

HOW CAN TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY
TAKE US TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF
MINISTRY

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How can Trinitarian theology take us towards a theology of ministry, that is a theology of ministry that is grounded in the doctrine of the Trinity?

TO SET THE SCENE

: my lived experience.

: my academic work

PhD Thesis: 'Revisioning the Theology of the Ordained ministry in the Contemporary Catholic Church'

1. Present an understanding of the Trinity that is not an abstract theory about a God that is separate from us, but a teaching about God's life **with us**.
2. Propose that the doctrine of the Trinity is a resource for understanding the nature of ministry.
3. What does this mean for the way we organise and structure the ministry of the church?

The Doctrine of the Trinity is not an abstract theory about a God that is separate from us. 'It is a teaching about God's life with us and our life with each other'.

(Catherine LaCugna, *God For Us: the Trinity and Christian Life*)

In recent centuries the paradigm of the Trinity has been separated from the actual experience of people's lives: experiences that originally gave rise to the doctrine.



Rublev's Icon of the Holy Trinity

Catherine LaCugna argues that historically there has been a focus upon the ontological relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit rather than what God does in salvation history.

One cannot divorce the inner life of God from what God does in history. In fact the inner life of God is unknowable but what we do know of God has been revealed to us in human history.

Botticelli's Trinity



John Zizioulas: The being of God is known only through personal relationships and personal love. Being means life, and life means communion. . . The being of God is a relational being: without the concept of communion it would not be possible to speak of the being of God. (Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*.)

Karl Rahner: God is by nature, self-communicating, seeking to reveal and give of God-self. Trinitarian theology is then a theology of relationship. (Rahner, *The Trinity*, 1970)

Elizabeth Johnson: Speaking about the Trinity expresses belief in one God who is not a solitary God but a communion in love marked by overflowing life. (Johnson, *She Who Is*, 222)

Zizioulas: It is unthinkable to speak of the 'one God' before speaking of God who is in 'communion' that is to say, of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Trinity is a primordial ontological concept . . . The substance of God has no ontological content, no true being, apart from communion.

John Damascene (675- 749CE) uses the term perichoresis to describe this relationship- being in one another, permeation without confusion. This perichoretic relationship values both the oneness of God and the diversity of God, because the three persons do not lose their distinctiveness.

Miroslav Volf in his discussion of perichoresis notes ‘The Father and the Son are in one another and Christians are in them’.

God exists as three persons in mutual and loving relationship (mutually indwelling in one another) and oriented in relationship to the whole creation.

LaCugna: the communion between the three persons not only entails an equality, a mutuality and a reciprocity amongst the three, but it overflows to include humanity as its beloved partner. (LaCugna: *God For Us*, p274)

The life of God is not contained in God alone, but is essentially related to our life and has bearing on our relationships with one another.

The trinitarian model of God is non-hierarchical, it is a shared authority of equal persons. (However there is in the tradition a suggestion of a pattern of dominance and subordination between the Father from whom the Son and the Spirit proceed and the Son and the Spirit who do the proceeding.)



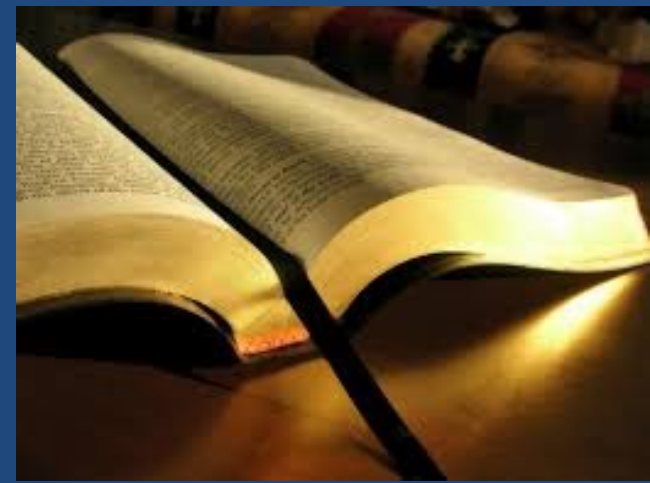
This is strongly critiqued by various theologians (Elizabeth Johnson, Catherine LaCugna, Miroslav Volf) :

Leonardo Boff: The three have their origin from all eternity, none being anterior to the others. Their relationship is one of **reciprocal participation** rather than hypostatic derivation, of **correlation and communion** rather than production and procession.

(Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 1988)

How to resolve this question? (It needs exploration because it has implications for how we then understand relationships in the church)

If we look at scripture- there is ambiguity.



- ◆ ‘ . . . The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor . . . ’ (Luke 4: 16-20)
- ◆ “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people” . (John 17: 1-2)
- ◆ The Father sends the Spirit ‘in Jesus name’. (John 14: 25)
- ◆ The Spirit comes upon Mary to give birth to the Son. (Luke 1)
- ◆ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. (Mark 1: 9-15)

The locus of authority that is revealed by the three persons is not based in any one person of the Trinity but in the koinonia of God or communion of God.

The doctrine of the Trinity reveals a God who is essentially relational, who is three persons united in communion, who is non-hierarchical, whose authority is grounded in the koinonia of the three persons, whose mutual love overflows to all creation and who calls forth loving relationships in the Christian community.

The doctrine of the Trinity takes us towards a sound ecclesiology and a sound theology of ministry.

Zizioulas: The Church is the image of the Triune God. The economy of the Holy Trinity (the work of Christ and the Spirit in history) is the basis of ecclesiology – the church is built by this and leads to the vision of the Triune God (eschatology).

Miroslav Volf: The Church as the Image of the Trinity: 'Present participation in the trinitarian *communio* through faith in Jesus Christ anticipates in history the eschatological communion of the church with the triune God.'

But note **Hans Küng:** 'The church is not God. The church as a fellowship of believers is, in spite of everything positive that can be said about it, neither God nor a God-like being . . . God's work and the church's are neither identical nor overlapping, there is a fundamental distinction between them. God remains God.'
(Hans Küng, *The Church*)

Jürgen Moltmann: "The church in the power of the Spirit is not yet the kingdom of God, but it is its anticipation in history."

Pannenberg: "The church . . . is nothing apart from its function as an eschatological community and therefore as an anticipatory sign of God's coming rule and its salvation for all humanity."

2. The doctrine of the Trinity is a resource for understanding the nature of the ministry.

Trinitarian doctrine has implications for how we understand ministry in the church.

Proposal: The Triune God is the agent and inspiration for right relationship in the human community. It is therefore the *means* towards shaping the ministry of the church. The Triune God, who is essentially relational, is the animation and life underpinning the very work of ministry.

LaCugna: The church is called to be an icon of the Trinity inasmuch as its members “exist together ‘perichoretically’, in mutual giving and receiving, without separateness, or subordination or division. Church leadership is to be ‘rooted in the ministry of service, not of lordship.’” *(An icon- which points to the mystery of God but is not in itself, the mystery of God. – more like a signpost pointing beyond itself to the God who dwells in light inaccessible.)*

We cannot rely on a purely Christological basis for ministry.

‘To be in the image of God is to be in community. It is not simply a man or a woman who can reflect God, but it is a community in relationship’. (Elizabeth Dominguez, *In God’s Image*, p7)

The view of ministry in the ancient Christian church could be described as ‘pneuma-christological’ in that the people of the time saw the Spirit enlivening and inspiring the church. Edward Schillebeeckx notes the move away from this view to a theology of ministry based directly on Christology. He critiques this and reminds us that the ecclesiology of the early church (the first wave of the Jesus movement) had its source in the baptism of the Spirit. (Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face*)

‘If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.’(Gal.5:25)

‘... and no-one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit’.
(1 Cor. 12: 3)

John Zizioulas extends this idea:

The identification of the Church's ministry with that of Christ is possible only if we let our *Christology be conditioned pneumatologically*. The mystery of Christ is initiated by the Father who sends the Son in order to fulfil and realise the eternal design of the Trinity to draw humanity and creation to participate in God's very life. (Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*.)



