent Trinity they reinforce the impression that the doctrine of the Trinity has limited soteriological significance as it is limited to God's internal life and has no connection with the Christian life in the world.

LaCugna devotes the remainder of her book developing the claim that

The doctrine of the Trinity is not ultimately a teaching about 'God' but a teaching about *God's life with us and our life with each other*. It is the life of communion and indwelling, God in us, we in God, all of us in each other. This is the '*perichoresis*,' the mutual interdependence that Jesus speaks of in the Gospel of John.<sup>198</sup>

Drawing on the work of John Zizioulas, LaCugna seeks to develop a definition of person as relation in keeping with the Cappadocian pattern of the "unique hypostatic identity and distinction 'within' God without postulating a difference in substance between the divine persons".<sup>199</sup> Being constitutes personhood. "Being, existence, is thus the event of persons in communion".<sup>200</sup> And this leads her to describe *perichoresis* as a "divine dance".<sup>201</sup> Ultimately the questions of Trinitarian theology are not, for LaCugna, speculative but practical. Trinitarian salvation is *theosis* according to LaCugna. Thus the basic, practical question of Trinitarian theology is: "How are we to live and relate to others so as to be most Godlike?"<sup>202</sup>

She holds on to a relational trinitarianism which, for her, offers great promise for feminist theology because of its highlight of mutuality rather than patriarchy. "As a revised doctrine of the Trinity makes plain, subordinationism is not natural but decidedly unnatural because it violates *both* the nature of God and the nature of persons created in the image of God".<sup>203</sup> LaCugna argues that authentic Trinitarian existence will always be liberationist in character as the economy of Jesus Christ has established a new household unbounded by patriarchal distinctions. She admits that the Church lost this vision quite early as the household codes of the

post-Pauline and pastoral letters of the New Testament represent an accommodation to non Trinitarian patterns.<sup>204</sup>

Summarily, though difficult to do, these authors look at the Trinity in the light of the lessons humanity could draw from the being of God who subsists in relationship. Juxtaposing these notes from the Trinity alongside the contemporary society, there seems to reveal an unlikely parallel where the perfection of one dwarfs the incongruous lifestyles of the postmodern society. Here the mirror shows that as *imago trinitatis*, as Augustine teaches, humanity stands a long way off in reflecting the image of the maker in the world today. In this wise then these theologians call the Trinity an archetype for human communitarian life. The social programme of Moltmann, Boff, and LaCugna and many others seem to suggest a *rapprochement* towards Trinitarian model of life for the man and woman of today. Thus Moltmann's early work, *The Theology of Hope*, was his own attempt to provide a theological parallel to the Jewish Marxist Ernst Bloch's *Principle of Hope*, and Moltmann continues to work out the eschatological implications of this theme in his later works on the Trinity. Boff sees the Trinity as a perfect community and as such, a model of liberation for the poor and the oppressed. Thomas S. Scirghi says it is a model for belonging to contemporary society. In similar language, Paul Mullins subtitles his book "A Guide for the Perplexed". LaCugna finds in social trinitarianism a resource for an egalitarian, non-patriarchal God and Church.

However, in their efforts, they have swayed into one extreme to another. The Trinity is abstracted from creation and history, which is ironically the very error Moltmann claims to avoid. LaCugna pits personhood against nature in such a way as to dismiss the significance of the createdness of male and female. She endorses the conclusion of Margaret Farley:

If the ultimate normative model for relationship between persons is the very life of the Trinitarian God, then a strong eschatological ethic suggests itself as a context for Christian justice. That is to say, interpersonal communion characterized by equality, mutuality, and reciprocity may serve not only as a norm against which every pattern of relationship may be measured but as a goal to which every pattern of relationship is ordered.<sup>205</sup>

Here we must ask if equality, mutuality, and reciprocity are derived from the biblical doctrine of the Trinity or from our postmodern culture that is characterized by its drive toward autonomy. Creational distinctions are lost as the self-differentiation within the Trinity, which is exchanged for a communal theology that is but a murky reflection of our culture's Gnostic spirituality. LaCugna's estimation sounds unnatural, not in respect of our being creatures of the Triune God, but of our personhood. Personhood is made to become ambiguous. Thus, the initial promise of LaCugna's book to offer a soteriological theology of the Trinity that has as its corollary in the life of the Christian in and with God seems lost.

A remedy is possible if humankind would return to the principles and take a fresh look at the intent and purposefulness of revelation and the language by which God has revealed himself to us.

#### 4.11 A Trinitarian Hermeneutic for the Church and for the World

St Augustine has provided us with a window by which anyone could peep into the being and nature of God and his relationship with the world. So far, he has guided us to appreciate and explore the rich depths of the Christian faith heritage and its promises to the human community. While defending the unity of God and



acknowledging the multiplicity within the Godhead, his teaching about God in the *De Trinitate* establishes a strong indication of relationality in God both within his immanent self and in his economic missions. This fact of God's relationality is underlined here because of its rich promises to humankind in the present age.

The essence of this revelation of God as a Trinity is the establishment of the divine – human reciprocity by which God's kenotic condescension (to meet humanity in history) becomes an offer of grace for an effective knowledge of God and for humanity's deification.<sup>210</sup> It is first a divine "self-opening" to the non-divine 'other' that furnishes us with information on the manner of God's life on the one hand. The entire Christian bible is a compendium of the various stages, acts and events of divine self-disclosure and dialogues between God and humankind. These attest to God's perfect life as a model of community where the Blessed Three live a perfect perichoretic life. Being Triune, the Blessed Three are interlocked in an eternal dialogue and relationality that estranges any form of solitariness in God. On the one hand, this relationality is so central in the life of God that in addition to the teachings of the Cappadocian Fathers who made unity the final compliment of the Trinity, Scholastic theologians maintained that each person of the Blessed Trinity is distinctively what He is by virtue of His relationship with others. With evidences from the Holy Writ and the fruits of contemplation and theological reflection, Augustine taught how God has made us know His Trinitarian nature. He was able to prove how to conceive multiplicity in a qualitative, rather than quantitative lens. Thus, he could say in agreement with the Christian tradition that though the Father is God, and the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, does not amount to a plurality of Gods. The Three Divine Persons do not make Three Gods but One. Though distinct, even in their distinct missions *ad extra*, they have one nature and one divine will. This enables a form of perfect lifestyle that is marked by

mutually coinherent transparency that is theologically illustrated with a perfectly rhyming rhythmic dancestep in a choreographic display. He thus addressed this mathematical conundrum that remained a major hinderance to the Trinitarian faith through the mystery of relationship. It led him to paint the Trinity in a communitarian image as the divine community, communion or family. But by letting this flow of immanent relationality outside the divine community, God stepped into history (kenosis or divine condescension). He lets His face be seen by the “non-divine” other. And now, creation can understand who He is, what He is and how He is, a divine community. Over and above these, God is none other than a relational being who subsists in relationship. From his teachings, we draw a depth of lessons on the Trinity as a community of persons in eternal relation.

Subsequent theologians and magisterial pronouncements laboured to explain this teaching on divine relationalty, both within the inner being of God and in the economy. The Eleventh Council of Toledo (675 AD), for instance, reaffirmed Augustine’s teaching that the divine names, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as relational (Ds 528). So also has the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* when it says that “the divine Persons are relative to one another” (CCC, 255). It continues the explanation that the real distinction of the Persons from one another resides solely in the relationships they have with each other, a relationship that does not destroy the divine unity. And in the dynamic of this relationality, God wishes, as Scripture says, in the plan of his loving kindness, to destine us in love to be his sons, and to be conformed to the image of his Son (Eph. 1: 4-5, 29). This plan (cf 2Tim. 1: 9 - 10) “unfolds in the work of creation, the whole history of salvation after the fall, and the missions of the Son and the Spirit, which are continued in the mission of the Church”.<sup>206</sup>

This lays the foundation for a more fully comprehension of human or creaturely relationships and interactions, whether as church or general human society. In the first place, this divine relationality becomes obviously the model of relationship for community life, whether at the family – nuclear or extended, community, and church. Understanding the God-self helps us perceive our own “selves” in the matrix of ‘otherness’ and perhaps with the understanding that the self is constituted by its relationship. “It is a being whose identity emerges only in relation to other beings”<sup>207</sup> As relationality “constitutes” the being of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so are we in our own individual ‘selves’ constituted into persons in ‘an-other’, and together, we become a people on the same pilgrimage of life with others, journeying unto a communion with a yet “‘Other’ self” in the parousia. This is our common destiny.

On the other hand, it is an invitation to enter into communion with God and to share in his life. So, the Catechism teaches this:

Being a work at once common and personal, the whole divine economy makes known both what is proper to divine Persons and their one divine nature. Hence the whole Christian life is a communion with each of the divine Persons without in any way separating them.<sup>208</sup>

Thus, God who is relational invites and extends his relationship to humanity; the first instance was at creation, reaching its climactic point in the Christ-event. He who is hitherto veiled ‘mystery’ opens himself to us as Father, as Son and as Spirit.

The process and the various events of human deification serve the purpose of making humans capable of sharing in the divine life (deification / theosis).<sup>209</sup> The divine self-communication, and the

human understanding, of God as a relational being, like Rahner would argue, is not the end in itself. It is purposeful. It is like an opening of a door to a new horizon. This consists of the rich promises and new rays the revelation offers to humankind about the being of God on the one hand, and about human relatedness as beings and “personae” in communities. Since God is Trinitarian, a new import is given to the conception of the human person as an *imago dei*: he is *imago trinitatis* as well.

