

Ecumenical Perspectives on the
Filioque for the Twenty-first Century

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Getting Beyond the *Filioque* with Third Article Theology

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I In pursuit of a new metaphysics

In a recent *Theological Studies* article, influential Roman Catholic theologian Joseph Bracken, S. J., favourably reviews the recent turn to Spirit Christology, especially my own account, observing particularly how such Christologies emphasize in a new way the activity of the Holy Spirit both within the immanent Trinity and in salvation history. Bracken then suggests that such a theology ‘introduces a new understanding of the classical dogma of the Trinity’.¹ ‘New’ in this context does not mean novel. Rather, by ‘new’ I believe Bracken means the same as William Alston, for instance, who argued that ‘The Trinity, no less than other articles of the Christian faith, needs re-examination and reformulation for each age, as has happened throughout Christian history. The doctrine provides inexhaustible riches for exploration, a task to which each period brings distinctive skills and perspectives’.² In 1926, process theologian Alfred North Whitehead noted that ‘Christianity has always been a religion seeking a metaphysic’.³ While Whitehead’s claim may be an overstatement, Allston and Bracken are correct in continuing to constructively reflect on divine ontology. Spirit Christology, and the Third Article Theology it gives rise to, is one such distinctive perspective seeking to enrich the received tradition.

¹ Joseph A. Bracken, ‘Trinitarian Spirit Christology: In Need of a New Metaphysics?’, *Theological Studies* 72 (2011), pp. 750–67 (750).

² William P. Alston, ‘Substance and the Trinity’, in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (eds S. T. Davis, D. Kendall and G.O’Collins; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 179–202 (179).

³ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: World Publishing, 1960), p. 50. The comment was made as part of his 1926 Lowell Lectures.

Bracken particularly notes how a Spirit Christology along the lines of that which I developed in *The Anointed Son*⁴ thinks of the intra-Trinitarian relations not simply in terms of divine processions (origin and action) but more in terms of the active role of the Spirit in the Godhead's eternal act of self-giving love. Further to this, Bracken suggests that more can be added to my account of Spirit Christology at the level of divine ontology by means of a more detailed reflection on intersubjectivity. At this point I am in agreement with Bracken when he suggests that such a new understanding of intersubjectivity would be based on Aquinas' notion of subsistent relations, but rendered more dynamic in terms of a presupposition of mutually constitutive causal relations between the divine Persons. Bracken's detailed proposal suggests:

The classical notion of the divine processions, in other words, presupposes the unilateral directionality of traditional cause-effect relations (first the cause, then the effect) even as it claims that this unilateral directionality from Father to Son and then to the Spirit is purely logical, not temporal, given the alleged eternity of the divine life. The alternative, more-dynamic understanding of subsistent relations, however, presupposes that the three divine Persons are simultaneously both cause and effect of their ongoing "relatings" to one another. Father and Son are both cause and effect of their ongoing relationship to each other, and the Spirit is both cause and effect of the dynamic interrelations of Father and Son.⁵

Bracken's suggestion is helpful; although I do not think even Bracken goes far enough with this revision of the traditional idea of subsistent relations. He is right to see that the traditional construal of subsistent relations requires a more dynamic account, but he is wrong to suggest that this dynamism is limited to the Spirit's 'dynamic interrelations of the Father and Son'. The Spirit, too, is as active in the 'ongoing relatings' of Father to Son and Son to Father as he is in Father to Spirit and Son to Spirit.

Bracken correctly summarizes my earlier work on reconceiving the Trinity along relational lines as building on the prior work of Fr. Thomas Weinandy,⁶ and positing the central conviction that the Godhead is neither derived from the person of the Father alone (an Eastern tendency) nor a solitary substance separate from the three Persons (a Western tendency). The Godhead is nothing other than the Trinity.⁷ Bracken, however, even calls this revision into question due to his

⁴ Myk Habets, *The Anointed Son: A Trinitarian Spirit Christology* (Princeton Theological Monograph Series, 129; Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010).

⁵ Bracken, 'In Need of A New Metaphysics?', p. 751.

⁶ Thomas G. Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995).

⁷ See Habets, *The Anointed Son*, p. 225.

misunderstanding of my insistence on the *monarchy* of the Father.⁸ What follows is a further elaboration of the sort of relational ontology a Third Article Theology leads to with special emphasis upon the doctrine of the *Monarchy* of God⁹ and the related issue of the *filioque*.¹⁰ In presenting such a thesis my intention is to draw upon Eastern and Western insights, while at the same time critiquing aspects of both traditions, in order to enrich the tradition as a whole.

II The promise of third article theology

The recent (re)turn to the Trinity as ‘the doctrine which changes everything’ has reinvigorated contemporary theology and sponsored a number of significant projects which are bearing much fruit. Such Trinitarian projects range from theologies of retrieval to constructive theological propositions. One significant implication of this Trinitarian renaissance has been a renewed interest in pneumatology to the point that we may speak of a pneumatological renaissance characterizing theological discourse in the first decade of the twenty-first century. We see such a flowering of Trinitarian pneumatology in such diverse areas as theology of religions, the dialogue between theology and science and theological anthropology. But, perhaps more so than in any other area, the Trinitarian pneumatological renaissance is evident in the (re)turn to Spirit Christology. Across the spectrum of the Christian Church, theologians are turning to Spirit Christology in order to further articulate the person and work of Jesus on the one hand and the identity and mission of humanity on the other.

This turn to Spirit Christology in a robust Trinitarian context is welcome and has produced a number of suggestive and significant works. However, it is also, I suggest, a discipline come of age, and with that, it is poised to move from its preoccupation with definition and methodology, that is, with prolegomena, to constructive and systematic integration. In other words, it has moved from

⁸ Bracken, ‘In Need of A New Metaphysics?’, p. 755. Bracken was obviously not aware of Myk Habets, ‘*Filioque? Nein. A Proposal for Coherent Coinherence*’, in *Trinitarian Theology After Barth* (eds Myk Habets and Phillip Tolliday; Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), pp. 161–202, where my argument on the *monarchy* of the Father is outlined in some detail. What I offer here is a more expansive outline of the divine ontology supporting such an argument.

⁹ Throughout the essay I am using *Monarchy/ia* with an uppercase when referring to the Godhead or the being of the Father, and *monarchy/ia* with a lowercase when referring to the person of the Father, or the Father in relation to the Son and the Spirit. This corresponds to Thomas Torrance’s use of absolute and relative senses of God’s Fatherhood. For a helpful discussion see Benjamin Dean, ‘Person and Being: Conversation with T. F. Torrance about the Monarchy of God’, *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15 (2013), pp. 58–77.

