

# Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity

Chapter 7 of *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons*

(Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1996), 168-202.

Thomas F. Torrance

IN our discussion of the formulation of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity in the third chapter we followed a movement of thought from the ground level of the incarnate self-revelation of God in a pattern of implicit trinitarian relations in the economic Trinity through two conceptual levels to a fully explicit pattern in the ontological Trinity. In the course of this movement there took place a refinement in our understanding of the basic concepts and relations of God's revealing and saving activity toward us and for us of which we learn in the Scriptures of the New Testament. This involved two stages: the interpretation of the soteriological content of God's three-fold self-revelation mediated to us in the biblical statements about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the light of their ontological substructure expressed in the Nicene *homoousion*; and the unfolding of the profound implications of the *homoousion* applied to the Spirit as well as to the Son for an understanding of the eternal relations of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. At this third level use was made of the patristic concept of *perichoresis* to express something of the mystery of the Holy Trinity in respect of the coinherent way in which the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit exist in one another and dwell in one another as one God, three Persons. We must now give further consideration to the notion of *perichoresis* and the help it gives us in deepening and clarifying understanding of the onto-relations of the three divine Persons to one another in respect of the coordination that obtains between them and their unity in the divine *Monarchia*.

It was undoubtedly Athanasius who in his elucidation of the dwelling of the Father and the Son in one another provided the theological basis for the doctrine of coinherence. He did this by way of elucidating statements of Jesus to the disciples recorded by St John, particularly, 'I am in the Father and the Father in me'.<sup>2</sup> He deepened and refined the concept of the *homoousion* which gave expression to the underlying oneness in being and activity between the incarnate Son and God the

Father upon which everything in the Gospel depended. As he understood it the *homoousion* pointed both to real distinctions between the three divine Persons and to their coinhering with one another in the one Being of God. For Athanasius this had to do not merely with a linking or intercommunication of the distinctive properties of the three divine Persons, which became known as *communicatio idiomatum* (κοινωνία ιδιωμάτων), but with a completely mutual indwelling in which each Person, while remaining what he is by himself as Father, Son or Holy Spirit, is wholly in the others as the others are wholly in him. Although Athanasius did not give us a specific term for coinherence, mutual containing, or *perichoresis* (περιχώρησις)—that came later—its basic idea was already conceived in his refutation of the Arian disparagement of the Lord’s Words, ‘I in the Father and the Father in me’, through their question, ‘How can the one be contained (χωρεῖν) in the other and the other in the one?’ Athanasius pointed out that this would be to think of the relation between the Father and the Son quite inappropriately in accordance with the way material things can empty into and contain one another. He went on to explain that when it is said ‘I am in the Father and the Father is in me’ we are to understand this reciprocal relation as one in which the whole Being of the Father and the whole Being of the Son mutually indwell, inexist or coexist in one another, which is thinkable only in relation to God himself and of which we learn only in God’s revelation of himself.

In his *Letters on the Holy Spirit* written to his friend Serapion, Athanasius showed that we must think of this coinherence as applying equally to the homoousial interrelations between the Spirit and the Son, and the Spirit and the Father, and thus to the whole Trinity, for unless the Being and Activity of the Spirit are identical with the Being and Activity of the Father and the Son, we are not saved. For the great Patriarch of Alexandria the Gospel of salvation as handed down from the apostles and expressed in the Nicene Confession depended entirely on the ontological connection between the saving life and activity of the incarnate Son of God and God the Father, which in turn revealed and imported the no less crucial ontological connection between the Holy Spirit and both the Son and the Father. Thus his stress upon the inner coinherent relations of the Holy Trinity was particularly significant in upholding the bond between the soteriological and ontological understanding of the Faith inherent in the *homoousion* that had been central to the Nicene appropriation and interpretation of the Gospel.

With reference to the Johannine verse, John 14:10, Hilary put forward much the same teaching in the West but with explicit account of the coinherence between the divine Persons in terms of their wholly *containing* one another as whole Persons without any diminishment to the honour and glory of one another. ‘Although

these Beings do not dwell apart, they retain their separate existence and condition and can reciprocally contain one another, so that one permanently envelops and is also permanently enveloped by the other whom he yet envelops.’ He argued that while this idea of mutual containing is unintelligible in respect of natural objects, it is not impossible with God who is both within and without all things, and contains all things although he himself is not contained by anything. Hilary was very familiar with Athanasian and Cappadocian theology which he learned during his exile in the East, and although he wrote in Latin he clearly had in mind the Greek terms and χωρεῖν and χωρητικός in this account of the way in which the Persons of the Holy Trinity reciprocally contain one another while remaining what they are in their otherness from one another. Here we evidently have developed the full concept that was to be given technical expression in the term *perichoresis* (περιχώρησις), which like the verb περιχωρεῖν derives from χωρεῖν meaning both ‘to go’ and ‘to make room for’ or ‘to contain’. The noun *perichoresis* may actually have been current in the East at that time, although there is no written evidence for it extant.