Thus Sacred Tradition, Magisterium, the Fathers, and contemporary theologians, with the aid of the language of symbols, teach consistently that God is a community of persons in relation. It is only in tuning ourselves up to one another in brotherliness and communion as members of the one human family that we may image the Trinity in whose image we are made. This is challenging as it is equally an invitation to members of the Church. As People of God and Body of Christ, called into being by the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (cf., LG., 4), who live this communion already in the Eucharistic community, she is called to follow in the footsteps of her divine founder and head who is Son to the Father and Giver of the Spirit. The Church, by her special link with the Trinitarian community, and more so as a community of faith whose ultimate mission gears towards this communion with the Triune God, finds herself in the world, charged with the duty and task of continuing the mission of raising souls for that eschatological climactic moment when God will gather all things to Himself in Christ Jesus. Or, as one can deduce from the teachings of the *Penny Catechism*, the final end of creation is communion with God. Communion is the final cause of God’s breaking forth into history. By this intervention, God extends His redeeming hands to pull all up into communion with Him. Hence, LaCugna would rightly say that “The doctrine of the Trinity is not ultimately a teaching about ‘God’ but a teaching about *God’s life with us and our life with each other*.<sup>210</sup> By it’s revelation, He

wishes creation to share in His the life of communion and indwelling, where He would be in us, we in God, all of us in each other, not only at the parousia, but already now in history as well.

While the Patristics battled with making the mystery of God's life comprehensible and acceptable to the intellectual minds of their time, the more contemporary thinkers position the Trinity in a social/relational perspectives whose final objective is the transformation of the face of the earth through creation of brotherly love and communion among humankind as it is in heaven. Falling back to the language of the dogma of the Trinity developed by the Church Fathers, they highlight the importance of such concepts as "relationship" and "person". Though Augustine had not so much highlighted the richness inherent in the concept of the "person", as Richard of St Victor or the Cappadocians and John of Damascus did, since he scarcely understood what the terminology meant. The contemporary approach, despite its digression from the Augustino-Cartesian psychological orientation, finds it a rich access, especially for both the Church as the icon of the Trinity in the world, and for the human communities and families as dynamics of persons in relationship. These thinkers emphasize the rich heritages and imports of personhood's openness to and orientation toward otherness:

... the exploration of social trinitarianism and the appeal to relationality during the course of the twentieth century has been accompanied by a renewed discourse on person/personhood. This discourse was manifest in two different streams, one in which the 'turn to person/personhood' is understood in relational terms and another in which person/personhood is seen in an individualistic terms. The appeal to a social or relational understanding of the human person is often grounded in a dialogical and dialectical understanding of the person

rooted in the ancient understanding that the human person is *zōon logon echōn* (living being having the word).<sup>211</sup>

Since it belongs to the same mission of God from which all true meanings and interpretations spring forth, Rahner and many contemporary theologians come to this new hermeneutic of the Trinity and shot the once dry mystery of faith up to the centre stage as a vista for understanding ourselves, others and the world as relational beings. By virtue of its inner constitution in otherness, John D. Zizioulas opines “personhood” is opened up to another human other and to the world in a creational relationality. Thus, human persons are constituted in relationship with God, with otherness in the family of humankind, and in the Church as communion of saints, and with the environment and the rest of creation, including future generations to come. And above all, as *imago trinitatis*, human persons become those beings that are locked up in a triadic relationship with one another, the world and with the Triune God.

God is, in His immanent self, a relational being in whom exists an eternal perfect relationship. By virtue of His self disclosure, God lets us into the mystery of His life and life in general. We are now able to understand who He is, know what He is and how He is. The pages of the Holy Writ contain indisputable indications of His interactions in the economy as an interacting, relational being who subsists in relationship. An analysis of the concept shows the distinctness and difference (of identity) among the interlocuting subjects in a dialogue – at least, between the known (object of knowledge) and the knower (subject)<sup>212</sup>. This understanding led Torrance to apply this interactionist approach to the God-talk since he (God) has been personally interacting in human history. Thus, God distinguishes himself from the “otherness” with the world and more so, reveals himself in the personal.

Though Walter Kasper points out that the dialogical and dialectical understanding of human personhood should help us and guide us analogically towards understanding the divine personhood,<sup>213</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (former Pope Benedict XVI), understands that such dialogical conceptuality of the divine personhood has fundamental implications for the understanding of the relationality within the Godhead<sup>214</sup> and the world. God Himself is the source and initiator of this relationship. He who is essentially relational invites and extends his relationship to humanity; the first instance was at creation, reaching its climactic point in the Christ-event. This God who is in Himself a ‘mystery’ (a *mysterium*) opens himself to us as Father, as Son and as Spirit.

The Divine self-opening to the ‘other’ by God is an extension, through an invitation, by His utterly gratuitous will, for us to participate in the communion inherent in God and to live in family with one another as “persons”, as people living in the same one human family or community with one another, and as members of the Church, the People of God, Body of Christ, and Spouse of the Holy Spirit, and stewards of the earth. It is an invitation into relationship with one another and with God.

John Zizioulas promotes the inroads the Orthodox tradition’s use of ‘persons’ and ‘personhood’ are making into contemporary theological discourse and ecumenical dialogue. In his view, to be a person is to be “there” (*Dasein*). *Dasein* is ontologically opposed to not being there. Being there itself is radically linked to relationality and from this emerges the “event of communion.” In relation to the Godhead, Zizioulas would opine that the permanent and unbreakable status of the relationships between Father, Son and Holy Spirit means that the particular beings of each are never isolated individuals. There is a reality of communion in which each particular is affirmed as unique and irreplaceable by the others.<sup>215</sup> Yet in summary he would say that the being of God, that is, the

substance of God has no ontological content, no true being, apart from communion.<sup>216</sup> Yet in summary, he would say that the being of God, that is, the substance of God has no ontological content, no true being, apart from communion. Hence, the being of God, and by extension, our own being, could only be known only through personal relationships and personal love.

In this dialogical understanding of the being of God, revelation would now be understood only as an extension of the communion inherent in the Godhead outside the divine nature; it is an invitation to participate in that dialogue. Thus, there is established a profound reciprocity between humanity and God on the one hand, and among us humans with one another as we journey through history towards the communion that would be consummated in the parousia. It is at this parousia that every human quest *for community and belongingness would be satisfied and every human yearning cease. With this hope, the Christian dogma of the Blessed Trinity ceases to be any longer a dry dogma of faith but becomes a dance step where God teaches and coaches his little ones how to live in community with one another. This is more understandable when we read Horrell's remarks on the importance of this doctrine of God. He according to him, the Trinity is the macro-structure of reality which helps us to define and shape our worldviews:*

... one's understanding of God should significantly define his worldview. It is my belief that the doctrine of the Three-in-One provides a micro-structure of reality that makes sense of life, one that gives a remarkable basis for our perception of ourselves as persons, for our relationships in marriage, family, the local church and community and, in point, the role of the local church in mission<sup>217</sup>



*And put in another word, the once absurd doctrine of faith turns out to become a source of the most holy profound practical truths imaginable:*

*That means to say that it would now have implications for how I treat my family. The Trinity has implications for how I look at all other human beings. The Trinity has implications for the profession that I choose to spend my few days in the world practicing and how that will be done. The Trinity has implications for what I will consider the goal and purpose of my existence.<sup>218</sup>*

Dwight J. Zschelle explains that the way we understand the nature of God as Trinitarian affects and challenges the way we relate with God and with one another. It bears more fruit in our treatment of one another and our community. “Our working theology impacts our pattern of organization, whether we consciously intend it or not.” Zschelle leads us to see the iconic leadership God presents: “At the heart of the Biblical narrative of the life of the Trinity are the Incarnation and Cross. God’s manner of identification with humanity is one of self emptying power, prestige, and honour into the other (humanity) in order to serve and redeem us, as we read in Philippians 2:6-8. This pattern of pouring out one’s life into the other’s to the point of utter identification, even at great personal cost, contracts sharply with prevailing understandings of leadership, authority, and freedom – both in ancient and modern worlds”.<sup>219</sup>

It becomes obvious then that the Trinity as shared life becomes a model, both for relationship, community and life before human beings. The Holy Spirit is toward us as through Christ gives us access in himself to God – he is a person, an onto-relational being. Such notion of the person is applicable to the interpersonal relations in a created way, correlated to the uncreated way in which

it applies to God. We are thus called to live not as individuals, in isolation, but as members of communities in communion with one another. Understanding this, the Trinity then as a model of community would not be difficult for us Africans who naturally live and think in relational ways. We have our communities and still maintain the inherited structures of communal living. The Church too, is very much addressed as a community and in its inner mystery, maintains a relationship with the Triune God (LG 4). It would serve as an icon of the Trinity in the world while African communities would provide us with models for inculturating the Trinitarian faith. It is along this understanding that we talk today of the different theological perspectives of the Trinity in which the truths of this mystery are brought into a correlation with the realities of life and the “questions which men ask about the meaning of this present life and of the life to come, and how one is related to the other. We must be aware of and understand the aspirations, yearnings, and the often dramatic features of the world in which we live” (GS, 4). This will be the preoccupation of the next chapter.

In the bid therefore to address some of the issues that rob humanity of its personhood, many theologians have undertaken to carry on the liberative mission of theology of the Trinity into their respective areas of life and concerns, in the so-called social trinitarianism. The area of urgent need is the Church as a dynamic community of persons in relationship which does not undermine the hierarchical and institutional structures nor drift into an ideological social factor but rather promotes it by seeking a deeper conception of her image that would be a ground and window for reflecting Trinitarian community and communion here on earth. She continues in her self-understanding and as she labours amidst the challenges and vicissitudes of our time. Since she is the icon of the Trinity, being called and sustained by the Triune God, she satisfies the expectation of her founder that she reflects before men

and women of our time the love, unity, and communion that characterises Trinitarian life. She is not only to serve as a mirror, of the divine life, but has to be proactive in making that life felt and lived as she prepares humanity and the world to a fuller share of the Triune community. We make bold to say therefore that the Church *locus trinitatis* for experiencing the Trinitarian life and love in the world. Understanding the Church as communion images the Trinity, as icon of the Trinity, opens a new hermeneutic for understanding the Church today using the Vatican II Council as the referral to his argument.