¹⁰ Bracken’s suggestion that a process-oriented view of the Trinity is to be preferred over what I am calling a relational ontology will not be addressed in this essay, as I limit myself here to a clearer explication of what a relational ontology is in relation to the *filioque*.

a discipline specific ‘Spirit Christology’ to a systematic-wide ‘Third Article Theology’. We see signs of this happening in the recent work from, amongst others, Ralph Del Colle,¹¹ David Coffey,¹² Myk Habets,¹³ Lyle Dabney,¹⁴ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen¹⁵ and Amos Yong,¹⁶ in addition to a number of theses.

One area in particular that a Third Article Theology highlights, one that methodologically starts with pneumatology, is that of metaphysics, specifically an understanding of divine ontology. With the dominance of Logos Christology in the early Church, especially as developed by the Apologists of the second century, philosophical concepts of absolute being came to dominate theological discourse. Central to a Spirit Christology is a focus on categories of function over metaphysics, narrative over analytic philosophy and relationality over static conceptions of substance. With the eclipse of Spirit Christology in favour of Logos Christology something like a relational ontology of the divine being was obscured by static-substance ontology.¹⁷ The recent return to Spirit Christology and its more holistic Third Article Theology has thus brought with it further opportunity to develop a biblical and relational ontology not reliant upon the substance of philosophical concepts of absolute being. What is in dispute, however, is which ontology best represents a biblical and orthodox Trinitarianism informed by the insights of a Third Article Theology. What follows is a suggestive account I am construing as a relational ontology.

III Toward a theo-logical ontology

Trinitarian theology must be established in Holy Scripture if it is to be orthodox. The contention of a relational ontology of the divine being begins with

¹¹ Ralph Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit Christology in Trinitarian Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹² David Coffey, *Deus Trinitas: The Doctrine of the Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), ‘Spirit Christology and the Trinity’, in *Advents of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Current Study of Pneumatology* (eds B. E. Hinze and D. L. Dabney; Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001), pp. 315–38.

¹³ Habets, *The Anointed Son*; and ‘Spirit Christology: Seeing in Stereo’, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 11 (2003), pp. 199–235.

¹⁴ D. Lyle Dabney, ‘Starting with the Spirit: Why the Last Should be First’, in *Starting with the Spirit: Task of Theology II* (eds G. Preece and S. Pickard; Hindmarsh, SA: Australian Theological Forum, 2001), pp. 3–27.

¹⁵ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Toward a Pneumatological Theology: Pentecostal and Ecumenical Perspectives on Ecclesiology, Soteriology, and Theology of Mission* (ed. A. Yong; New York: University Press of America, 2002).

¹⁶ Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

¹⁷ For an account of the rise of Logos Christology over Spirit Christology in the early Church, see Habets, *The Anointed Son*, pp. 10–88, especially pp. 12–24.

questioning the hegemony Greek philosophical thought has had over theology. It is not the case that all things Greek are *de facto* contrary to Scriptural truth. While Tertullian may have questioned what Athens has to do with Jerusalem, it is patently evident that Greek philosophical thinking has been a boon to advanced metaphysical thought, theology included. What is not so often acknowledged, however, is that Greek metaphysics carries its own internal logic and thought forms which, if not assiduously scrutinized, may not be compatible with the God who reveals himself. What I am challenging is a Greek philosophical conception of being which ultimately leads to speculation on a supposedly universally accessible structure of being, with its concomitant attributes and necessary corollaries, a perspective in which God is understood on the basis of an *a priori* knowledge of absolute being.¹⁸ This is what I am referring to as substance ontology, one that is static and often at odds with the dynamic and relational ontology of the God who names himself. It is just such a narrative of Greek philosophical metaphysics which the final work of Stanley Grenz narrates under the name ‘onto-theology’.¹⁹ In opposition to such an onto-theology and its recent ‘death’, Grenz rightly suggests we return to a Trinitarian ‘theo-ontology’.²⁰ This entails, in short, the move from philosophy (being) to theology (God).²¹

a The self-naming God – I AM

After narrating the ‘death of being’ over the history of Western philosophical reflection up to Derrida, Grenz turns to the constructive section of his work and examines the significance for divine ontology of God’s self-naming throughout his covenantal dealings with Israel, and then supremely in the incarnation.

¹⁸ Such attributes established *a priori* include: self-existence, eternity, unchangeability, and, consequently, absolute being. See Stanley J. Grenz, *The Named God and the Question of Being: A Trinitarian Theo-Ontology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), p. 133. Such attributes may in fact be found in the divine being, but if so, they will be understood in nuanced ways from that of Greek philosophy. One may, for example, see the account of *apathea* offered by David Bentley Hart in *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 346–60, especially pp. 354–6.

¹⁹ Grenz, *The Named God*.

²⁰ Grenz points out that he was not the first to use the term ‘onto-theology’, pointing the reader to Merold Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-Theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), see Grenz, *The Named God*, p. 119.

²¹ This is not the first time such an attempt has been made, of course. One is reminded of the work of Karl Barth throughout his *Church Dogmatics* and his German interpreter Eberhard Jüngel, of whom John Webster said in the introduction to his own translation of one of his works, ‘Jüngel undertakes this task on the basis of a conviction that theological misunderstanding often derives from metaphysical presuppositions unexamined and uncriticised by substantive Christian truth, a conviction given lengthy exposition in *God as the Mystery of the World*, John Webster, ‘Translator’s Introduction’, in *God’s Being is in Becoming* (ed. Eberhard Jüngel; trans. J. Webster; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), p. x.

The particular focus of Grenz's study is the significance of the designation 'I AM'. Focusing on Exod. 3.14 and its subsequent biblical history (Exod. 6.7; 33.19 etc.), Grenz finally settles on the following meaning of the 'I AM' name: 'Yahweh's self-disclosure at the time of the call of Moses presents the divine name as indicating that Yahweh is the I AM, the one who is present-compassionately-with his people at each point along their journey.'²² After revoking his name in Hos. 1.2–9, Yahweh revokes the revocation in second Isaiah (40–55) revealing an advance on the divine name, now as 'I AM he' (Isa. 43.10–13, 25; 46.4; 51.12). In this advancement 'Yahweh is pledging that even to the farthest future, he will remain "I am he" to Israel.'²³ This is what it means for Yahweh to be the 'first and the last', and not just for Israel but for all of creation (Isa. 48.12). Such a revelation of the self-naming God is further expanded and clarified in the incarnation.