Gregory Nazianzen had used the verb περιχωρεῖν to help him express the way in which he thought the divine and human natures of Christ interacted or intermingled with one another in virtue of their union, but without any suggestion of the human nature interpenetrating the divine Nature, or any attempt to extend this to the inner relations of the divine Persons in the Holy Trinity. The first actual use of the noun *perichoresis* in extant literature is found in the work of an unknown theologian on the Holy Trinity attributed to Cyril of Alexandria. This is found in connection with the key text John 14:11, in a passage lifted without acknowledgement by John of Damascus but which had the effect of giving it currency as a technical theological term. By *perichoresis* Pseudo-Cyril (and John Damascene) gave expression to the dynamic Union and Communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit with one another in one Being in such a way that they have their Being in each other and reciprocally contain one another, without any coalescing or commingling with one another and yet without any separation from one another, for they are completely equal and identical in Deity and Power. Each Person contains the one God in virtue of his relation to the others as well as his

relation to himself for they wholly coexist and inexist in one another. Human beings do not exist within one another, but this is precisely what the divine Persons of the Holy Trinity do. Explanatory reference is made to the statement of Gregory Nazianzen to the effect that the Godhead is undivided in divided Persons due to their identity of Being, rather like three suns cleaving to one another without any separation and giving out their light combined and conjoined into one.

It is important to note that *perichoresis* has essentially a *dynamic* and not a static sense, with the meaning of mutual indwelling and inter-penetrating one another in the onto-relational, spiritual and intensely personal way discussed above.

It imports a mutual movement as well as a mutual indwelling, which gives expression to the dynamic nature of the homoousial Communion between the three divine Persons, in which, as we shall note, their differentiating qualities instead of separating them actually serve their oneness with each other. It was thus that Basil linked both the coactivity of the divine Persons in the Trinity and the oneness (ἕνωσις) of God's Nature to the Communion (κοινωνία) of the Spirit with the Father and the Son. Since God is Spirit and God is Love, we must understand the *perichoresis* in a wholly spiritual and intensely personal way as the eternal movement of Love or the Communion of Love which the Holy Trinity ever is within himself, and in his active relations toward us through the Holy Spirit from within his homoousial relations with the Father and the Son. In this homoousial way the Holy Spirit is in himself the *enhypostatic* Love and the Communion of Love in the perichoretic relations between the Father and the Son, and as such is in himself the ground of our communion with God in the Love of the Father and Son. This was precisely the theme developed by the Apostle John in his Epistles, which had such a far-reaching impact on St Augustine.

This teaching corresponds to the way in which theologians like Epiphanius of Salamis with considerable stress on the *homoousion* as applying to the inner relations of the Trinity as a whole, spoke of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as three *enhypostatic* Persons eternally grounded and wholly coinhering in one another while remaining other than one another, without there being any deviation in the Trinity from complete oneness and identity. In the one Being of God the three Persons are always what they are, the Father always the Father, the Son always the Son and the Holy Spirit always the Holy Spirit, each being true and perfect God. And it corresponds also to the thought of Cyril of Alexandria in his view of the living and dynamic coinherence or mutual containing of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit essentially and enhypostatically within the Holy Trinity. He brought together the emphasis of Athanasius upon the one Being of the homoousial Trinity with

Gregory Nazianzen's conception of an indivisible but internally differentiated Trinity of real hypostatic relations continuously and actively subsisting in the Godhead.

We have spent some time in our consideration of 'the mystery of the *perichoresis*', for its articulation in Nicene and post-Nicene theology of the immanent in-each-otherness of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in their homoousial Communion with one another, brought the Church's interpretation of God's revealing and saving acts in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to its supreme point, in acknowledgement of the Triunity of the living God. It expressed the truth that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinctive Persons each with his own incommunicable properties, but that they dwell *in* one another, not only *with* one another, in such an intimate way, let it be repeated, that their individual characteristics instead of dividing them from one another unite them indivisibly together, the Father in the Son and the Spirit, the Son in the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit in the Father and the Son. The Father is not Father apart from the Son and the Spirit, the Son is not the Son apart from the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Spirit apart from the Father and the Son, for each is who he is in his wholeness as true God of true God in the wholeness of the other two who are each true God of true God, and yet in the mystery of their perichoretic inter-relations they are not three Gods but one only God, the Blessed and Holy Trinity.