In summary, this new hermeneutic opens a new vista to reading and interpreting the Trinity today. The being of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is now seen as a model of life for the Church where being, though a mystery, is contributed and where unity ensues from the unity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (LG 4). Over and above all, the Trinity must be understood in the face of brokenness that characterized the present society as a model and a challenge to the world in search of peace friendliness, and belonging. In our next chapter, we shall explore this in the context of the Church in Nigeria where we shall underline the points that the Trinity is a model of life, a model of community and thus present the Church as a model and icon of the Trinity in the Church. Where the Church fails to serve in this light, and where Christians as *imago Trinitatis*, fail to reflect the Trinitarian life and love, they would henceforth cease to do salt of the earth and life of the world

#### 4.12 The Import of Augustine's Trinitarian Doctrine for the church in Igboland and for an Igbo Community

The doctrine of the Trinity as expounded by St Augustine, particularly in his "*De Trinitate*" provides great insights for and calls the Church and the entire human community (as the host of

the Church) and the Universal Church in particular, to live as community and as one family. Augustine, promoted by the zeal to defend the authentic faith, expounded a relational doctrine of the Triune God. He exposed how the three persons live a perfect life of communion and love. He went ahead to teach how humans can emulate the divine persons and community. In his teaching, he sought the most viable illustration by searching for a creaturely image of the Trinity. His preference for a psychological approach to this Christian doctrine of God was novel to the practice in most of his predecessors and contemporaries. Quite unlike his predecessors who opted for earthly elements to convey transcendental truth, St Augustine, on the other hand, turned inwardly to the “inner man” for a search of the image of the Trinity in the world. His psychological gaze at this doctrine of God was conceived in the bid, perhaps, to provide an illustration of the image of the Trinity with a human person who bears an image of God Himself in the world. Accordingly, he awakened the conscious mind in his time that there lies an image of the divine Trinity even within any human selves. For Augustine, the presence of the image in humans is an invitation and a challenge to live like our prototype –the Trinity.

Augustine used the doctrines of unity (substance) in which he concentrated on the nature and oneness of God on the one hand, and the relations in God as the theological foundation for discussing unity in diversity within the Godhead. His conception of the Trinity therefore indicates the picture of One God who, within His divine self, is a community. A look into the culture of Africa (particularly the interrelatedness inherent in African communities) in which he was brought up helps one to interpret substantial unity in the Godhead as Augustine taught. In this respect, one sees a parallel between the ideas of Tertullian in a communitarian deity and those of Augustine, rather than the Aristotelian understanding of distinct material substratum which lies completely independent

of the other. "Substance became Augustine's version of the Cappadocian "*archê*". According to the Cappadocians, the Father is the *archê* (source, origin, principle) who in freedom and self-giving allowed the Son and the Holy Spirit to share in Himself. Such a thought as this imports some underlying notion of subordination in God. This interpretation is inescapable, especially as the Father alone is regarded as the principle of divinity itself. For Augustine and for any African, this would not only import inherent subordination but also could serve as the necessary basis for despotism and oppressive approach to life and governance in which the "I" is and remains the only authentic and true subject while the "other" is ascribed an "it". In this wise, the Son and the Holy Spirit would have nothing in common with the Father apart from what is given "*gratis*" by the possessor of this absolute "I".

The divine nature on the other hand, which both Tertullian and Augustine stressed, is better seen from various African traditions and from these traditions draw some implications of this Trinitarian doctrine of God for the human community. These traditions are grounded on the communal understanding of the Divine and of humanity. In consequence, it does not only provide an adequate ground for a safeguard of the unity of God (of the Trinity), it more importantly provides an adequate ground for explaining the meaning of equality and for clarifying personal distinction and temporal subordination within the community without subjecting differences to anthropological inferiority (as the Arians did).<sup>220</sup> Augustine was only being cautious. In the cause of defending the *monarchia* of God, Tertullian had been accused of propagating two or three gods (tritheism) with different natures (evidently, an obvious a form of polytheism), since he had insisted on the plurality of members within the Divine, even in its unity.<sup>221</sup> For him instead, "Three" is a sign of infinite Divine plenitude: hence one "substance" indicates that the Trinity as a whole is consubstantial with each member – the Father, Son and Holy

Spirit. Hence, substantial unity in God points to a dynamic, organic unity rather than mathematical atomistic unity, to refer to the "Divine stuff" or "divine nature."<sup>222</sup>

The discussion on Trinitarian relations provides the theological evidence for distinctness in the one God in St Augustine's *De Trinitate*. He based his arguments on the testimony of revelation and existing Tradition on divine actions in the economy. The personal distinctions are not in doubt for Augustine, but he had to provide an ontological and theological base upon which he could address the attacks on the orthodox faith by the either Sabellians or Arians and by extension, the Tritheists. First of all, his basic thought and take off point is the unity of God. He followed this up with the manifestation of this one God in the economy of salvation as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Finally, he went ahead to clarify the troubling problem of number where distinguishing between the relational and the additive formulae. He explained therefore that in the Trinity, the three do not equal to three Gods but only one God. Using thus the doctrine of the divine relations, Augustine explains the Trinitarian nature of the one God. This would receive its climatic elaborations in scholasticism - particularly in the elaborate teachings on personhood as a subsistent relation developed by Thomas Aquinas. His clarification, building on the unity of nature (*una substantia*) and the relation of origin (a thesis that became modified in the scholastic doctrine of relation of opposites and became formally declared a dogmatic formula by the Council of Florence), Augustine asserted a "personalistic" presentation of the Divine Three where he now projected the terms, Father, Son and Holy Spirit as relational concepts. Today in the contemporary times, the concept "person" is essentially understood to be relational. By so doing, the statement of faith that there are three persons in one God becomes symbolic for us where a Divine Person becomes a prototype and model of personhood and the

Trinity emerges as a prototype of persons in relation, a prototype and model of community, familyhood and communion.

There is need to re-emphasize the ground for authentic unity and diversity in the world today. This need would be very urgent in a world of broken relationships. This involves many members of the Church, either as perpetrators or victims. It poses a major challenge to the mission of the Church in unprecedented terms. In present day Nigerian communities, especially of the post-military rule era, the level of divisions, enmity and crises have become a major cause of concern. Agulanna uses a number of metaphors to describe how and why societies and persons who were once held in strong ties how the strong ties that held the society tightly together came to loosen, and life in the community and families degenerated into splinter groups and factions. To buttress this point, he speaks of the levelling mentality, which he termed the “crab mentality” (or pull him down). He uses the Mbaise people of Imo State in present day Nigeria for a sample. He says:

Any nation where everybody is at the lower rungs of the ladder of life is a nation in distress. Levelling mentality believes in doing everything possible to ensure that everybody is equal preferably at the lower levels of life. This mentality is generally another shackle that holds Igbo people down as well as Mbaise people.<sup>222</sup>

The consequences of these mentalities have reduced the land to a theatre of hunger, poverty, sickness and underdevelopment. As the foundation fabrics that bound people together in the community in past years are broken, humans are left to struggle and fight for survival as individuals. This makes the need to reconstruct the community spirit imperative. This clamour is already in the air. Solidarity was the brain behind Mbaise fame and progress. Evidences of community sponsored projects abound and these

accounted for the rapid development recorded in Mbaiseland, especially in the 50s and 60s. Nze Onukafor of Ife na Owutu in Ezinihitte Mbaise relates why the roads are no longer maintained and the market squares cleaned from time to time as they used to do in their youth days. He said: "in our own time, we were always together, to the streams and to the bush to fetch firewood. We did everything together as a team. We would come out on appointed days to clean roads and the market squares. But today things have changed. You no longer see them together. Today, no one easily takes anything from the brother, since all is afraid of the other."<sup>225</sup> Many indicators show the prevalence of the same problem in other parts of Igboland. Information from Ngwaland as well as Mbano and Obowo come with startling information that the youth, for instance are left to carry their destinies in their own hands. Obasi makes an affirmation of Onukafor's worry, but identifies leadership style as the root cause of the whole problem. According to him, it is quite evident that the leaders and the elite lack the readiness to carry the others (more especially the young) along. This oftentimes has created a worrisome state or situation between the youth and the old. While we understand the differences between the young and the old which the interviewees represented, we find it more difficult to appreciate the case of a woman who wished to remain anonymous that she and her children cannot afford to worship God in the same Church with the man that killed her husband and made her a widow in broad daylight. This is an obvious case of concern as she may be representing also the unspoken voices of many.

The essence of the Church as a community of faith, hope and clarity, a community that functions as a sign and instrument of unity and communion is thus called to question where her members and the world to whom she is sent to minister are living in shreds. She has the duty to go back inwards and come up with a theological pastoral frame upon which she would employ her



services for the good of humankind and the salvation of souls. She has the need to re-invent communion within the differences that abound in every community. This she must begin by herself, following the agenda set in motion at the Vatican II Council of self-examination and then mission *ad extra*. The Augustinian Trinitarian doctrine which highly emphasized the communion and love, built on mutual reciprocity within the Trinity provides us with that theological frame.