Canvassing various interpretations of Jesus' use of 'I AM' / *ego eimi* throughout the gospels, Grenz examines the I AM sayings of the Gospel of John, especially the High Priestly Prayer of Jn 17.6, 26 before concluding: 'The exegetical trail we have been traversing . . . leads to the conclusion that, whatever else John might have in mind here, the revealed and bestowed name must be the divine I AM. What Jesus has received from the Father is the Old Testament name of the covenanting God of Israel. Consequently, Jesus shares with the Father the great I AM self-designation.'²⁴ This self-identity is not, however, without differences as well. While Jesus shares the divine identity, to use Richard Bauckham's helpful terminology,²⁵ he and the Father are not simply identical. Jesus reveals God as his Father, literally 'the Father of the Son', and Jesus himself is revealed as 'the Son of the Father'. It is such a divine self-revelation that led the early Church to speak of the Father, the Son and the Spirit as *homoousios* and together they are the one true God in a form of mutual indwelling.

Here we must think supremely of the incarnate Son's relationship to the Father by the Holy Spirit, the central theme of Spirit Christology,²⁶ and the large number of texts which testify to the divine identity shared by Father, Son and

²² Grenz, *The Named God*, p. 151.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

²⁵ In *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), Richard Bauckham masterfully develops and defends the thesis that Jesus (and the Spirit) share the divine identity as revealed in the Old Testament and as such his proposal dovetails nicely with that of Grenz, while they differ in some of the details.

²⁶ A detailed theological interpretation of those texts which narrate the relationship between the incarnate Son and the Holy Spirit throughout the gospels, something I now refer to as 'Messianic *kairoi*', can be found in Habets, *The Anointed Son*, pp. 118–87.

Holy Spirit. I have confined the treatment to a few representative illustrations.²⁷ When we turn to John 5 and the story of Jesus healing a lame man on the Sabbath and the subsequent dialogue with the Jews, we see Jesus asserting a functional equivalence to God his Father; ‘My Father is working until now, and I myself am working’ (v. 17), which was clearly understood by the Jews to be an assertion of relational equivalence; ‘For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he . . . was calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God’ (v. 18). Such functional and relational equivalence is repeated throughout the gospels. If we merely stay with John’s Gospel we may remember such texts as Jn 5.23, ‘. . . all will honour the Son even as they honour the Father . . .’; Jn 5.26, ‘. . . just as the Father has life in himself, even so he gave to the Son also to have life in himself . . .’; Jn 8.19, ‘. . . if you knew me, you would know my Father also’; Jn. 10.30, ‘. . . I and the Father are one’;²⁸ Jn 10.38, ‘. . . the Father is in me, and I in the Father’; Jn 12.44, ‘. . . he who believes in me, does not believe in me but in him who sent me’; Jn 12.45, ‘He who sees me sees the one who sent me’; Jn14.7, ‘If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; from now on you know him and have seen him’; Jn 14.9, ‘. . . he who has seen me has seen the Father . . .’ and Jn 15.23, ‘He who hates me hates my Father also’. In Harner’s considered opinion, ‘This theme of mutual indwelling expresses the dynamic aspect of the unity between the Father and the Son. It is a way of stating, in what we might call pre-Trinitarian language, that distinct “persons” exist in mutual interrelatedness within the Godhead.’²⁹

To these illustrative texts we must also add those that speak of the oneness of the Spirit with God. Once again limiting ourselves to representative texts we may include the following: 1 Cor. 2.10-12, ‘For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God’; Jn 14.16-18, ‘I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, that he may be with you forever, that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see him or know him, but you know him because he abides with you and will be in you.

²⁷ More examples may be found throughout Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*.

²⁸ Here once again the Jews pick up stones as they realize that with this statement Jesus is claiming to be God, ‘The Jews answered him, “For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy; and because you, being a man, make yourself out to be God”’, Jn 10.33.

²⁹ Philip B. Harner, *The “I AM” of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Johannine Usage and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), p. 41.

I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you'; Rom. 8.9-10, 'However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the Spirit is alive because of righteousness'; and Eph. 2.20-22, 'having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God the Spirit'.³⁰

The combined testimony of the Scriptures is that God names himself as Yahweh, which is linked to the language of 'I AM' and denotes be-ing or dynamic presence. Those texts briefly addressed above, and many others, confirm that Jesus and the Spirit share the divine identity with the Father, yet each in their respective ways; Jesus as the eternal Son and the Holy Spirit as the one who proceeds from the Father through the Son. Such texts lead to the development of a Trinitarian and relational ontology.

Building upon the substantial biblical testimony to the oneness of the Triune being of God in relational terms, Western theologians developed what has come to be termed the doctrine of subsistent relations, which stresses the oneness of the Godhead; while Eastern theologians developed what has come to be termed the doctrine of *perichoresis*, as a way of further explaining the dynamic relationships between the three persons. When both concepts are combined in such a way that they mutually explicate the other then something like a biblically grounded, theologically informed relational ontology results. Only when this ontology is recognized can we appreciate the revolutionary transformation of the concept of *ousia* by the early Church in relational terms from the Greek impersonal concept of being.³¹

b Subsistent relations fully in act

We turn first to the notion of subsistent relations. Thomas Aquinas rightly argued that the one being (*ousia*) of God is the relationship of the three Persons (*hypostaseis*).

³⁰ In *Panarion* 74, in opposition to the heresy of the *pneumatomachi*, Epiphanius of Salamis shows that the Holy Spirit is equally Lord with the Father and the Son, citing as evidence Wis.1.7; Jn 15.26; 16.13; 16.14; 1 Cor. 2.10 and 1 Cor. 12.11. Epiphanius, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, Volume Two: Books II and III (Sects 47–80, *De Fide*) (trans. Frank Williams; Leiden: Brill, 1994), p. 472.

³¹ For a critical history of the concept of *ousia* and the transformation of the term into a thoroughly relational category, see Grenz, *The Named God*, pp. 1–50.