We noted above that *perichoresis* is not a static but a dynamic concept, for it refers to an eternal movement in the Love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for one another, which flows outward unceasingly toward us. But it is important to note as well that *perichoresis* is not a speculative concept. It expresses the soteriological truth of the identity between God himself and the content of his saving revelation in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit, and thereby assures us that what God is toward us in Jesus Christ and in his Spirit he is inherently and eternally in himself. Together with the conception of the *homoousion* the conception of the coinherent or perichoretic relations of the divine Persons enables us to read back the interrelations between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation into the eternal relations immanent in the one Being of God. It must be said, therefore, that the basic conception of *perichoresis* arises out of joyful belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and out of worship and thanksgiving for the saving Love of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit who reconciles us to himself and takes us up into Communion with himself.

On the other hand, *perichoresis* is a truth about the intimate relations in the divine Life which we cannot but formulate in fear and trembling, with adoration and awe, and in recognition of the poverty and inadequacy of the language we use in trying to put into words understanding of the mystery of the oneness and three-foldness of God's self-revelation to us. We could not do this were it not for the incarnation of God's Word in Jesus Christ and his gracious condescension to address

us in human forms of thought and speech. In speaking of the Holy Trinity especially we are aware not only of having to use human modes of expression provided for us in the biblical revelation which signify realities beyond themselves, but of having to employ non-biblical terms in venturing to make pronouncements beyond the actual statements of the Scriptures in order to clarify interpretation and refute error, yet we cannot disguise the fact that this is to tread upon holy ground where we may speak and think only with prayer for divine forgiveness. As Karl Barth once wrote: 'In our hands even terms suggested to us by Holy Scripture will prove to be incapable of grasping what they are supposed to grasp.'<sup>20</sup> However, as Cyril of Alexandria once said, 'when things concerning God are expressed in language used of men, we ought not to think of anything base, but to remember that the wealth of divine Glory is being mirrored in the poverty of human expression.' This is surely how we must think of *perichoresis* in our attempt to speak as carefully and faithfully as we can, within the limited range of our creaturely capacities, about the ineffable Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity of the inter-hypostatic onto-relations in the transcendent Life of God.

We must now go on to draw out several of the important implications of *perichoresis* for a doctrine of the Triunity of God in which we shall take up again and develop further some of the theological conceptions that have already come before us.

#### 1) PERICHORESIS AND THE WHOLENESS OF THE HOLY TRINITY

*perichoresis* reinforces the fact that the Holy Trinity may be known only as a *whole* for it is as a whole that God makes himself known to us through himself and in himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It enables us to appreciate more fully the truth that the Holy Trinity is completely self-grounded in his own ultimate Reality, and that God's self-revelation is a self-enclosed *novum* which may be known and interpreted only on its own ground and out of itself. This means that our knowing of God engages in a deep circular movement from Unity to Trinity and from Trinity to Unity, since we are unable to speak of the whole Trinity without already speaking of the three particular Persons of the Trinity or to speak of any of the three Persons

without presuming knowledge of the whole Trinity, for God is God only as he is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and cannot be conceived by us truly otherwise. Certainly, as we noted in the first chapter, in our apprehension of God's trinitarian self-revelation in its intrinsic wholeness we rely on a subsidiary awareness of the particular Persons of the Trinity and in our explicit apprehension of each particular Person we rely on an implicit awareness of the whole Trinity. This is precisely what *peri-choresis* tells us, that God is known only in a *circle of reciprocal relations*. In Karl Barth's words, 'Just as in revelation, according to the biblical witness, the one God may be known only in the Three and the Three only as the one God, so none of the Three may be known without the other Two but each of the Three only with the other Two.'

The inner reason for this circular and holistic apprehension of God in his Trinity is already evident in the completely homoousial interrelations of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in which as distinct Hypostases they share equally, individually and together, and are the one identical Being of the Lord God Almighty. But it is in the refining and developing of the *homoousion* in its application to the Trinity as a whole through the concept of *perichoresis* that this became fully confirmed, in realisation of the truth that no divine Person is he who he really and truly is, even in his distinctive otherness, apart from relation to the other two in their mutual containing or interpenetrating of one another in such a way that each Person is in himself whole God of whole God. Since each divine Person considered in himself is true God of true God (Θεὸς ἀληθινὸς ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ) without any qualification, the whole God dwells in each Person and each Person is whole God. Since the fullness of the Godhead is complete in each of them as well as in all of them, it is as the one indivisible Holy Trinity that God is God and that God is one God, and therefore may be known and is actually and truly known only as a Triune Whole. No one Person is knowable or known apart from the others. Due to their perichoretic onto-relations with one another in which they have their Being in one another, the Father is not truly known apart from the Son and the Holy Spirit; the Son is not truly known apart from the Father and the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit is not truly known apart from the Father and the Son. The Holy Trinity is revealed and is known only as an indivisible Whole, in Trinity and Unity, Unity and Trinity. This indivisible wholeness, as we shall see, must be allowed to govern our understanding of the divine processions or missions of the Son and the Spirit from the Monarchy which, without a lapse into a remnant of Origenist subordinationism, cannot be limited to the Father. The Father is not properly (κυρίως) Father apart from the Son, the Son is not properly Son apart from the Father, and the Holy Spirit is not properly the Holy Spirit apart from the Father and the Son.