A high point for theological inculcation of Trinitarian communion should be the cultural value where ostracism meant the cutting of someone from the web of life. As K.C. Anyanwu rightly pointed out, life without community is meaningless. The culmination of St Augustine's Trinitarian doctrine is the implanting image of the Trinity as a community in Mbaise, Igboland and in Nigeria, and indeed, wherever humankind exists in community. It becomes the duty of the Church, then, as an icon of that Trinity in the world, to plant this same Trinitarian life in all lands. Thus, in her mission in Igboland, the Church should lead the movement for rediscovery of the sense of community which is fast corroding today in the world. The opportunities would not only be a spiritual advantage, it could have deep socio-cultural and anthropological promises to the man and woman of today (from Mbaise and beyond) in their quest for belonging and search for meaning. The ideal of such meaning and belonging is God who reveals Himself to us in the three fold ways Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This knowledge promotes solidarity and love even among human beings in communities.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Fortman, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, p. 271

<sup>3</sup> Kelly, 271

<sup>4</sup> Joseph S. O'Leary, "Method and structures in the *De Trinitate* of St. Augustine": <http://josephsoleary.typepad.com/myweblog/methods-and-structures-in-the-de-trinitate-of-st-augustine-1976/htm> of May 5, 2009

<sup>5</sup> Yves Congar, "Augustine, the Trinity, and the Filioque:" [http://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/pics/St\\_Augustine\\_Theology\\_Congar.pdf](http://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/pics/St_Augustine_Theology_Congar.pdf), cf. Augustine, *De Trin.* 5. 3. 4; 6.7; 6. 1. 1; see also *Contra sermonem arianorum (418-419)*; *Collatio cum Maximino and Contra Maximinum*.

<sup>6</sup> Fortman, p. 140.

<sup>7</sup> New Advent, Catholic Encyclopedia, "St Augustine: *De Trinitate* [http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130\\_115.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130_115.htm), Aug. 17, 2010

<sup>8</sup> Augustine Letter to Aurelius, Parsons, p. 84

<sup>9</sup> cf Stan Anyanwu, unpublished faculty lecture note on St Augustine, 2006, at CIWA

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Mckenna, Introduction, St Augustine. The Trinitate, 1963, p.VIII

<sup>11</sup> cf., François Glorié, 'Augustinus, *De Trinitate*', in *Sacris Erudiri* 16 [1965]: 203-55

<sup>12</sup>E. Hendrickx, 'La date de composition du *De Trinitate*,' *L'année théologique augustinienne* 11 [1952]:305-16)

<sup>13</sup> O'Leary, 1976

<sup>14</sup>Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. P. 119

<sup>15</sup>Fortman, 140.

<sup>16</sup> Oshitelu... .

<sup>17</sup>Chadwick, 90, 91

<sup>18</sup>Chadwick 91, 92

<sup>19</sup>Mckenna, p. ix

<sup>20</sup>Fortman, p.140

<sup>21</sup>O' Meara, p. 254

<sup>22</sup> Robert Letham, p. 196

<sup>23</sup>O'Leary, *Methods and Structures in Augustine's De Trinitate: Introduction*

<sup>24</sup>Augustine, *De Trinitate*, in *New Advent Online Catholic Encyclopedia*

<sup>25</sup>Mckenna, p. ix, x

<sup>26</sup>John J O'Meara, ed. *An Augustine Reader*, Garden City, Image Books, 252

<sup>27</sup>De Trin Bk 7, proem in New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia

<sup>28</sup> E. J. Fortman, *The Triune God*, 1982, p., 101, 102

<sup>29</sup>De Trin, 5.9.10

<sup>30</sup>cf. E.J. Fortman, *The Theology of God, Commentary*, Contemporary College theology series, Milwaukee, The Bruce Publishing Co, 1968, p. 122

<sup>31</sup>E. J. Fortman, *The Theology of God*, 1968, p.1 22

<sup>32</sup>E. J. Fortman, *The Triune God*, 1982 p. 154.

<sup>33</sup>Pius XI, *Ad Salutem*, Encyclical Letter, 1930, no. 23

<sup>34</sup>O'Collins, 141

<sup>35</sup>John J.O. Donnel, p. 119 – 122; 133

<sup>36</sup>De Trin 1.4.7

<sup>37</sup>De Trin 1.3.5

<sup>38</sup>Ayres, p. 95 - 96

<sup>39</sup>cf. Hans Kung, *Does God Exist?* Trans by Edward Quinn, New York, Crossroad, 1991 edition, p. 19

<sup>40</sup>J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 271; cf. Also Fortman, 1968, p, 114

<sup>41</sup>E.J Dobbin in Komonchak, p. 1057.

<sup>42</sup>Ayres,p.

<sup>43</sup>St Augustine, Treatise on Faith and the Creed, in RE Syllabus, Ireland, CD-Library: Classics, 2004 [www.librarycd.com](http://www.librarycd.com).

<sup>44</sup>Augustine *De Trinitate*, Bk 1 ch 3

<sup>45</sup>Norman Pittenger, *the Divine Trinity*, Philadelphia, United Church Press, 1977, p.42.

<sup>46</sup>Augustine, *De Fide et Symbolo*, 9.16

<sup>45</sup>Dobbin, *Trinity in Komonchak* 1058.

<sup>47</sup>Joseph Pohle, *the Divine Trinity, A Dogmatic Treatise* ed. By Arthur Preuss, St. Louis, B. Herder Book Co, 1925, p. 197

<sup>48</sup>Stephen Mikenna, 'Introduction' in *De Trinitate*, p. xv

<sup>49</sup>cf John Edward Sullivan, *the Image of God*, Dubuque, the Priority Press, p84, 89, 104

<sup>50</sup>Sullivan, p85

<sup>51</sup>Letham, 198, 200.

<sup>52</sup>cf. Augustine, *Retractions on the Fifteen Books on the Trinity*, trans by Sister Mary Inez Bogan, p. 147; *Letter to Aurelius, Bishop of Carthage* (c. 416) in Parsons, *Letters*, Vol IV, (165-203), p. 81-81; *Letters to Dioscorus and Aurelius*, Parsons, p. 84

<sup>53</sup>cf Stan Anyanwu, unpublished faculty lecture on St Augustine, 2006, at CIWA.

<sup>54</sup>Lewis Ayres, P. 171

<sup>55</sup>Ayres, 72; see *Retractiones* 1.17

<sup>57</sup>Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, p. 239

<sup>58</sup>*De Trin.* I, 2, 4

<sup>59</sup>*De Trin.* I, 2, 4

<sup>60</sup>*De Trin* 5.8.9

<sup>61</sup>*De Trin* 7.4.8

<sup>62</sup>J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, p. 98

<sup>62</sup>*De Trin* Book 2

<sup>63</sup>cf *De Trin* 1.6.12

<sup>64</sup>Norman Pittenger, *the Divine Trinity*, Philadelphia, United Church Press, 1977, p.42

<sup>65</sup>Kelly, p. 272, citing Johannes Tract.39, 2 – 4

<sup>66</sup>cf. Augustine *De Trin* 5.8.9; 6.7.8; 7.6.12; 15.6.9; 15.6.10; 15.7.10

<sup>68</sup>Georges Florovsky, *The Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth Century*, [http://www.holyTrinitymission.org/books/english/fathers\\_florovsky\\_2.htm](http://www.holyTrinitymission.org/books/english/fathers_florovsky_2.htm)

<sup>69</sup>cf Ayres, p. 96, 97

<sup>70</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, cited by Leonardo Boff in *Trinity and Society*, trans Paul Burns, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988, p.19

<sup>71</sup> Anne Hunt, p. 6, 7

<sup>72</sup> Anne Hunt, p. 7

<sup>73</sup> cf Arthur W. Wainwright, *Trinity in the New Testament*, London, SPCK, 1969, 237

<sup>74</sup> Anne Hunt, p.10, 11

<sup>75</sup> Kasper

<sup>76</sup> Hunt, 11

<sup>77</sup> cf O' Collins, p 85

<sup>78</sup> Letham, *The Holy Trinity in Scripture, History, Theology and Worship*, 2004, p.89

<sup>79</sup> cf J.N.D Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, pp 83-108

<sup>80</sup> Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *The General Catechetical Directory*, 1971; cf., Gerald O' Collins, p.85

<sup>76</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, p. 228

<sup>77</sup> Kasper, p. 249,150

<sup>78</sup> Letham, *The Holy Trinity in Scripture, History, Theology and Worship*, 2004, p.89

<sup>79</sup> cf O' Collins, p 85

<sup>80</sup> Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *The General Catechetical Directory*, Ad norman decretum, 1971

<sup>81</sup>William G. Rusche, p.2

<sup>82</sup>Letham, 91

<sup>83</sup>O'Collins

<sup>84</sup>Rusche, 2-3; cf Letham, 91

<sup>85</sup>Willis, 98

<sup>86</sup>Kasper, 249

<sup>87</sup>Kasper, 97

<sup>88</sup>Kasper, 150

<sup>89</sup>Letham, *The Holy Trinity in Scripture, History, Theology and Worship*, 2004. 89

<sup>89cf.</sup> O'Collins, 85

<sup>90</sup>William G. Rusche, *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980. 2

<sup>91</sup>Rusche, 2

<sup>92</sup>Kelly, JND., *Christian Doctrine*, 83 – 108

<sup>93</sup>Kelly,.