In God essence is not really distinct from person; and yet . . . the persons are really distinguished from each other. For Person signifies relation as subsisting in the divine nature. But relation as referred to the essence does not differ therefrom really; but only in our way of thinking; while as referred to an opposite relation, it has a real distinction by virtue of that opposition. Thus there are one essence and three persons.³²

The doctrine of personal subsistence clearly articulates the relational being of God as involving three co-equal persons in one undivided (relational) substance. Bracken has rightly argued for the retention of the doctrine of co-inherence, or subsistent relations, but in more dynamic terms: 'Aquinas argued that the works of God *ad extra* are one. I would argue that the works of God *ad intra* are likewise one.'³³ This, of course, is a paraphrase of the doctrine of divine simplicity; but it is a concept of simplicity that is not static, in some caricature of Greek substance ontology, or alternatively a Boethian account of person.³⁴ Boethius famously defined 'person' as: '*persona estrationalis naturae individua substantia*' ('a person is the individual substance of a rationale nature').³⁵ If this view were to dominate then we would have to posit three individual substances in the Godhead, or what simply amounts to tritheism. The basic mistake the Boethian definition makes is that it separates essence from existence in God when the two cannot be separated. Thus the notion of subsistent relations and divine simplicity are concomitant doctrines in a relational ontology. Such a dynamic and Trinitarian construal of the divine being safeguards a fully relational understanding of divine substance. Here we might more properly speak of subsistent relations fully in act (*actus purus*).³⁶

Still closer to the tradition of a relational ontology is the work of twelfth-century spiritual writer Richard St Victor who, in contrast to Boethius, defined a divine person as follows: '*divina persona est naturae divinae incommunicabilis existentia*' ('a divine person is the incommunicable existence of the divine

³² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica* (trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province; New York: Benzinger Bros., 1947), I.39.1., as cited by Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology: Grounded in Holy Scripture and Understood in the Light of the Church*, Volume One: *The God Who Is: The Holy Trinity* (Fearn: Mentor, 2008), pp. 491–2.

³³ Bracken, 'In Need of A New Metaphysics?', p. 757. Citing Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, 1, q. 45, a. 6 resp.

³⁴ For a critical account of such misunderstandings of substance metaphysics, see Alston, 'Substance and the Trinity', pp. 179–202. This is not to imply that Aquinas rejected the Boethian definition of person outright; it would appear he didn't. However it is clear that the full development of the notion of 'person' in the *Summa theologica* gives priority to the notion of relation over substance.

³⁵ Boethius, *Liber de Persona et Duabus Naturis*, Ch. 3.

³⁶ For an account of divine simplicity and *actus purus* that comports with my position here, see Thomas G. Weinandy, 'Does God Suffer?', *First Things* 117 (2001), pp. 35–41.

nature').³⁷ Richard built his divine ontology not upon *a priori* philosophical speculation but *a posteriori*,³⁸ as he reflected on the biblical assertion that 'God is love' (1 Jn 4.8). While idiosyncratic in its details,³⁹ Richard argued that the three Persons of the Trinity wholly co-indwell in one another in such a way that their personal distinctness as Father, Son and Holy Spirit remains irreducible or incommunicable. Thus, unlike many recent accounts which argue the relations of the Trinity are prior to the persons,⁴⁰ Richard argues that, in Douglas Kelly's words, 'although Father, Son and Holy Spirit co-inhere in one another, their distinct conscious subjectivity is not lost on one another or merged into an impersonal unity.'⁴¹ Kelly nicely summarizes this as follows: 'The three divine Persons thus exist in common relationship, while having an incommunicable reality about each one in particular.'⁴² These two axioms; first, the irreducible distinction among the three divine Persons within the unity of the being of God, and second, the incommunicable distinctions amongst the three Persons are distinguishing features of Trinitarian orthodoxy and are shared by East and West alike.

Bracken has called for more sustained attention to the category of 'intersubjective relations and simultaneous mutual causality', something we do find already in the tradition of Aquinas and the Victorine, to name just two. We also already find such inter-subjectivity within the Eastern tradition as seen in their focus upon the *perichoretic* relations of the Triunity; the theme of the next section.

c *Perichoresis* and onto-relations

It was the theology which lay behind the Western notion of subsistent relations fully in act which the Greek Fathers would speak of by means of an analogy – that

³⁷ Richard St Victor, *De Trinitate* (trans. Gaston Salet; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1959), IV.22.

³⁸ In his Prologue, Salet clearly represents such a methodology as follows: 'From faith, which is the foundation and origin of everything good, we ought with all our ardor to rise to the understanding of faith, climbing from the visible to spiritual realities, and to the Eternal himself', Richard St Victor, *De Trinitate*, p. 13.

³⁹ Richard sought to explain or justify why there had to be three persons for perfect love to exist on logical grounds and at this point he departed from revealed theology into a form of analytic speculation. Surprisingly in many ways, Romanian Orthodox theologian Dumitru Staniloae offers a similar account in his *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 1: *Revelation and Knowledge of the Triune God: The Experience of God* (trans. and eds Ioana Ionita and Robert Barringer; Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994), pp. 265–7.

⁴⁰ See for instance the example of Paul Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000); and 'Participating in the Trinity', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 33 (2006), pp. 375–91. Fiddes defines 'subsistent relations' incorrectly when he argues that 'there are no persons "at each end of a relation," but the "persons" are simply the relations', *ibid.*, p. 281.

⁴¹ Kelly, *Systematic Theology*, p. 494.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 496.

of *perichoresis*. Staniloae reminds us that ‘Being does not exist really except in hypostasis . . . We can say more: the spiritual essence that is subsistent only in a subject always implies a conscious relation between subjects, and consequently a hypostatization of that essence in numerous subjects, in perfect reciprocal interpenetration and transparance[sic] – what Saint John of Damascus termed *perichôrêsis*.’⁴³ Staniloae goes on to speak of such relations in the same terms as those of Bracken – Divine inter-subjectivity. ‘The subsistence of the divine being is nothing other than the concrete existence of divine subjectivity in three modes which compenetrates each other, hence a threefold subjectivity.’⁴⁴ The divine persons are in full and transparent communion with each other as pure subjects which implies their complete inter-subjectivity. Thomas Torrance can even speak in this regard of there being three conscious subjects within the Godhead when he comments:

Not only is the divine consciousness proper to the nature of the one God common to Father, Son and Holy Spirit alike, but each divine person in virtue of his distinctiveness shares in it differently and appropriately, so that we would have to say that while Father, Son and Holy Spirit constitute one indivisible God, they do so as three conscious subjects in mutual love and life and activity. That is to say, coinherence applies fully to the three divine Persons as conscious of One another in their distinctive otherness and oneness.⁴⁵

It is significant to notice that calls for a focus on divine inter-subjectivity have come from within other attempts at what I am calling a Third Article Theology. A prime example of this is found in the work of Clark Pinnock, whose *Flame of Love* sets out the first attempt at a systematic Third Article Theology. At one point he argues that ‘Plurality in God is real plurality, and relationality belongs to his essence. The dimension of intersubjectivity is basic – Father, Son and Spirit are three subjects in common. They constitute a community of persons in reciprocity as subjects of one divine life. They joyously share life together.’⁴⁶ Pinnock makes this comment amidst a critique of Augustine’s notion of the Spirit as the bond of love, a concept Pinnock finds lacking as it makes the Spirit

⁴³ Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, p. 256.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

⁴⁵ Thomas F. Torrance, ‘Towards an Ecumenical Consensus on the Trinity’, in *Ecumenical Perspectives: Towards Doctrine Agreement* (ed. T. F. Torrance; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), p. 97. This is paralleled in Pannenberg’s qualified statement: ‘If the trinitarian relations among Father, Son, and Spirit have the form of mutual self-distinction, they must be understood not merely as different modes of being of the one divine subject but as living realizations of separate centers of action’, Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 319.