## 2) PERICHORESIS AND DISTINCTIONS WITHIN THE TRINITY

The concept of *perichoresis* deepens and strengthens our understanding of the hypostatic distinctions within the Trinity. While it helps to clarify the circularity of our belief in the Trinity through belief in his Unity, and our belief in his Unity through belief in his Trinity, it does not dissolve the distinctions between the three divine Persons unipersonally into the one Being of God. On the contrary, it establishes those distinctions by showing that it is precisely through their reciprocal relations with one another, and in virtue of their incommunicable characteristics as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that the three divine Persons constitute the very Communion which the one God eternally is, or which they eternally are. In so doing, however, *perichoresis* has much to say about the *order* or τάξις that obtains between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in their relations with one another, the relation of the Son to the Father as his Father, and the relation of the Holy Spirit to both as the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son. They all coexist enhypostatically in the Communion of the Holy Trinity without being confused with one another, and without differing from one another in respect of their homoousial Being and homogeneous Nature.

On the one hand, *perichoresis* asserts the full *equality* of the three divine Persons. Gregory Nazianzen and Didymus the Blind drew the attention of the Early Church to the fact that in the triadic formulations in the Scriptures of the New Testament a variation in the order in which the divine Persons are mentioned is found, which points to their indivisible nature and essential equality in Being. Moreover, the New Testament refers to each Person, the Son and the Spirit no less than the Father, as ‘Lord’ or *Yahweh*, each, therefore, as true God or αὐτοθεός, as ‘whole God’ (ὅλος θεός), ‘whole from whole’ (ὅλος ὅλου), as Athanasius expressed it, or ‘God considered in himself’, as Gregory Nazianzen expressed it.<sup>26</sup> This represented a rejection of any Arian or partitive conceptions of Deity, and was considerably strengthened by the concept of *perichoresis* without any detracting from the distinctive properties and interrelations of the three divine Persons, through the emphatic assertion, not only of their oneness in Being, but of their identity in will, authority, judgment, energy, power or any other divine attribute. In all but the incommunicable properties which differentiate them from one another as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, they share completely and equally—each of the divine Persons is entirely united to those with whom he is enjoined as he is with himself because of the identity of Being and Power that is between them. This was clearly affirmed at the Council of Constantinople before the adoption of *perichoresis* as a technical term, when it promulgated and enlarged the Nicene Confession of Faith, later ratified at the Council of Chalcedon. Thus in taking their cue from the faith of



Baptism in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Fathers of Constantinople wrote in their Encyclical or Synodical Epistle: ‘According to the Faith there is one Godhead, Power and Being of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, equal in Honour and Majesty and coeternal Sovereignty in three most perfect Hypostases, that is, in three perfect Persons.’ That was designed to set completely aside the twin heresies of Arianism and Sabellianism, or partitive and unipersonal conceptions of God, the very point which was taken up and made more precise by the perichoretic teaching of Pseudo-Cyril and John Damascene.

On the other hand, *perichoresis* affirms the real *distinctions* between the divine Persons in their hypostatic relations with one another, as well as their real oneness, and does so by providing the frame within which we may think and speak of the three divine Persons in their proper differences without detracting from their complete equality, in line with the order given in Baptism into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—the Father first, the Son second, the Spirit third. This priority in order or Monarchy of the Father within the trinitarian relations is consonant with the Father’s relation to the Son and the Spirit within the indivisibility of the Triune Being of God. Hence the priority or Monarchy of the Father within the Holy Trinity must not be taken to imply a priority or superiority in Deity. It refers to the fact that ‘the Son is begotten of the Father, not the Father of the Son’, which is the *order* manifested in the incarnation between the Father and his only begotten Son, and is reflected in the sending of the Holy Spirit by the Father in the name of the Son. This has to do in part, then, with the history of God’s revealing and saving acts, but it is governed by the irreversible relation between the Father and the Son intrinsic to them in which, while the Father ‘naturally’ comes first, the Son is nevertheless everything the Father is except being Father.

While in the Father/Son relation the Father is the Father of the Son, he is in no sense the deifier of the Son, for he himself in his eternal Being as God is not Father without the Son, as the Son in his eternal Being as God is not the Son without the Father. As the Son of the Father he is not less than the Father but is himself true God of true God, for as St Paul tells us ‘it pleased the Father that all the fullness of God should dwell in him’—‘the entire Godhead dwells in him.’ That is to say, the inner trinitarian order is not to be understood in an ontologically differential way, for it does not apply to the Being or the Deity of the divine Persons which each individually and all together have absolutely in common, but only to the mysterious ‘disposition or economy’ which they have among themselves within the unity of the Godhead, distinguished by position and not status, by form and not being, by sequence and not power, for they are fully and perfectly equal.