<sup>95</sup>Fortman, *The Triune God*, 51

<sup>96</sup>OCollins, 87

<sup>97</sup>Anne Hunt, *Trinity*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2005, 15, 16



<sup>98</sup>cf., Justin Martyr, Apology 1.6, 65, 67

<sup>99</sup>cf., Irenaeus, Adversus Praxean, 12

<sup>98</sup>Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, 61:3-4

<sup>99</sup>Letham, <sup>94</sup>: cf Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. 4:20.1

<sup>100</sup>cf G L. Prestige, 236

<sup>101</sup>St Irenaeus, Adversus Haeresus, 1.10.1

<sup>102</sup>cf St Athanasius, Apologia Contra Arianos 1, 61; 3, 15, 16, 4

<sup>103</sup>St. Athanasius, Letter to Serapion, 1. 27

<sup>104</sup>Catherine Mowry LaCugna, God for Us, P. 67

<sup>105</sup>cf Tertullian, Adversus Praxean, 1.10.1

<sup>106</sup>Tertullian, Adv. Praxean, 9

<sup>107</sup>O'Collins, 126

<sup>108</sup>Hunt, 15, 16

<sup>109</sup>Paul Collins, the Trinity: A Guide for the Perplexed (London: Continuum, 2008), 28

<sup>110</sup>G.L.Prestige, God in Patristic Thought, London, SPCK, 1969. P.235, 236

<sup>111</sup>G.L. Prestige, 236

<sup>112</sup>Paul Collins, 29

<sup>113</sup>St Athanasius, *Apologia Contra Arianos*, 1.61

<sup>114</sup>St Athanasius, *Letter to Serapion*, 1.27

<sup>115</sup>LaCugna, 67

<sup>116</sup>Gregory Nazienzus, *Orationes* 25, 16; cf., LaCugna, 67

<sup>117</sup> St Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 6.14.

<sup>118</sup> John Damascene, *De fide Orth* 1,8.

<sup>119</sup> John Damascene, *De fide. Orth*, 1,8.

<sup>120</sup>cf Michael O'Carroll, *Trinitas, A Theological Encyclopedia on the Holy Trinity* pp.131-140

<sup>121</sup>cf. Thomas Hopko, "Holy Spirit in Orthodox Theology and life" in *Commonwheel*, Nov 8, 1968, pp. 186-191

<sup>122</sup>Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "Trinity, Doctrine of the" in Richard McBrien, ed. *Encyclopaedia of Catholicism*, p. 1271.

<sup>123</sup>John R. Willis, editor. *The Teachings of the Church Fathers*, p. 129

<sup>124</sup>John R. Willis, 173

<sup>125</sup>cf, Ayres, p.59 – 63

<sup>126</sup>Ayres, 5

<sup>127</sup>Augustine, *Letter 120*; Hunt, 18; see Ayres, 5

<sup>128</sup>Hunt, p. 18. Hunt, p.18 note 130

<sup>129</sup>Augustine, *De Trin.* 1.5.8. note 131

<sup>130</sup>Hunt, p. 18, 19.

<sup>131</sup>Augustine, *De Trinitate* 6. 12.

<sup>132</sup>*De Trinitate* 5.14.15

<sup>133</sup>cf Walter Kasper, *That They May All Be One, The Call to Unity Today*, London: Burns & Oates, 2004, 97ff

<sup>134</sup>Anne Hunt, *Trinity*, p. 20.

<sup>135</sup>Augustine, *De Trinitate* 14.15

<sup>136</sup>Pius XI, 1930, Encyclical Letter, *Ad Salutem*, n. 23, citing Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 8. 1. 1

<sup>137</sup> Pius XI, 1930, *Ad Salutem* 24

<sup>138</sup>Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us*, pp. 150-157

<sup>139</sup>Anne Hunt, p. 23

<sup>140</sup>Richard of St. Victor, *De Trinitate*, 1, 20

<sup>141</sup>Carroll, *Trinitas*, P. 197

<sup>142</sup>cf Benedict XVI, "Pope challenges pilgrims to use Holy Trinity as model in Relationship" <http://pakistanchristian.tv/news2009-11-25-pope->

<sup>143</sup>Showings, *Long text*, chap. 4, in Anne Hunt, *Trinity*, 31, citing Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, trans. Edmund College and James

Walsh, *Classics of Western Spirituality*, New York: Paulist Press, 1978

<sup>144</sup>Boethius, *Eut.* 3.1 – 5 in Fortman, p.163; LaCugna, p.154

<sup>145</sup>Fortman, *The Triune God*, p.191

<sup>146</sup>cf Benard J.F. Lonergan, Robert M. Doran and Daniel Mansour, *The Triune God: Systematics, an E-Book*, [http://books.google.com/books?id=ubMU7qEKZZoC&pg=PA311&dq=the+concept+of+Person+in+St+Augustine,+pdf&hl=en&ei=opyJTd\\_7LcefOpeYobEO&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CC4Q6AEwAjgU#v=onepage&q=the%20concept%20of%20Person%20in%20St%20Augustine%2C%20pdf&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=ubMU7qEKZZoC&pg=PA311&dq=the+concept+of+Person+in+St+Augustine,+pdf&hl=en&ei=opyJTd_7LcefOpeYobEO&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CC4Q6AEwAjgU#v=onepage&q=the%20concept%20of%20Person%20in%20St%20Augustine%2C%20pdf&f=false)

<sup>147</sup>Joseph Pohle, *The Divine Trinity*, St Louis, B. Herder Book, Co. p. 220 – 230; 236 – 243

<sup>148</sup>Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God*, p. 158

<sup>149</sup>Fortman, p. 159, citing DZ 75-76

<sup>150</sup>Pelikan, p. 50

<sup>151</sup>Jeroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, p. 16

<sup>152</sup>cf. Fortman, *The Triune God*, pp. 197-198; *The Jesuit Fathers, The Church Teaches*, n. 306

<sup>153</sup>cf Fortman, p. 218; Neuner-Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, n. 326; *The Jesuit Fathers, The Church Teaches*, n. 312

<sup>154</sup>McBrien, *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, p. 3180; Neuner-Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, p. 151

<sup>155</sup>The Church Teaches, nn 314 - 320

<sup>156</sup>Karl Rahner, Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise “*De Trinitate*”, p. 77-79

<sup>157</sup>Fortman. 285

<sup>158</sup>The Jesuit Fathers, The Church Teaches, nn 314ff

<sup>159</sup>cf Friedrich Lauchert, “Anton Günther” in the Original Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://oce.catholic.com/index.php?title=Anton-Gunther>; cf The Christian Faith pp 42 – 43; The Jesuit Fathers, The Church Teaches, p. 137

<sup>160</sup>The Jesuit Fathers, The Church Teaches, nn. 317ff

<sup>161</sup>Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, 68, 69

<sup>162</sup>Joseph Neuner and Josef Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, p. 157

<sup>163</sup>Neuner- Dupuis, p. 157

<sup>164</sup>Bruno Forte, *The Church: Icon of the Trinity*, Boston, St Paul Books & Media, 1991, p. 18

<sup>165</sup>cf., Vatican II, AG 4; John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 21; CCC, 852

<sup>166</sup>SCC, *Ad norman decreti*, n 47

<sup>167</sup>SCDF- *Mysterium Fidei*, 1972, n. 19

<sup>168</sup>John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 1979, n. 10

<sup>169</sup>John Paul II, Letter to Families, Rome 2 February, 1994, nu 16, citing Eph. 3:14-15

<sup>170</sup>The PCPCU, "Clarification on the Greek and Latin Traditions Regarding the Procession of the Holy Spirit", of 13 September, 1995

<sup>171</sup>Pius X, Ad Salutem, n.23

<sup>172</sup>Karl Barth, The Humanity of God (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1960), 38

<sup>173</sup>John T. Pless, "Tracking the Trinity in Contemporary Theology" in Concordia Theological Quarterly; Vol 69:2 April 2005 of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne Indiana. p.99 – 119, <http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/plesstrackingTrinity.pdf>.

<sup>174</sup>Karl Barth, the Doctrine of the Word of God, trans, G. Bromiley, Edinburgh, 1960, p. 358

<sup>175</sup>Karl Barth, the Doctrine of the Word of God, p. 339

<sup>176</sup>cf., Barth, the Doctrine of the Word of God, 353

<sup>177</sup>cf., Karl Barth, the Doctrine of the Word of God, 368, 381

<sup>178</sup>Rahner "Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise, 'De Trinitate' in Theological Investigations, vol. Iv, p. 77, The Trinity, 9-10

<sup>179</sup>Rahner, Foundations of Christian Faith, New York, Crossroad, 1987, p. 135

<sup>180</sup> Karl Rahner, The Trinity, 21 – 24

<sup>181</sup> cf. Karl Rahner, Foundations of the Christian Faith, p. 71 -73

<sup>182</sup>Karl Rahner, "The Trinity," in *A Map of Twentieth-Century Theology: Readings from Karl Barth II to Radical Pluralism*, ed. Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, 190.

<sup>183</sup>Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology- Volume I*, tr. G. W. Bromiley, London: T&T Clark, 2004, 295.

<sup>184</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology- Volume I*, 319.

<sup>185</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology- Volume I*, 311-312

<sup>186</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology- Volume I*, 335.

<sup>187</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, tr. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden New York: Harper and Row, 1974, 239

<sup>188</sup>Jürgen Moltman, *The Crucified God*, 244

<sup>189</sup>Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 157-158

<sup>190</sup>Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 265

<sup>191</sup>Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 255

<sup>192</sup>Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, tr. Paul Burns, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988, 221-222

<sup>193</sup>Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 221-223.

<sup>194</sup>Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 215

<sup>195</sup>Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and the Christian Life*, San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991, 1; cf also Catherine Mowry LaCugna and Kilian McDonnell, "Returning

from the Far Country: Theses for a Contemporary Trinitarian Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41 (1988): 191-215).