⁴⁶ Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996), p. 40.

passive, brings his personal subsistence into question and leads inexorably to modalism. In Staniloae's work, offered as a corrective to certain Augustinian 'misadventures',⁴⁷ we find a solution to an emphasis on static substance ontology, while still finding traces of the problem in the solution. Rejecting notions of the *generatio activa* of the Father and the *generatio passiva* of the Son as lacking full Trinitarian agency, Staniloae speaks of divine inter-subjectivity in sublime fashion but fails to mention that the Father himself is 'personed' by the Son and the Spirit just as he is involved in 'personing' them in the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal spiration of the Spirit.⁴⁸ Only when such fully Trinitarian relations are posited whereby each person is active in the 'personing' of the other as subject is a fully *perichoretic* view of God possible, one which accords with the relational ontology of a Third Article Theology.⁴⁹

Arguably the most profoundly useful suggestion in recent theology that attempts to complete the circle of divine subjectivity along the lines indicated by Bracken, Staniloae and Third Article theologians has been offered by Fr. Thomas Weinandy, and he does this precisely by means of looking at the specific role of the Holy Spirit within the intra-Trinitarian life.⁵⁰ His thesis is that:

. . . the Father begets the Son in or by the Holy Spirit. The Son is begotten by the Father in the Spirit and thus the Spirit simultaneously proceeds from the Father as the one in whom the Son is begotten. The Son, being begotten in the

⁴⁷ Lest Augustine be tarred with every brush of Western heresy, as was the habit of Thomas Torrance and Colin Gunton, to name but two, I simply note the recent revisions of Augustinian interpretation given by Lewis Ayres: 'The Fundamental Grammar of Augustine's Trinitarian Theology', in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner* (eds Robert Dodaro and George Lawless; London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 51–76; "Remember That You Are Catholic" (serm. 52.2): Augustine on the Unity of the Triune God, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8 (2000), pp. 39–82; and Michel R. Barnes: 'Rereading Augustine's Theology of the Trinity', in *The Trinity* (eds Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 145–76; and 'Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology', *Theological Studies* 56 (1995), pp. 237–50. Such accounts highlight the distinctly relational and Trinitarian nature of Augustine's theology, despite any other criticisms his work might engender.

⁴⁸ Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, pp. 260–2. Staniloae correctly argues that neither Father, Son nor Spirit are strictly passive in their relations to each other as this would make the persons an object of the other, whereas divine inter-subjectivity demands that each of the three persons of the Godhead remain subject to the other two. Pannenberg offers a similar argument in his account of Triune self-distinction and mutual dependency when he argues the fallacy of the tradition is in looking at the Trinitarian relations from the perspective of origin rather than reciprocity. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 317–20.

⁴⁹ The Thomistic version of the *oppositio relationis* is rejected by Staniloae as being too static, lacking full *perichoretic* reality. He favours the relation posited by Basil who spoke of this *oppositio*, "but he took care to affirm with equal vigor that in these acts of coming forth there persisted the unity of being of the persons who are "opposed"; Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, p. 262.

⁵⁰ Notable others who have worked in this direction and deserve further consideration include John Owen, Jonathan Edwards and Colin Gunton; each of whom seek to construct a fully Trinitarian

Spirit, simultaneously loves the Father in the same Spirit by which he himself is begotten (is Loved). The Spirit (of Love) then, who proceeds from the Father as the one in whom the Father begets the Son, both conforms or defines (persons) the Son to be the Son and simultaneously conforms or defines (persons) the Father to be the Father. The Holy Spirit, in proceeding from the Father as the one in whom the Father begets the Son, conforms the Father to be Father for the Son and conforms the Son to be Son for (of) the Father.⁵¹

Implicit in Weinandy's proposal, but not developed in his work, is the active role of the Son and the Spirit in 'personing' the Father as well.⁵² In this regard, the suggestion of Grenz is particularly apt. While not owning all the nuances of his proposal, his stress upon the mutually constituted relations within the intra-Trinitarian being is exactly the direction Scripture points and where a more dynamic and relational divine ontology needs to work. Grenz suggests:

It is in this respect that the act of God naming God emerges as a triune or Trinitarian act. Present in this act of naming are Namer, Named, and Name. *Moreover, all three are constituted by the act.* The second of the three is constituted as the one who is named by the Namer, of course. *But the first is likewise constituted as the Namer of the Named,* who receives back the bestowed Name. And insofar as the name is bound up with the very essence of its bearer, the third emerges as the Name shared by the Namer and the Named. Exchanging substantive for dynamic language leads to the conclusion that the act involves Naming, Being Named, and Name Sharing.⁵³

While still giving priority to the Father and a degree of subsidiarity to the Spirit, the dynamic contours of Grenz's proposal are entirely along the lines of the relational ontology I am seeking to develop, an idea already found in the tradition embedded within the doctrine of *perichoresis*.

ontology and do so by a concentrated focus on the person of the Holy Spirit. See Kelly M. Kapic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Kyle Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2013), pp. 23–71, pp. 234–42; Colin Gunton, *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (London: SCM, 2002), pp. 94–108; idem., *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (2d edn; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), pp. 128–36; and idem., *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 188–209. I am grateful to Kyle Strobel and Andrew Picard for pointing me to specific references in Edwards and Gunton.

⁵¹ Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship*, p. 17.

⁵² I have worked with, and developed, Weinandy's thesis extensively in other work, see Myk Habets, 'A Little Trinitarian Reflection', *Evangel* 19 (2001), pp. 80–1; 'Spirit Christology: Seeing in Stereo', pp. 199–235; *The Anointed Son*, pp. 188–227 and 'Filioque? Nein', pp. 161–202.

⁵³ Grenz, *The Named God*, p. 290 (italics mine).