3. What does this mean
for the way we organise
and structure the
ministry
of the church?



The relationality of the Triune God provides a framework for defining ministry in terms of its relationship to the Christian community.

The triune God is radically related to not only all human life but indeed the whole creation and so the life of the church as much as is humanly possible ought to manifest the life of the Trinity.

The ministry of the church, which is essentially related to the Christian community ought then to:

- Manifest the mutual relations that are manifest in the Triune God
- Be collaborative and non-hierarchical
- Ought to manifest both unity and diversity
- Ought to (as much as is humanly possible) manifest the *ek-stasis* (ecstasy) of God.

Ministry - manifesting the mutual relations that are manifest in the Triune God.

The nature of the Triune God affirms that right relationships within the Christian community and with the wider world ought to be highly valued and nurtured. (The triune God is essentially a God of mutual and just relationship and calls the ministry of the church also to manifest mutual and just relationship)

The relationship between the people of God: we are fundamentally united- we are one- although in practice this is not always clear. 'For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and we were all made to drink of one Spirit' (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Christians are called to a genuine community in which right relationship is embodied. The very nature of God is revealed to us through the person of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Ministry - manifesting the mutual relations that are manifest in the Triune God.

All baptized Christians are therefore called to participate in God's life by standing *in persona Christi*, acting as Christ to others, through the inspiration of the Spirit. (Traditionally the Roman Catholic Church has attributed this representational function solely to the ordained minister, when it properly belongs to all of the baptized.)

This fundamental mode of relating, that of standing *in persona Christi* to one another is also fundamental to all ministry. All ministry is grounded in this call of baptism.

Ministry, activity that builds up and nourishes the people of God, is born within the community and is carried out on behalf of the community by ministers who may or may not be ordained. Many recognized ministries of the church are not conferred with ordination, but all ministries arise within the Christian community, inspired by the Spirit of God, and have as their purpose the building up and nourishment of the Christian community. In this way, all ministry ought to be seen as intrinsically related to the community in which it arises.

The Relationship between the Ordained Ministry and the Christian Community

The ordained ministry as a particular dimension of the church's ministry, has a distinct and essential relationship to the Christian community.

Schillebeeckx has noted that discussions about the meaning and function of the ordained minister traditionally have been far too centered upon the ontological character of the ordained person and too little concerned with the relationship of that person with the Christian community. John Zizioulas claims that 'there is a fundamental interdependence between the ministry and the concrete community of the church.' Schillebeeckx, *The church with a human face*, 155-6.

Zizioulas, *Being as communion*, 212.

Ordination has no meaning in fact outside of the Christian community.

The Relationship between the Ordained Ministry and the Christian Community

The ordained ministry is more than the assignation of leadership by a community upon a person. All ministry is inspired by the Spirit of Christ and originates in Christ but the capacity for the ordained ministry in particular, is discerned as a gift in a person *by the community in conjunction with the wider church.*

The wider church affirms leadership by ordaining a person. Ordination thus signifies a particular relationship between the ordained minister and the Christian community.

Ministry – collaborative and non-hierarchical

The threefold ministries: episcopacy, presbyterate and diaconate.
– three unique ministries – not so much a hierarchy as a way of organising the ministerial structure of the church where the locus of authority can be seen as grounded in the partnership of all the baptised- in the koinonia of the Christian community rather than lodged in one particular role or person.

The icon of the trinity in fact critiques ways of relating that give elevated status to any role in the community, since God's very life honours the equality, mutuality and distinctiveness of the Father, Son and Spirit united in One God.

Ministry – collaborative and non-hierarchical

In the Trinity there is no basis for domination or ‘power over’ others. The mutuality and equality of the persons of the Trinity affirms the claim that the relationships amongst the office-holders of the church and between the office-holders and the rest of the baptised ought to be collegial, collaborative and offer mutual service to one another.