<sup>196</sup>LaCugna, *God for Us*, 13

<sup>197</sup>LaCugna, *God for Us*, 210

<sup>198</sup> LaCugna, *God for Us*, 228

<sup>199</sup>LaCugna, *God for Us*, 249

<sup>200</sup>LaCugna, *God for US*, 271

<sup>201</sup>LaCugna, *God for Us*, 249

<sup>202</sup>LaCugna, *God for Us*, 398

<sup>203</sup>LaCugna, *God for Us*, 392

<sup>204</sup>LaCugna, *God for Us*

<sup>205</sup>Margaret A. Farley, "New Patterns of Relationship: Beginning of a Moral Revolution" in *Theological Studies*, [cdn,theologicalstudies.net/36.4.3.pdf](http://cdn.theologicalstudies.net/36.4.3.pdf)

<sup>206</sup>CCC, 257

<sup>207</sup>Zizioulas, 39

<sup>208</sup>CCC, 254

<sup>209</sup> In the views of C.S. Lewis, the sole purpose of divine kenosis is theosis (see the Selected Poems of C.S. Lewis). This theological theme is gaining much ground in contemporary western theological thought. Paul M. Collins' 2010 publication, *Partaking in the Divine*



Nature: Deification and Communion (T&T Clark, London), for instance, makes a historical survey of the development of this theme from the Eastern Orthodox theology and its penetration into the heart of western theology today, especially in the more recent decades. K. Ward's 2017 publication, *The Christian Idea of God: A Philosophical Foundation for Faith* (Cambridge Studies in Religion, Philosophy, and Society by the Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) has "Kenosis and Theosis" as one of the treated subtitles, see pp.191 -203.

<sup>210</sup>Paul M. Collins, *the Trinity A Guide for the Perplexed*, P. 62

<sup>211</sup>T. F. Torrance, *Scientific Theology and Critical Realism*, 2010.  
<http://mrtindavis.blogspot.com>

<sup>212</sup>Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, P. 290

<sup>213</sup>cf Paul M. Collins, *The Trinity, A Guide for the Perplexed* P. 62

<sup>214</sup>cf Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, p.9

<sup>215</sup>Zizioulas, *Being Communion*, p 41-42

<sup>216</sup>J. Scot Horrell, 2004. "The Self-Giving Triune God, Imago Dei and the Nature of the Local Church: An Ontology of Mission",  
<https://bibl.org/article/self-giving-triune-god>

<sup>217</sup>Mark A. McNeil, "A Brief Introduction to Trinitarian Faith"  
<http://www.abortionessay.com/file>

<sup>218</sup>J. Scot Horrell, 2004. "The Self-Giving Triune God, Imago Dei and the Nature of the Local Church: An Ontology of Mission",  
<https://bibl.org/article/self-giving-triune-god>

<sup>219</sup> Dwight J. Zschelle, "The Trinity, Leadership, and Power." In the Journal of Religious Leadership, Vol. 6 No. 2, Fall 2007, <http://arl-jil.org/volumes/zscheile07.pdf>

<sup>220</sup> cf Ogbonnaya, XI, 51,85.

<sup>221</sup> cf Ogbonnaya, 64ff, cf Ad praxeas, chapter 2-7, 86.

<sup>223</sup> cf Ogbonnaya 75-77, 87.

<sup>224</sup> Agulanna, "Demographic Structure of Mbaise and the Implications for Economic and Political Growth" in Emma Obasi and Oscar Anyanwu, 61, 88.

<sup>225</sup> Interview with Nze Onukafor, a Catholic, about 85 years of age is a native of Ife Ezenihite Mbaise: granted 28/5/2018.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

Philosophy, they say, begins with wonder. However, in the case of the Christian doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, the English adage which says that “necessity is the mother of invention” holds true when it comes to the development of the Christian doctrine of the Blessed Trinity in the life of the church. The Blessed Trinity is a mystery of the Christian faith. The context in which what the Church calls its doctrine of the Trinity developed in the early church is one of challenges, tensions, oppositions, errors and misplaced, heretical interpretations of the revealed truth, human rationalization and application of the Gospel message to the life situations and diverse cultural milieus the nascent church found itself. St Augustine provided an elaborate clarification of the doctrine which he confesses it as the faith of the church and his faith also. In addition to the need for further clarification, the clarifications St. Augustine made in the *De Trinitate*, in particular, address the contending theological issues which were already threatening the unity of the Christian community in his time. The Christian community was already weakened by the Donatist and soon again by the Pelagian controversies which St. Augustine devoted his learning, time and energy in fighting. The situation is much the same today in most parts of the world where division, injustice, poverty, insecurity and hatred is at the fore. In like manner, the Church in Igboland, bearing in her bosom, the wounds and scars of human pain and grief, finds herself compelled to give a response to the griefs and anxieties of her sons and daughters living in the world, and humanity in general, living in a world of unjust, divisive, exclusive conflicts that have led a countless number of souls to a precipitated death, a countless number homeless and yet a multitude without food or proper shelter. Division is always considered a crack on a people’s value system. And since such societies have not always withstood the pressures

from the ills of contemporary times, there becomes a justification of the church in her vigilance and commitment to the course of the Gospel to rise to the occasion and bring hope and joy to her sons and daughters and to humanity as a whole. St Augustine of Hippo, as Bishop of Hippo, devoted time and energy in defending the orthodoxy of faith, clarifying the much misinterpreted Christian doctrine of faith, and corrected errors from the church's contrivers.

The major doctrinal battle fought in the early Church concerned the oneness of God and the struggle to explain the inner relationship among the divine Persons, especially within the Godhead. The articulation of the very position of the church on the questions, whose central aim was to restore unity in the Christian community, is what we have in our creedal symbols as the faith of the church and of the Christians. Augustine, who found himself at the twilight of the patristic era, considered unity and communion a great value for the life of the Christian community and the good of the Gospel, hence he would stop at nothing in assuring it a vigorous defense in the face of any error and menacing threat. He as member of the Magisterium resorted to a clarification of the definitions of the trinitarian faith to embrace the questions arising out of the needs of his time within his community. This faith says that God is one (*Credo in Unum Deum*) who is Three in Persons. When put in a confessional formula, it reads: "We believe in one God... the Father ... the Son ... the Holy Spirit" (The Roman Missal). The confession professes the nature of God as Trinitarian. This doctrine of faith which developed in the post-Apostolic church went through the recesses of positive revelation to assert affirmatively the belief of the church as then practiced in the church's liturgy, especially in the baptismal catechesis and celebrations of the early church. The Magisterium and the theological tradition have lent themselves to its proof, elaboration and defence against the various challenges that confronted the church on account of its novel teaching of plurality in God.

One Council after another, Synod after Synod, and one Symbol after another, arising from the bosom of the church, each in its turn, backed up with scriptural foundations, faced the issue of the Trinitarian faith and gave clarifications on specific aspects of the faith with increasing sharpness to meet each heresy as its came along. For instance, Nicaea I dwelt on the divinity of God the Son and through the concept of "Substance" (*ousion*) laid the ontological foundation for addressing the unity of God. The Council of Constantinople I (381 AD) focused on the Holy Spirit and developed the concept of "procession" in regard to the origin of the Holy Spirit. Secondly the Council, modifying Nicaea I and supplying the missing link in the relationship between the Son and the Spirit developed the doctrine, not of the *Ousion*, but of the distinct hypostases of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and thus laid the foundation for discussing the dynamic conception of God as a relational being.

St Augustine, among many others laboured in this respect to preserve the deposit of the faith by giving it an authentic interpretation that has remained across the ages, a distinctive trait of Christian theology in the West. It is along this background that this work studied Augustine's Trinitarian theology, though with special focus on his *De Trinitate*. Augustine, as both theologian and member of the church hierarchy, who stands a strategic ground, to teach on the being of God and what it has for humankind. The result of the study is quite enriching for the church's self-understanding as she engages herself on mission of salt and light to the human community with a special focus on the Church in Igboland, Nigeria.

St Augustine's Trinitarian theology is said to have given the Western tradition its mature and bold expression.<sup>1</sup> He paid special attention to trinitarian reflections to the point that "All his life as a Christian he was meditating the problem of Trinity, explaining the

Church's doctrine to inquiring and defending it against attack...."<sup>2</sup>  
The mystery of this ineffable God becomes the subject matter of his long and elaborate discussion, the *De Trinitate*,<sup>3</sup> his *opus magnus*. Its special characteristic lies in the articulation of his faith in a style that blends personal experience of this faith and the teaching of the Church and the rules of reasoning (mediated in Neo-platonic lens).

Augustine's *De Trinitate* was a fruit of long years of meditation. In it, Augustine showed the Trinity to be at the very centre and heart of the Christian faith. The proximate cause and strength behind Augustine's embarking upon this "laborious" task is the challenge of the faith which had been distorted by Arians and those who use philosophical language and reasoning (*cf. Civ. 10.29; De Trin 13.19.24*) on the ineffable mystery. He employs evidences from both deposits of faith and reason to show that the concept of being both one and three "is so far from being gobbled gook that simple reflection on the nature of human personality offers an immediate example."<sup>4</sup>

However, its *sitz in leben* is the Church. Augustine wrote as a bishop, a contemplative and a philosopher, teacher and rhetorician. The combination of these trends blended by the *sensus fidei* result to the richness and complexity of the work that many consider too dry to understanding. Commentaries on this work, like Mckenna's, hold that Augustine's main reason for writing this work was probably to strengthen the faith of his fellow Christians (his brethren) that is, his fellow Catholics, on the greatest of the mysteries. He intended also to spur love among his followers/audience and to love God.<sup>5</sup>

He began by setting before himself the orthodox faith and followed it in style by what has been tagged his 'unique contribution' to Trinitarian thought: the psychological analogies.

Every other argument and method of approach is set in this perspective. The pursuit of this work is at the same time dialectical and argumentative.