Leonardo Boff makes clear the dynamic aspect of *perichoresis* when explaining its Greek use and the Latin equivalents:

The Greek word has a double meaning, which explains why two words were used to translate it into Latin. Its first meaning is that of one thing being contained in another, dwelling in, being in another – a situation of fact, a static state. This understanding was translated by *circuminsessio*, a word derived from *sedere* and *sessio*, being seated, having its seat in, seat. Applied to the mystery of the communion of the Trinity this signified: one Person is in the others, surrounds the others on all sides (*circum-*), occupies the same space as the others, fills them with its presence . . . Its second meaning is active and signifies the interpenetration or interweaving of one Person with the others and in the others. This understanding seeks to express the living and eternal process of relating intrinsic to the three Persons, so that each is always penetrating the others. This meaning was translated as *circumincessio*, derived from *incedere*, meaning to permeate, compenetrate and interpenetrate.⁵⁴

A doctrine of *perichoresis* allows us to speak of the one God in dynamic terms, and in ways which seek to express the genuine unity in distinction between the three persons. The doctrine also aids in rejecting an unbalanced essentialist approach which has tended to dominate Western Trinitarian theology since at least the time of Augustine, and an overly strong doctrine of monopatrim in the East.⁵⁵ In order to more fully express the inter-subjectivity of the Godhead, that is, both subsistent relations fully in act and a doctrine of *perichoresis*, we should have to adopt some such notion as that posited by Thomas Torrance of ‘onto-relations’ or being-constituting-relations. Building on the doctrines of both the *homoousios tō patri* and *perichoresis*, Torrance developed what he termed an onto-relational concept of the divine persons. By onto-relational Torrance implies an understanding of the three divine persons in the one God in which the ontic relations between them belong to what they essentially are in themselves in their distinctive *hypostaseis*. In short, onto-relations are being-constituting-relations. The differing relations between the Father, Son and Spirit belong to what they are as Father, Son and Spirit; so the *homoousial* relations between the three divine Persons belong to what they are in themselves as Persons and

⁵⁴ Leonardo Boff, *The Trinity and Society* (New York: Orbis, 1988), pp. 135–6.

⁵⁵ Even if such treatments of Western substance ontology have tended to exaggerate the claims. All talk of being, especially within the Christian tradition with its emphasis upon the being of God, are claims towards a substance ontology. It is the nature of such an ontology that is in dispute. As David Bentley Hart has said, ‘a theology that refuses to address questions of ontology can never be more than a mythology’, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 213.

in their communion with one another.⁵⁶ In summary, the divine being and the divine communion are to be understood wholly in terms of one another. As the *ousia* or be-ing of God is fully Trinitarian, and thus fully relational, we must understand the being of God as having intrinsic constitutive relations.⁵⁷

The onto-relations are not modes of existence, as in the Basilian notion of τροπος ὑπαρξεως (*tropos huparxeos*), but are instead eternally existing relations or σχέσεις (*skeseis*), substantially subsisting in God and are beyond all time (ἄχρονως), beyond all origin (ἀναρχως) and beyond all cause (ἀναιτιως).⁵⁸ They are, as Del Colle explains; ‘persons in the fullest sense, constituted by relationality that is homoousial and perichoretic, one with each other in their relational being and mutually inhering in each other.’⁵⁹ As a direct result, Torrance affirms the traditional *taxis* of the divine Persons (the eternal processions) with the stipulation that the eternal generation of the Son and the spiration of the Spirit from the Father apply only to the mode of their enhypostatic differentiation and not to the causation of their being.⁶⁰ Here Torrance is following the theology of Epiphanius of Salamis particularly. I would add to this account the enhypostatic differentiation of the Father is also ‘personed’ in the simultaneous acts of begetting and spirating the Son and the Spirit, as both Son and Spirit relate to the Father as Father, as *fons divinitatis*, and as the *mia archē*. As Torrance writes:

When we consider the order of the three divine Persons in this perichoretic way we do indeed think of the Father as first precisely as Father, but not as the Deifier of the Son and the Spirit . . .⁶¹ This does not derogate from the Deity of Son or of the Spirit, any more than it violates the real distinctions within the Triune Being of God, so that no room is left for either a Sabellian modalism or an Arian subordinationism in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. . . . Since no distinction between underived Deity and derived Deity is tenable, there can be

⁵⁶ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), pp. 102–3.

⁵⁷ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, p. 323, follows Robert Jenson’s contention that Augustine missed this fundamental point of Nicene theology, that ‘the relations between the persons are constitutive not merely for their distinctions but also for their deity’. Cf., Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p. 119.

⁵⁸ This is the language of Gregory Nazianzen over Basil and Gregory Nyssen. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.*, 23.8, 11; 29.2ff, 16; 30.11, 19f; 31.9, 14, 16; 42.15ff. References from Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, p. 321.

⁵⁹ Ralph Del Colle, “Person” and “Being” in John Zizioulas’ Trinitarian Theology: Conversations with Thomas F. Torrance and Thomas Aquinas, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54 (2001), p. 79.

⁶⁰ See Del Colle, ‘Person and Being’, p. 80, who cites Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), p. 179; and *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), p. 135.

⁶¹ Torrance here cites John Calvin in support: ‘The name of God is restricted to the Father only in respect of his being the Principle of Godhead (*Deitatis Principium*), not because he is the source of the divine Being (*non essentiando*), as the fanatics babble, but by reason of order (*ratione ordinis*)’, *Institutes* 1.13.26.

no thought of one Person being ontologically or divinely prior to another or subsequent to another. Hence while the Father in virtue of his Fatherhood is first in order, the Father, the Son and the Spirit eternally coexist as three fully co-equal Persons in a perichoretic togetherness and in-each-otherness in such a way that, in accordance with the particular aspect of divine revelation and salvation immediately in view, as in the New Testament Scriptures, there may be an appropriate variation in the trinitarian order from that given in Baptism, as we find in the benediction, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” Nevertheless both Athanasius and Basil counselled the Church to keep to the order of the divine Persons given in Holy Baptism, if only to counter the damaging heresy of Sabellianism.⁶²

Torrance affirms a number of Trinitarian axioms that contribute to his ontological definition of divine ontology.⁶³ He first affirms the personal status of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit but he also affirms as orthodox the personal status of the one being of God. Thus in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity the one being of God does not refer to static substance or abstract *ousia* (philosophically derived notions of absolute being) but to the intrinsically personal I AM of the self-naming God.⁶⁴ It is, as such, a thoroughly relational ontology. Second, Torrance lays stress on the *Monarchy* of the personal being of God, ‘or the one ultimate Principle of Godhead, in which *all three divine Persons share equally*, for the whole indivisible Being of God belongs to each of them as it belongs to all of them.’⁶⁵ The *Monarchy* is thus the Triune Godhead *and* the person of the Father (enhyposstatic), but, strictly speaking, it is the *being* of the Father, the one Triune Godhead, that *Monarchy* actually refers to.⁶⁶ Third, and consequently, the Spirit

⁶² Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 179–80.