A problem arose here in the Cappadocian theology of the post-Nicene era, due largely to their defence of Nicene Orthodoxy against the Aristotelianising

argumentation of Eunomius the Arian Bishop of Cyzicus. The Cappadocian theologians helped the Church to have a richer and fuller understanding of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity in their distinctive ‘modes of existence’ or ways of origination (τρόποι υπάρξεως), as Basil and his brother, but not Gregory Nazianzen, spoke of them. They contributed considerably to the richly personal understanding of the Holy Trinity through their emphasis on the distinctive and objective existence, the peculiar nature and characteristics (ιδιότητα, ιδιώματα, χαρακτηριστικά) of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as they are made known to us in the Gospel, and as they belong to one another in the Communion which they constitute together as μία οὐσία τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις, one Being three Persons. This was a significant move for faith and worship, for it meant that they completely set aside any anxiety about the Nature of God, or any temptation to think of God behind the back of his three-fold self-revelation—there is no such God. Apart from God as he is revealed to us in his three-fold economic or evangelical manifestation as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, there is no divine Being undefined by Jesus Christ which we need fear—as St John remarked, there is no room in the love of God for fear, for perfect love casts out fear.

On the other hand, the rather dualist distinction drawn by Basil and his brother Gregory between the transcendent Being of God which is quite unknowable and the uncreated energies of his self-revelation, had the effect of shifting the weight of emphasis from the Nicene doctrine of the identity of being to one of equality between the divine Persons, and of transferring the element of concreteness in the doctrine of God entirely on to the differentiating particularities of the three divine Persons in accordance with their modes of existence. Proper and salutary as this stress was upon the economic self-revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit mediated in the apostolic tradition of the Gospel and the liturgy, the way Basil and his friends sought to defend this had the effect of playing down the truth embedded in the Nicene *homoousion* of the oneness between the economic and the ontological Trinity, e.g. in respect of the fact that what God *now is* toward us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the economy of redemption, he *ever was* antecedently in his intra-divine Life. In the words of Athanasius: ‘As it always was, so it is even now; and as it now is, so it ever was and is the Trinity, and in him the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.’ Consonant with his reservation about the identity of the economic Trinity and ontological Trinity is the rather strange fact that Basil never referred to the Holy Spirit as God or of one Being with him (Θεός or as ὁμοούσιος) in contrast to Gregory Nazianzen.

However, Basil and his friends considered that the defence of Nicene theology required a clear distinction to be made between οὐσία and ὑπόστασις, for their

identity could be used, and was used, though diversely, by Sabellians and Eunomians in support of their heretical unipersonal and subordinationist ideas. When the Cappadocian theologians argued for the doctrine of one Being, three Persons (μία οὐσία τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις) they did so on the ground that the *ousia* has the same relation to the *hypostasis* as the general or common to the particular. They pointed, for instance, to the way three different people have a common nature or φύσις. They absorbed the Nicene *ousia* of the Father (οὐσία τοῦ Πατρὸς) into the *hypostasis* of the Father (ὑπόστασις τοῦ Πατρὸς), and then when they spoke of the three divine Persons as having the same being or nature, they were apt to identify *ousia* with *physis* or nature. Thereby they tended to give *ousia* an abstract generic sense which had the effect of making them treat *ousia* or *physis* as impersonal. Then when in addition they concentrated Christian faith directly upon the three distinct hypostases of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as they are united through their common action, they were charged with thinking of God in a partitive or tritheistic way, three Gods with a common nature, which of course they rejected. They sought to meet this charge by establishing their belief in the oneness of God through anchoring it in the Father as the one Origin or Principle or Cause, Ἀρχή or Αἰτία, of divine Unity, and they spoke of the Son and of the Holy Spirit as deriving their distinctive modes of subsistence or coming into existence (τρόποι υπάρξεως) from the Father as the Fount of Deity (πηγή θεότητος). But they went further and argued that the Son and the Spirit derive their being (εἶναι) and indeed their Deity (θεότης) from the Father by way of a unique causation (αἰτία) which comprises and is continuous with its effects, and by that they meant the Father considered as *Person*, i.e. as ὑπόστασις, not οὐσία, which represented a divergence from the teaching of the Nicene Council. Thus Basil or his brother Gregory Nyssen thought of the relations between the Father and the Son and the Spirit as constituting a structure of a causal series or, as it were, 'a chain of dependence'. And Gregory could speak of 'one and the same *Person* (πρόσωπον), out of whom the Son is begotten and the Spirit proceeds.' The implication was that it is the *Person* of the Father who causes, deifies and personalises the Being of the Son and of the Spirit and even the existence of the Godhead! As Didymus pointed out, however, if one is to speak of the generation of the Son and the

procession of the Spirit from the *Person* of the Father this is not to be equated with the *causation of their being*, but only with the *mode* of their enhypostatic differentiation within the one intrinsically personal Being of the Godhead.