Augustine was fully aware of the paucity of human language in expressing the mystery of God.<sup>6</sup> The distinctive features of Augustine's Trinitarian perspectives in the *De Trinitate* are the Orthodox Trinitarian Faith in which he confesses the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity. He took the Nicene definition of the Trinity as a preamble of faith and orthodoxy. The second is a profession of faith in this God who is Tri-personal where the distinguishing mark of his explanation of the doctrine lies in outlining the rules of relationality pertaining to the divine being and the implications underlying such explanations for the human community. The third feature lies in the use of analogies in illustrating the Trinity. This is perhaps the most important contribution of Augustine to the development of Trinitarian theology. Some of these analogies are intensely experiential, they are tenuous examples of how three things may be in some sense one.<sup>7</sup>

As Paul M. Collin points out, the Trinitarian doctrine is a hermeneutical tradition in a hermeneutical community. Clearly put then, one needs to know what Augustine taught in the light of orthodox theology and the contextual issues that warranted the *De Trinitate*. In that regard, Augustine meant to clarify doctrine and defend the Trinity against erroneous pretensions. He embarked on this as a hermeneutical excursion in which the articles of the faith were explored along the lines of their interpretational value. This helped him to address the faith as read, as taught, as believed and celebrated. This faith states that God is one but within this One God there are Three Divine Persons. He began his quest by situating his position at the beginning of the *De Trinitate* whereupon he makes his heavy reliance on the Catholic writers and

the Catholic Faith.<sup>8</sup> He repeatedly sounded that there are not **three** Gods but one God such that despite the fact that the Father **is** God, the Son as well as the Spirit, there are never two or **three** Gods but one as Tertullian's dictum holds: "if he is not one, **is not God.**"

The unity of God is so pervasive that **Augustine** would **solicit** its presence through the pages of **salvation** history beginning with the OT theophanies. His oneness is not limited **in thoughts** of Augustine to God's **immanent** self; but **equally in the economy**. What he is in his inner **self** becomes **revealed in his opera ad extra**. The three are **always** united such **that there** is never a time one operates in **isolation** of the **other**. **At** creation, redemption or even at **sanctification** which is **mostly** attributed to separate actions of **the Father**, the Son **or the Spirit**, he does not see a 'time' when one is absent. **In his perfection**, he cannot be one thing in the Godhead and **show** another thing of himself in the economy. Thus for **Augustine**, the action of God in the outside, too, is one. The ascription of such as creation, redemption or sanctification/transfiguration to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is done only by appropriation. Thus the unity of the Three in the work of salvation is thus defended and elaborated to meet the intellectual demands of his time. In actual fact Augustine does not distinguish the one God from the Trinity since the one God is the Trinity and the Trinity also is the one God.

The specific characteristic of the Christian faith lies in its confession in a Tri-une/Tri-personal God. In the one God there are Three Persons who, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is One God. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which this confession evokes and which Augustine vigorously defended and expounded, states that there are three persons in one God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Simply put, God is substantially One but Three in Persons. The substance becomes a gauge against any misrepresentation of the divine nature. He put it straight and clear



that God is not a *triplex* but Trinity.<sup>9</sup> He stresses this by positing that each person is God (*De Trin.* 7.3.4; *cf De Trin.* 15.17.28).

God is not only and simply One, he is Three; yet, he is not only and simply a Trinity, he is “a dynamic of persons in relation”. The terms used by Christian theology in speaking about the Trinity of God as ‘Person’, ‘Father’, ‘Son’, ‘Gift’, ‘Generating’, ‘begetting,’ ‘proceeding,’ ‘sending,’ ‘sent,’ ‘communion’ and many others are used by Augustine to illustrate this relationality of God. Each evokes an idea of ‘otherness’ in the being of God where the relatants are “distinct” from one another.

While actually affirming the personal distinctions within God in his intimate self, Augustine uses them to highlight the relationship in the inner being of God in which the Lover, the Beloved and the Love between the two illustrate an interpersonal relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Their relationship in its perfection is described as communion and reciprocal reference such that the unity in God is a communion, a mutual reciprocity. God becomes a community of persons bound up in a communion of love and life, marked by reciprocity and mutuality. Secondly, Augustine traces the relation of origin among the three where, like the East, especially the Cappadocians and later John of Damascus, the Father becomes the *mon-arche*, the source and principle of origin of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Thirdly, in the free flow of life and love, the Three, together join in the one mission *ad extra*. He holds that no action of God is perfected or carried out by the Father alone in isolation of the Son and the Holy Spirit nor does the Father do anything which remains unknown to the Son and the Spirit. God who is one and three is at the same time a relational being.

The notions of the Father generating or begetting the Son which was taken by Praxean to mean the same thing as creating<sup>10</sup> from

the ontological basis upon which Augustine introduces and explains the relationality inherent in the being and nature of God. He affirms that God is a relational being by virtue of these concepts since there would be no idea of God as Father when, in relation to the Trinity, he is not Father to the Son, or conceiving the Son without evoking the idea of the Father. Since the Father and the Son are in a perfect flow of life and love, the Spirit is that which the Father and the Son give and receive from each other. He is defined as the Love of God, the Gift, Use, blessedness, communion, of the Father and the Son. Thus the being of God is what it is by virtue of what each is to the other(s). Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity presents God as a dynamic of persons in relation. The matrix of this relationship is not only to be seen in the unity of substance but the communion enunciated in the mutual indwelling from eternity of one in the others.

Out of the summary preface of *De Trinitate* 1.4.7, emerges a threefold understanding that best captures Augustine's argument and at the same time facilitates our reflection of God, the Blessed Trinity, not only in the dynamics of salvation history but moreso as a model of life for the human community imposes itself on us. In the first place, for Augustine, Scripture (which is always his starting point) reveals Father and Son and Holy Spirit to be equal and inseparable. The fundamental basis for this equality and inseparability is their being from one substance. The second, according to Ayres, stems from an expansion of what it means for the Three to be one God by stating the logical irreducibility of the Three. The third expands on this personal irreducibility to the point of according each of the divine Three a specific role in accordance with evidences from Sacred Scripture and in accord with and in fidelity to the practice of the Catholic Church.<sup>11</sup> This inseparable unity of the Divine Three, rather than contradicting or conflicting with the personal distinctiveness of each Divine Person, rather enhances their love and communion. Augustine rather held strong

to the indivisibility of the divine substance and by virtue of this taught that the Three are mutually present in and to each other. In this regard therefore, Augustine teaches a doctrine of mutual indwelling by which he explains that the relationship between one and the others, stemming from eternity, is marked by openness, tolerance, penetration, and presence. This mutual indwelling is effective only to the point at which the difference in persons within the Godhead and the unity of their nature are understood to be neither contradictory nor confused but a reality about the nature of God. This opens a vista for discussing the Trinity as a model of being and life, and of community and relationship for men and women in the family and for the church and the world.

The implication of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity comes out more in the light of this new hermeneutic as Paul Collins suggests. Against Kant who values the Trinity as a mere speculative conjecture, for according to Kant, “the doctrine of the Trinity provides nothing, absolutely nothing, of value, even if one claims to understand it; still less when one is convinced that it far surpasses human understanding”,<sup>12</sup> the doctrine becomes a rich asset to humanity along the journey of rediscovery of meaning and life in a community. Contemporary theologians today have arrived at such discovery in the Trinity. Augustine’s theology in particular, and indeed the whole doctrine as propounded by both the Magisterium and other individual theologians, all point to the fact that God is interpersonal. He is relational. He is “other-related”. He is a community. A being that is at the same time one but who within his being is interpersonal as relational, a being within which the ‘members’ relate with each other in such a communion of life and self-giving that in spite of the personal distinctions, there is no domination or oppression, no subordination of any kind, becomes a model, archetypal for the human community called to unity by the one God who subsists in unity.

An argumentative justification that the Trinity is a community and as such the perfect one could be made from a perusal of the pages of the Sacred Writ and, beyond that, in the testimony of Tradition and the reflections of theologians across the ages. Obviously, this confession, a specifically Christian form of speaking about God, emerges first as a synthesis of biblical faith in God and a recapitulation and summary of the entire Christian mystery of salvation.

In the contemporary times, following the outcome of the Vatican II Council, the theology of these magisterial teachings holds and explains that the central mystery of the Christian faith is the mystery of the Holy Trinity. *The General Catechetical Directory* of April 11, 1971 of the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy (SCC) explained that its revelation (communication) corresponds to the way and the plan by which God reveals himself to humankind in the economy.<sup>13</sup> Its summary reflects in essence the opening words of the Athanasian *Quicumque vult*: “We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity.”

Vatican II documents do not have any explicit Trinitarian formulation but Trinitarian musings are scattered in almost every page of the Sixteen Documents. Joseph Neuner and Josef Dupuis say that the Council did not treat systematically the theme of God and the Trinity. However, they assert that deeper reflections on human salvation, needs and aspirations in our time which are the constant per se of the entire deliberations of the Council Fathers, demanded a rethinking of our relation to God who is Triune. In addition to the pastoral needs mentioned above, they add the new perspectives on the mystery of salvation, of revelation and of the Church which imply and demand a more elaborate presentation of the Trinitarian mystery and of the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit.<sup>14</sup> To crown this observation, they remark that:

The Trinitarian structure of the entire work of salvation is unfolded in LG 2-4, with the conclusion, borrowed from St Cyprian, that the Church is clearly a people whose unity derives from that of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The same perspective is found in AG 2-4, with a special emphasis on the mission of the Church. Moreover the Trinitarian life is presented as the model and source of the inter-personal relation in human society (G S 24).<sup>15</sup>

Though not deciding a Trinitarian definition, but rather presuming it, the Council defined the Church essentially as ‘ecclesia *De Trinitate*’

The Council, occupied with pastoral concerns, initiates, in a manner reminiscent of St Augustine, rather a new page in the church’s self-understanding as it sets the same church on the path of her *missio ad gentes* as light and salt to the world. The church is now set on mission with the duty of bringing what has been duly defined and clarified across the ages. The next generation of Papal, Synodal and Magisterial Documents, proclamations and teachings will now find themselves in the perspective of this hermeneutic of mission which has left Jerusalem, seen Athens, visited Rome, incarnated in Igboland and is now en route to the “utmost bounds of the earth” (Acts 1:8), under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the propelling force and principal agent of the church’s mission and evangelisation.<sup>16</sup> This new light is born witness to soon after the Council by a recall to the central mysteries of the Christian faith in the language of today by Paul VI himself in the *desideratum and breast plate* for the people of God under the name: “*Credo of the People of God*” (Paul VI, *Credo of the People of God*, 30 June, 1968). All these put together, in one way or the other elaborated or stressed one issue already highlighted by St Augustine. They thus project St Augustine as an inspiration and rightly underscore the importance of his position not only in the western development of

the Christian doctrine but more practically for the church in Africa and Ahiara in particular.