⁶³ These are worked out in relation to ‘The Agreed Statement’ on the Trinity in dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox Communion. See Thomas F. Torrance, ‘The Agreed Statement on the Holy Trinity’, in *Theological Dialogue between Orthodox and Reformed Churches*, vol. 2 (ed. T. F. Torrance; Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1993), pp. 219–26.

⁶⁴ Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives*, p. 112. It is on this point that ‘Torrance and Zizioulas are on the same page’, writes Ralph Del Colle, ‘Person and Being’, p. 73. For theological accounts of the ontological significance of the divine name, see Kelly, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 461–4; and Grenz, *The Named God*, especially pp. 133–246.

⁶⁵ Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives*, p. 112 (emphasis mine). See also Torrance, *Theological Dialogue between Orthodox and Reformed Churches*, vol. 2, p. 231.

⁶⁶ Torrance accepts the doctrine of the *Monarchy* according to Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen and Cyril of Alexandria, over that of the other Cappadocians; and in so doing he rejects what may be termed standard, Eastern Palamite theology. For critical engagement see Del Colle, ‘Person and Being’, pp. 70–86. It is not the point of this essay to defend this reading of Greek patristic theology except to note that Torrance’s interpretation is not idiosyncratic and is shared by a number of Eastern Orthodox theologians such as Nicholas Loudovikos, ‘Person Instead of Grace and Dictated Otherness: John Zizioulas’ Final Theological Position’, *The Heythrop Journal* 52 (2011), pp. 684–99, and Hegumen Hilarion Alfeyev, ‘The Trinitarian Teaching of St. Gregory Nazianzen’, in *The Trinity: East/West Dialogue* (eds Melville Y. Stewart and Richard Swinburne; trans. Eugene Grushetsky and

proceeds from the Father, but given the previous definition of *Monarchy*, ‘the Holy Spirit proceeds ultimately from the Triune Being of the Godhead.’⁶⁷ Thus the Spirit proceeds out of the mutual relations within the one being of the Holy Trinity ‘in which the Father indwells the Spirit and is Himself indwelt by the Spirit.’⁶⁸ Hence the biblical testimony that ‘the Lord is the Spirit’ (2 Cor. 3.17).

d The *Monarchy* of God

As a result and a natural implication of a *perichoretic* and onto-relational way of thinking, I now want to directly suggest that the Father himself is ‘personed’ by the begetting of the Son and the spiration of the Spirit and the nature of their mutual love in return. There is thus origin and action for all three Persons of the Trinity.⁶⁹ We see the foundations of such a position already in the patristic tradition when, as Staniloae highlights, ‘the self of the Father would not know itself if it did not have the Son in the mirror of its consciousness as another consciousness of its own. This does not mean that the Son brings the Father knowledge of himself from outside, but that the Father knows himself only inasmuch as he is the subsistence of the divine essence as Father, hence inasmuch as he is the begetter of the Son.’⁷⁰ But why limit the self-knowledge of the Father through the Son and not also speak of the Holy Spirit? And then why not go on to make this a truly Trinitarian and *perichoretic* notion? The Father is the source of both Son and the Spirit; the Son through his eternal generation, the Spirit by his eternal spiration. But as we have already had occasion to see, neither Son nor

Xenia Grushetsky; Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), pp. 107–30. This is also the interpretation adopted by Reformed and Orthodox theologians who participated in and drafted the ‘Agreed Statement on the Holy Trinity’, see Torrance, *Theological Dialogue between Orthodox and Reformed Churches*, vol. 2, pp. 219–26. Conversely, the following adopt the more common Orthodox understanding that the person of the Father is the *Monarchia*: Boris Bobrinskoy, *The Mystery of the Trinity: Trinitarian Experience and Vision in the Biblical and Patristic Tradition* (trans. Anthony P. Gythiel; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1999), pp. 264–8; Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (trans. Ian and Ihita Kesarcodi-Watson; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1978), p. 46, and idem., *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (trans. by members of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1976), p. 58; John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1983), p. 183; and John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), pp. 40–1, and idem., *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (ed. Paul McPartland; London and New York: T&T Clark, 2006), p. 134.

⁶⁷ Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives*, p. 113. At this point Torrance and Zizioulas find themselves diametrically opposed.

⁶⁸ Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement*, p. 113.

⁶⁹ Weinandy, *The Father’s Spirit of Sonship*, pp. 53–65, also seeks to illustrate both action and origin of the Father by appeal to the Athanasian-Nazianzen-Epiphonian-Nicene theology that the *monarchy* belongs to the being of God and also then to the person of the Father.

⁷⁰ Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, p. 258.

Spirit are passive in such begetting and spirating, and the Father himself receives from the Son and the Spirit as much as he gives. From Weinandy we are also reminded that the Spirit is involved in the begetting of the Son *in the Spirit* and the Father spirates the Spirit *in the same act* by which he begets the Son, ‘for the Spirit proceeds from the Father as the fatherly Love in whom or by whom the Son is begotten.’⁷¹ In this way the Persons sustain themselves in what they are.

But we may add another level to these actions and origins – that of the *Monarchy*.⁷² By being the eternally begotten Son, the Son ‘persons’ the Father with his *monarchia*, and by being the eternally spirating Spirit, the Spirit ‘persons’ the Father in his *monarchia* also. Torrance attempts to summarize such a position when he writes of Athanasius:

He certainly thought of the Father as the ἀρχή, but he immediately associated the Son with that ἀρχή . . . While the Son is associated with the ἀρχή of the Father in this way, he cannot be thought of as ἀρχή subsisting in himself, for by his very nature he is inseparable from the Father of whom he is the Son. By the same token, however, the Father cannot be thought of as ἀρχή apart from the Son, for precisely as Father he is Father of the Son . . . While the Father was on occasion denoted as the ἀτίτος and the ἀρχή of the Son that was meant to express the truth that the Father is the *Father* of the Son and that the Son is the *Son* of the Father, but not to withdraw anything from the complete equality of the Son with the Father, for the Sonship of the Son is as ultimate as the Fatherhood of the Father.⁷³

In his own adaptation of Torrance’s position, Benjamin Dean offers a complementary perspective on this theme when he suggests that, ‘There is an authority that is common to Father, Son and Holy Spirit because each Person shares perichoretically in the One unified Being of God . . . Yet there is an authority that is the particular personal property of the Father alone. That is, generative authority and ultimate rule is appropriate to the Person of the Father in terms of source and origin in a manner that is hypostatically peculiar.’⁷⁴

In the economy the Son comes to do the will of the Father who sent him, and the Spirit is sent by the Father *through* the Son to accomplish all that the Father and Son have given him to do. They do so willingly for the *monarchy* of the

⁷¹ Weinandy, *The Father’s Spirit of Sonship*, p. 69.