This centering of divine unity upon the *Person* of the Father rather than upon the *Being* of the Father, with its implication that the Person of the Father is the Fount of Deity, was to introduce the ambiguity into the doctrine of the Trinity that gave rise to difficulties regarding the procession of the Spirit as well as of the Son which we shall consider later. At the moment, however, it is the problem of a distinction drawn by the Cappadocians between the wholly uncaused or *underived* Deity of the Father and the caused or *derived* Deity of the Son and of the Spirit, that we must consider. As Gregory Nazianzen, himself one of the Cappadocian theologians, pointed out, this implied a relation of superiority and inferiority or ‘degrees of Deity’ in the Trinity, which is quite unacceptable, for ‘to subordinate any of the three Divine Persons is to overthrow the Trinity’. He was followed in this judgment by Cyril of Alexandria who, like Athanasius his theological guide, would have nothing to do with a generic concept of the divine οὐσία, or with causal and/or subordinationist relations within the Holy Trinity.

It is at this very point that the introduction of the concept of *perichoresis* proved of decisive importance. It ruled out any notion of a ‘before’ and an ‘after’ or of degrees of Deity and set the doctrine of the Trinity back again on the basis laid for it by Athanasius in terms of the coinherent relations and undivided wholeness in which each Person is a ‘whole of a whole’, while nevertheless gathering up and reinforcing the strong hypostatic and intensely personal distinctions within the Trinity which the Cappadocian theologians had developed so fruitfully especially for spiritual life and worship. This perichoretic understanding of the Trinity had the effect of restoring the full doctrine of the Fatherhood of God without importing any element of subordinationism into the hypostatic interrelations between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and at the same time of restoring the biblical, Nicene and Athanasian conception of the one Being or οὐσία of God as intrinsically and completely personal. Moreover, it ruled out of consideration any conception of the trinitarian relations arising out of a prior unity, and any conception of a unity deriving from the underived Person of the Father. In the perichoretic Communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who are the one Being of God, Unity and Trinity, Trinity and Unity mutually permeate and actively pass into one another.

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. Thus while we think of the Father within the Trinity as the Principle or Ἀρχή of Deity (in the sense of *Monarchia* not restricted to one Person, which we shall consider shortly), that is not to be taken to mean that he is the Source (Ἀρχή) or Cause (Αἰτία) of the divine Being (τὸ εἶναι) of the Son and the Spirit, but in respect simply of his being Unoriginate or Father, or expressed negatively, in respect of his not being a Son, although all that the Son has the Father has except Sonship. This does not derogate from the Deity of the 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. The statement of Jesus, ‘My Father is greater than I’, is to be interpreted not ontologically but soteriologically, or ‘economically (οἰκονομικῶς)’, as Gregory Nazianzen, Cyril of Alexandria and Augustine all understood it. In other words, the subjection of Christ to the Father in his incarnate economy as the suffering and obedient Servant cannot be read back into the eternal hypostatic relations and distinctions subsisting in the Holy Trinity. The mediatorial office of Christ, as Calvin once expressed it, does not detract from his divine Majesty.<sup>52</sup> Since no distinction between underived Deity and derived Deity is tenable, there can be 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.

### 3) PERICHORESIS AND THE DIVINE MONARCHY

*perichoresis* has far-reaching implications, as became apparent above, for our understanding of the divine *Monarchia*. We saw earlier that *perichoresis* reinforces

the fact that the Holy Trinity may be known only as a whole, for it is as a whole that God makes himself known to us through himself and in himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The self-revelation of God as triune is a self-enclosed *novum* which may be known and interpreted only on its own ground and out of itself. Hence our knowing of God engages in a perichoretic circular movement from Unity to Trinity and from Trinity to Unity, for God is God only as he is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and cannot be conceived by us truly otherwise. This means that we understand the Monarchy of God not in a partitive way moving linearly, as it were, from one divine Person to Another, but in the same holistic way as we know the Trinity, although, as we have been trying to do, we may develop modes of thought and speech with which to bring out the distinctive individualities and objectivities of the three divine Persons, as the Cappadocian theologians sought to do while seeking to steer a way between the extremes of unipersonalism and tritheism.