Lynn Rhodes – ‘a community of friends who are interdependent, mutually caring and accountable to one another. (Rhodes, *Co-creating*. P 123)

Carol Hess - ‘Relationships that are marked by conversations characterised by deep connection, co-operation and mutuality. Conversations are empathetic, non-judgmental, receptive, passionate, honest and self-disclosing.’ (Hess, *The Art of Ministry*, p65)
Note- there are not strict divisions between those who learn and those who teach, or those who serve and those who are served.

Ministry – collaborative and non-hierarchical

The role of oversight- can be understood not as a dominating or authoritarian role but rather as holding together and protecting the diversity of local communities. It involves the nurturing of links between local communities and between the universal church and local communities.

However in the Anglican communion, there is not the same relationship with the universal church. There is far more independence whereby a bishop is freer to make decisions for their own diocese, and freer to take into consideration the needs of their own local community.

Ministry – manifesting both unity and diversity.

Implications- The icon of the The Trinity is a foundation for viewing the ministry of the church as diverse but essentially **one**.

There is only one ministry originating in the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth and ongoing through the power of the Spirit. An essential tenet of the faith- we are one- we are fundamentally connected to one another- as Christians configured to Christ through our baptism, we are called to represent Christ to one another and more widely to others outside of the Christian community. ie- to live *‘in persona Christi’*. (p10)

But the ministry is also called to be as **diverse** as the gifts given to the baptised. It must include people of many cultures and classes, women as well as men.

Note: The ***foundation for all ministry*** is in a baptism into the life of the Triune God. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matt 28:19)

Ministry – manifesting both unity and diversity.

A division into ‘those who serve and those who are served’ is unacceptable. ‘Every person is to serve with his or her specific gifts and every person is to be served in his or her specific need.’

(Volf, After our Likeness, p230)

NB. Not all of the baptised are ministers – but rather the gifts of ministry are so dispersed amongst the baptised that that work of ministry cannot be contained within the ordained ministry.

The one ministry of the church is fundamentally diverse (and so in the Roman Catholic church I argued cannot be contained within an all-male celibate priesthood.)

- Ministry ought to (as much as is humanly possible) manifest the *ek-stasis* (ecstasy) of God.
- The triune God does not remain apart from creation. All creation is caught up in the life of God.
- “God goes forth from God, God creates the world, God suffuses its history and dwells within us, redeeming the world from within.” (LaCugna, *God For Us*)
- “There is no rest (*stasis*) in *ek-stasis*, only continual movement outward.”
- The life of God shows forth mutual and just relationships and reaches out to embrace all of creation, inviting the wider society to a loving, mutual and just way of being.

- Where there are distorted relationships whether between people, races and sexes or between the human community and the rest of creation, the life of the Trinity acts to challenge them.
- Where there are relationships of domination and subjection or of abuse in any form, the life of the Trinity stands as a critique in its revelation of radical relationality and mutual love.
- The Triune God inspires and empowers mutual, equal and inclusive relationships among humankind and between human beings and the created world.
- Thus the ministry of the church in manifesting the *ekstasis* of God will similarly be caught up in the life of the community and will call the wider society to a loving, mutual and just way of being.

- The work of Christian ministry if it is to embody the life of God, will reach out beyond itself – to influence and be influenced by the wider human community.
- Christian ministry must hold in tension its openness to the diversity of the human community and a vision for the fullness of humanity.
- The impact of Christian ministers upon the community might involve challenging but never dominating or coercing others.
- The diversity and differences amongst the human community become a resource for human learning and they are to be celebrated and protected.

- The Christian church is called to greater ecumenism - the need to acknowledge the work of the Spirit in other denominations. – to give concrete form to the unity and communion that is at the heart of Christianity.
- “The scandal is not that there are differences (between the Christian churches) but that these differences are used as an obstacle to communion.” (Schillebeeckx, *Church*, p197)
- If mutual and just relationships are not present in the life of the church, then the church lacks credibility in calling for right relationship in the wider society.
- But- when mutual and just relationships are present – the church can act prophetically to call the wider society to loving mutual and just relationship.
- The prophetic dimension of ministry is oriented towards the hope of the future- towards a vision of what might be- possibility of a better world.