⁷² In line with Torrance’s contention, Pannenberg suggests such a ‘dependent divinity’ (Ted Peter’s term for this form of relational ontology, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993], p. 135) does ‘not mean that the monarchy of the Father is destroyed’. Rather, ‘By their work the Son and Spirit serve the monarchy of the Father. Yet the Father does not have his kingdom or monarchy without the Son and Spirit, but only through them’, *Systematic Theology*, p. 324. Pannenberg does not, however, follow the argument of Torrance for applying the term Father (and thus the monarchy) to the whole Trinity. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 325–6.

⁷³ Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, pp. 312–13.

⁷⁴ Dean, ‘Person and Being’, p. 74.

Father is as constitutive of the Godhead that they are a part of as is Sonship or communion. Pannenberg is adamant on this point, 'The fact that the monarchy of the Father and knowledge of it are conditional on the Son demands that we bring the economy of God's relations with the world into the question of the unity of the divine essence.'⁷⁵ As Athanasius held, since the whole Godhead is in the Son and in the Spirit, they must be included with the Father in the one originless Source or *Archē* of the Holy Trinity.⁷⁶ The Father would not be the Father, with his *monarchia*, if he was not the begetter of the Son and spirator of the Spirit.⁷⁷ The *monarchy* of the Father is thus a personal attribute which comes with his fatherhood, like filiation is for the Son and communion is for the Spirit. The absolute *Monarchia*, however, belongs to the entire undivided Godhead, and is thus not limited to one Person.⁷⁸ As the 'Agreed Statement on the Holy Trinity' brokered between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and a Pan-Orthodox consultation states:

The priority of the Father or Monarchy of the Father within the Trinity does not detract from the fact that the Father is not properly (κυριως) Father apart from the Son and the Spirit, that the Son is not properly Son apart from the Father and the Spirit, and that the Spirit is not properly Spirit apart from the Father and the Son. Hence the *Monarchia* of the Father is perfectly what it is in the Father's relation to the Son and the Spirit within the one indivisible Being of God.⁷⁹

IV And the *filioque*?

Unless a divine ontology is construed along relational lines, in accordance with God's self-revelation, voices surrounding the *filioque* will simply continue to

⁷⁵ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, p. 327.

⁷⁶ Athanasius, *Ad Antiochenos*, 5; *Contra Arianos*, 4.1–4; cf Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 69.29; 73.16; *Expositio fidei*, 14. References from Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 181.

⁷⁷ As Pannenberg would have it, 'The monarchy of the Father is not established directly but through the mediation of the Son and Spirit. . . . the essence of the Father's monarchy acquires its material definition through this mediation. At any rate, the mediation of the Son and Spirit cannot be extraneous to the monarchy of the Father.' Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, p. 327. Pannenberg differs from our account in that he places much of this mediation in history and not directly in the immanent Trinity.

⁷⁸ This is the teaching of Nicene theology which states that the Son proceeds from the being of the Father (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Πατρὸς). References may be found throughout Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, particularly pp. 180–5; and *The Trinitarian Faith*, pp. 310–11. Benjamin Dean comes to similar conclusions when he states: 'According to Person, ontological priority and absolute authority belong to the Father. According to Being, ontological supremacy and absolute reign, rule and authority belong equally to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit', in 'Person and Being', p. 72. Dean believes Torrance 'underplays and effectively denies' the role of the *monarchy* of the person of the Father (p. 72). While that is a little strong, Torrance does underemphasize this aspect, and that is something I have sought to correct here.

⁷⁹ Torrance, *Theological Dialogue between Orthodox and Reformed Churches*, vol. 2, p. 223.

speak past each other in a series of unfortunate miscommunications. Once a *perichoretically* conceived doctrine of God is constructed along onto-relational lines, then the issue of the *filioque* is, I suggest, resolved; it literally becomes irrelevant. The Spirit proceeds from the one being of the Triune Godhead *and* from the person of the Father, as the *monarchia* is both appropriated to the Father and a defining personal characteristic of his subsistence. Thus the *filioque* may be said to be both proper and improper at the same time. Both the *filioquist* and the *monopatrism* traditions contain elements of theological truth and theological error. When one is able to discern what is what, ecumenical rapprochement may be possible. That is certainly the intention of my own work. We may say, therefore, with large sectors of the tradition, East and West, that the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone, if by that it is meant from the *perichoretic* being of God. We may say the Spirit proceeds from the Father through that Son, if by that it is meant from the person of the Father by means of the person of the Son. But we may also say, although it is rather clumsy language and not to be preferred, that the Spirit proceeds from himself, if by that it is meant he proceeds from within his own divine being, and thus consequently from the Person of the Father through the Person of the Son.

In presenting this thesis I am challenging the persistent position of Catholic theology, East and West in their respective ways, of positing the Holy Spirit as merely the one who perfects or completes the Father-Son relationship. I am arguing that the Spirit is as constitutive of the Father-Son relationship as Father and Son are of their relationships with him. Only such a Trinitarian theology can do full justice to a biblically derived relational ontology of the Godhead and make sense of the issues behind the *filioque* dispute. Such a relational ontology provides a biblical construal of divine inter-subjectivity and offers an account of God's be-ing that is essentially in line with the ecumenical tradition (with clear modifications)⁸⁰ and with a Third Article Theology, but one that is able to affirm what the *filioquist* West and the *monopatrism* East both want to safeguard: the essential Trinity of God.

⁸⁰ I am aware that my most controversial move is to reject the standard theological principle that the Father has no origin, and that the Son has origin from the Father and the Spirit, theology enshrined in the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, Canon 1: 'the Father (proceeding) from no one, but the Son from the Father only, and the Holy Ghost equally from both, always without beginning and end'. It is my contention that the Trinitarian theology of East and West contains within it such an inner logic to revise this traditional teaching in a very traditional way. That is, I firmly believe ecumenical theology demands the revision of this aspect of ecumenical theology in order for it to be ecumenical theology.