It has been remarked at several points hitherto that 'Father' was constantly used in the New Testament Scriptures and in the Early Church in two cognate ways with reference to the Godhead and to the Person of the Father. They were never separated from one another, but with the Cappadocian theologians these two senses of paternity were elided with one another. At the same time, as we have just pointed out, their way of distinguishing between *ousia* as a general concept and *hypostasis* as a particular concept, imported a shift in their approach (for two of them at least) away from the central significance of *homoousios* as the theological key to understanding the identity, intrinsic oneness, and internal relations of the Holy Trinity. In the course of this development they threw the emphasis upon the three *Hypostaseis* as individual modes of existence united through the *Monarchia* of the Father and as thereby having their Being in common, three *Hypostaseis*, one *Ousia*. Thus the main thrust of the Cappadocian teaching, even with reservations and qualifications, was to make the uncaused Person of the Father the Cause or Source of the Deity and of the personal Nature of the Son and the Spirit. Although they claimed that everything of the Father belongs to the Son, and everything of the Son belongs to the Father, the general trend was to weaken the Athanasian axiom that whatever we say of the Father we say of the Son and the Spirit except 'Father'.

For Athanasius as for Alexander, his predecessor as Archbishop of Alexandria, the idea that the Father alone is *Arche* (Ἀρχή), Principle, Origin or Source, in this sense was an Origenist concept that had become a main plank in Arian deviation from the Apostolic and Catholic Faith. Athanasius, on his part, held that 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 Ἀρχή of the Holy Trinity. Admittedly, the Cappadocian way of expounding the doctrine of the One Being, Three Persons or

Hypostases, helped the Church, as we have said, to have a richer and fuller understanding of the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity in their distinctive modes of existence. However, this was done at the expense of cutting out the real meaning of *ousia* as *being in its internal relations*, and of robbing *ousia* of its profound *personal* sense that was so prominent at Nicaea, and had been reinforced by Athanasius and Epiphanius. It also had the support of Hilary in the West.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, the Cappadocian interpretation, under a lingering Origenist influence, concealed a serious ambiguity. From one point of view the so-called ‘Cappadocian settlement’ meant the rejection of subordinationism, but from another it implied a hierarchical structure within the Godhead. This carried with it an ambiguous element of subordinationism that kept disconcerting thought within the Church and opening the way for division, yet it was the Latins who stressed even more strongly the role of the Father as *principium et fons totius Deitatis*.

The formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity at the Council of Constantinople was certainly indebted to the Cappadocian theologians, especially to Gregory Nazianzen who presided over its opening session, and as with them care was taken to steer between unipersonalism and tritheism. However, the main development did not follow the line advocated by the Cappadocians in grounding the unity of the Godhead in the Person of the Father as the unique and exclusive Principle of the Godhead, but reverted to the doctrine of the Son as begotten *of the Being* of the Father and made a similar affirmation of the Holy Spirit. In deliberate reaffirmation of Nicene theology it operated on the basis laid down by Athanasius, particularly as filled out and strengthened by the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This had seen further clarification through Epiphanius regarding the interrelation between the Unity and the Trinity of God, and was to see full-orbed development through Cyril of Alexandria. For Athanasius the concept of Triunity was already embedded in his understanding of the *homoousion* which, with its rejection of any notion either of undifferentiated oneness or of partitive relations between the three divine Persons, carried with it the conception of eternal distinctions and internal relations in the Godhead as wholly and mutually indwelling one another in the one identical perfect Being of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It was through the Trinity, Athanasius held, that we believe in the Unity of God, and yet it is only in recognition of the indivisible oneness and identity of Being in the Son and the Spirit with the Father that we rightly apprehend the Holy Trinity.

It is in this very light that we are to understand how Athanasius regarded the divine *Monarchia*. He certainly thought of the Father as the *Arche* (Ἀρχή—and Αἴτιος, but not Αἰτία or Cause) of the Son in that he has eternally begotten the

Son. He thus declared ‘We know only one *Arche*’, but he immediately associated the Son with that *Arche*, for, he added, ‘we profess to have no other Form of Godhead (τρόπον Θεότητος) than that of the only God.’ While the Son is associated with the *Arche* of the Father in this way, he cannot be thought of as an *Arche* 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 an *Arche* apart from the Son, for it is precisely as Father that he is Father of the Son. ‘The Father and the Son are two, but the Unity (Μονάς) of Godhead is one and indivisible. And thus we preserve the one Ἀρχή of the Godhead, not two Ἀρχαί, so that there is strictly a Monarchy (Μοναρχία).’ It is in this light also that we must understand the Synodal Letter of Athanasius to the people of Antioch in which he joined with others in acknowledging ‘a Holy Trinity, but one Godhead, and one *Arche*, and that the Son is of one Being with the Father, while the Holy Spirit is proper to and inseparable from the Being of the Father and the Son.’