Having underscored the importance of the christian doctrine of the Trinity in the world of conflicting values as ours today, and in the same frame of *mentae ecclesiae*, we realize the promises that could ensue from this basic christian teaching. It is on this ground that the doctrine which is evidenced in the scriptures and expounded, especially by our ancestor in the faith, St Augustine, is presented here, not merely as an article of faith, but more importantly as a model of life and community. On this ground, then, it is proposed to the church and people of Mbaise, a homogeneous African community at the verge of modernist tendencies to aid recapture the rich deposits of both the traditional society and the christian culture, especially where the two do not disagree, but where one can elicit the other, and harmoniously enhance both the human culture and the mission of the church today in the face of its new challenges.

The doctrine of the Trinity, which Augustine had expounded, has emerged as a central issue in current theological inquiry. A host of recent books have taken up one aspect or another of the doctrine of the Trinity. Not only systematic theology, but also biblical studies, Liturgy, Christian Ethics, Missiology, and Pastoral Theology have felt, in one way or another, the influence of contemporary Trinitarian studies. The important question today is how to bring the essentially Christian doctrine of faith to bear on the man and woman of today in contemporary societies and communities that are being battered by each day by disintegrating tendencies and attitudes that derobe humans of their identity as "*imago trinitatis*". Ala Igbo, for instance, despite all her rich signs and promises of a homogeneous community, contains yet in her bosom and shares in the the pains and griefs of her numerous sons and daughters who are beset by the current travails of the times. The

threat of disintegration by division and attendant tensions arising from the socio-political climate, from globalized culture of individualism and materialistic secularism are deeply felt today as heavy challenges not only to the mission of the Gospel but also to social coherence. This demands the call back to the Trinity who is the community of God and the prototype of all human societies and communities, whether religious or otherwise, to whom humans must return at the end of their sojourn, and before whom the Church in Igboland, like the disciples at the end of their apostolic work, must lay an account of her mission before the Master at the end of the missionary experience (cf Mark 6:30-31; Luke 9:10-11).

Barth and Rahner set the stage for a new 'Pentecost' on the Trinitarian doctrine by retrieving it from the oblivion and repositioning it as a central mystery of faith, life and communion for the church and for the world. After them, a cream of other theologians has appeared who have taken the doctrine in a new spirit into different areas of life and human endeavour. Their arguments reveal a big deposit of meanings that would not only set but at the same time reinvigorate the Gospel message on its particular mission in world. Despite the fact that this new spring is not coming only from the catholic church alone, the impact of the aggiornamento programme of Vatican II Council which opened the church to the world in the spirit of dialogue and requires the life of mankind today to be interpreted in the light of the Gospel cannot be overemphasized. The fruit of such dispositions of the Council is a thrust that, at least from the Catholic fold, promises a rich harvest of theological reflections and spiritual renewal is emerging and the Trinity is projected to an enviable lot of occupying a very central place in theological discourse and enterprise. It serves now as a theological paradigm and model for different life situations and contexts. Among the contemporary theologians include Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jürgen Moltmann who discovered "the relationship of God to God in the reality of the

event of the cross".<sup>17</sup> From there he holds that the Trinitarian communion of the three persons of the Trinity is the source and model for genuine human community characterized by love and freedom, openness and acceptance rather than domination and exclusion.

Leonardo Boff and Catherine Mowry LaCugna stand as examples of contemporary theologians who espouse a social trinitarianism. Leonardo Boff, fuelled by Moltmann, locates in the Trinity the basis for a liberated society and rightly pointed out that the divine unity that exists between the three persons of the Trinity is reflected in human beings living together in community. LaCugna sees the Trinity in communal or relational categories: "Trinitarian theology could be described as par excellence a theology of relationship, which explores the mysteries of love, relationship, personhood and community within the framework of God's self-revelation in the person of Christ and the activity of the Spirit".<sup>18</sup> For her,

The doctrine of the Trinity is not ultimately a teaching about 'God' but a teaching about *God's life with us and our life with each other*. It is the life of communion and indwelling, God in us, we in God, all of us in each other. This is the '*perichoresis*,' the mutual interdependence that Jesus speaks of in the Gospel of John.<sup>19</sup>

The social or relational Trinity becomes a rich heritage today for bringing the Trinity to the contexts. God who is relational invites and extends his relationship to humanity; the first instance was at creation, reaching its climactic point in the Christ-event. God who is in himself a 'mystery opens himself to us as Father, as Son and as Spirit.



This self-opening to the 'other' by God invites us to participate in the communion with God and live in family with one another as persons, as people living in community with one another, and as members of the church, the People of God, Body of Christ, and Spouse of the Holy Spirit, and stewards of the earth, we are invited into relationship with one another and with God. As relationality "constitutes" the being of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so are we in our own individual 'selves' constituted into persons in 'an-other', and together become a people on the same pilgrimage of life with others, journeying unto a yet 'other' 'self' in the parousia. This is our common destiny.

Where the church which exists in Igboland as a sign and instrument of communion and unity, through which Christ communicates grace and truth to the people of Mbaise and beyond, fails to serve in this light, and where Christians as *imago Trinitatis*, fail to reflect the Trinitarian life and love, they would henceforth fail in their essence as salt of the earth and light of the world. In a culture where the human person is an essential member of the society, he lives and thrives within the community and aspires to achieve himself within the ethos of the community, and finally dreams for the community of ancestors for his ultimate end, it would not be strange to propose to this same person the true image of the reality that lies beyond the empirical world and the communion which awaits all at the consummation of time. It is not the cult of ancestors which culminates the human history, but rather, in the light of christian gospel illumination, the communion which awaits us all at the parousia, to which we all have invitation by the tripersonal community. The Trinity is not only our social programme; rather the heavenly community is both our terminus a quo and our terminus ad quem for both the Church and the human community.

## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Emund J. Fortman, *The Triune God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1982) 139.

<sup>2</sup>J.N.D. Kelly, *The Early Christian Doctrines* 5<sup>th</sup> edition (London: Continuum, 2004) 271.

<sup>3</sup>Kelly, 271.

<sup>4</sup>Henry Chadwick, *Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University) 91, 92.

<sup>5</sup>Stephen Mckenna, ed., *Augustine. On the Trinity*(Washington DC: Catholic University of America) p. ix.

<sup>6</sup>John J O'Meara, ed. *An Augustine Reader*, Garden City, Image Books, 252.

<sup>7</sup>Edmund J. Dobbin, "Trinity" in Komonchak Joseph et al., *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 2003) 1058.

<sup>8</sup>St. Augustine, *De Trin* 1.4.

<sup>9</sup>*De Trin* 6.7.8; 7.6.12; 2.13.23.

<sup>10</sup>Georges Florovsky, *The Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth Century*, [http://www.holyTrinitymission.org/books/english/fathers\\_florovsky\\_2.htm](http://www.holyTrinitymission.org/books/english/fathers_florovsky_2.htm)

<sup>11</sup>cf Lewis Ayres, *Augustine on the Doctrine of Trinity*, 96, 97.

<sup>12</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, cited by Leonardo Boff in *Trinity and Society*, trans Paul Burns, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988, 19

<sup>13</sup>SCC, n 28.

<sup>14</sup>Joseph Neuner and Josef Dupuis, *The Christian Faith* (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 2005) 157.

<sup>15</sup>Neuner- Dupuis, 157.

<sup>16</sup>cr AG 4; John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 21; CCC 852.

<sup>17</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, tr. R.A.Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1974) 239.

<sup>18</sup>Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and the Christian Life*(San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991) 1; cf also Catherine Mowry LaCugna and Kilian McDonnell, "Returning from the Far Country: Theses for a Contemporary Trinitarian Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41 (1988): 191-215.

<sup>19</sup>LaCugna 228.

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### About the Book

The book is a theological reflection on human solidarity and community. The many "marks of human brokenness" are indications that peace has remained elusive in human societies, despite the many political, economic, cultural and even military institutions set to plant a lasting peaceful and harmonious world order, and build a united global community. The book proposes an ontology upon which such a community can be built. Using the theological frame of St Augustine's Trinitarian thought, it creates the impression that this ontology explains the fundamental ground for belongingness in any community. Though adjudged as a very complex and dry piece, its identification of the ground of unity in the Godhead in his doctrine of "One Substance" is a huge asset for humans in quest for unity and solidarity. Though accused of burying the individual (personal identity) into the community, this book makes a retrieval, repositions Augustine's Trinitarian thought to its proper place in the history of thought, and highlights its implications for the human community. With the Trinity understood as a community of persons in eternal relationship (bound together in the One Substance), and the uncreated, prototype community, the book presents the Igbo community where the "we" (community) comes before the "I" (personal identify) while it is in the "we" that the "I" finds identification, relevance, mission, excellence and accomplishment, and the Church as creaturely exemplifications of this uncreated prototype. This natural cum social disposition toward others is a predisposition towards communion with God. This has already begun in the Church community as a "preparation" to its perfection in glory/ in the parousia, the culmination point of every created community, for both Church and the human society. This projects the Blessed Trinity as a model of life and community for the Church and the human society and provides humans with a matrix for living communitarianly.

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