Thus while accepting along with the Cappadocians the formulation of *One Being, Three Persons*, Athanasius had such a strong view of the complete identity, equality and unity of the three divine Persons within the Godhead, that he declined to advance a view of the Monarchy in which the oneness of God was defined by reference to the Father alone or to the Person of the Father. The *Mone Arche* (μονὴ Ἀρχή) or Μοναρχία is identical with the Trinity, the *Monas* with the *Trias* (the Μονάς with the Τριάς), and it is precisely in the *Trias* that we know God to be *Monas*. Athanasius actually preferred to speak of God as *Monas* rather than as *Arche*, since his understanding of the *Monas* was essentially as the *Trias*: God is eternally and unchangeably Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three Persons who, while always Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in their coindwelling relations *are* the Triune God. The *Monarchia* or the *Monas* is essentially and intrinsically trinitarian in the inner relations of God’s eternal *Ousia*. An early statement attributed to Athanasius appears to represent his concept of the Triunity of God rather faithfully:

The Trinity praised and worshipped and adored, is one and indivisible, and without degrees (ἀσχημάτιστος). He is united without confusion, just as the *Monas* is distinguished in thought without division. For the threefold doxology, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord’ offered by those venerable living beings, denotes the three perfect Persons (τρεις ὑποστάσεις τελείας), just as in the word ‘Lord’ they indicate his one Being (μίαν οὐσίαν).

When we turn to Epiphanius we find him taking essentially the same line, for he presented his doctrine of the Son and the Spirit within an understanding of the whole undivided Trinity, not just the Father, as the *Monarchia*. He did not speak



of the three divine Persons as ‘modes of existence’, like Basil, Gregory Nyssen and Amphilochius, but as ‘enhypostatic’ in God, that is, having real, objective personal subsistence in God and as coinhering homoously and hypostatically in him. His conception of the *homoousion* as applying to the Trinity as a whole deepened the notion of the coinherence of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in their subsistent enhypostatic relations. Moreover, he did not share the Cappadocian way of trying to ensure the unity of God by tracing it back to the one uncaused or underived Person of the Father. He held the whole Trinity, and not just the Father, to be the Principle or Ἀρχή of the oneness of the Godhead. Hence he laid immense emphasis upon the full equality, perfection, eternity, power and glory of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit alike, and thus upon the perfection of God’s Triunity. Each of the divine Persons is fully, equally and perfectly Lord and God, while all three have and are one and the same Godhead. As Augustine wrote: ‘There is so great an equality in the Trinity, that not only the Father is not greater than the Son, as regards divinity, but neither are the Father and the Son together greater than the Holy Spirit; nor is each individual Person, which ever it be of the three, less than the Trinity itself.’ No one of the divine Persons is prior to or greater than another.<sup>71</sup> ‘In proclaiming the divine *Monarchia* we do not err, but confess the Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, one Godhead of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (τὴν Τριάδα, Μονάδα ἐν Τριάδι, καὶ Τριάδα ἐν Μονάδι, μίαν Θεότητα Πατρός, καὶ Υἱοῦ, καὶ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος).’ ‘There are not three Gods, but there is only one true God, and since the Begotten is One from One, and One also is the Holy Spirit who is One from One, a Trinity in Unity, and one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.’ ‘There is one Trinity in Unity, and one Godhead in Trinity.’<sup>74</sup> For Epiphanius, God *is* the Trinity, and the Trinity *is* God. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are essentially and intrinsically and coinherently One. While each one of the three divine Persons ever remains enhypostatically and perfectly what he is in himself (καθ’ ἑαυτό), they all bear upon one another mutually and coinherently in the one identical Being of the Godhead, and are the Godhead. ‘The relation of the Father is with the Son and the relation of the Son is with the Father, and both proceed in the Holy Spirit, for the Trinity ever consists in one Unity of Godhead: three Perfections, one Godhead.’

It has been important to say something in detail of the teaching of Athanasius and Epiphanius, for in pressing further the biblical stress of Athanasius on the ‘I am’ of the one ever-living ever-acting Being of God understood in his internal relations, Epiphanius did more than any other to clear away problems that had arisen in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and to prepare the ground for the

ecumenical consensus that was registered in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. It is important to throw the spotlight on this development today for it is actually somewhat different from what is found in the usual text-book tradition: it was upon the Athanasian-Epiphonian basis that classical Christian theology developed into its flowering in the great work of Cyril of Alexandria. In our day it has been upon the Athanasian-Epiphonian-Cyrline basis, together with the trinitarian teaching of Gregory Nazianzen who insisted that the *Monarchia* may not be limited to one Person, that doctrinal agreement on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity has been reached between Orthodox and Reformed Churches.<sup>79</sup> It is of particular significance for our discussion here that the conception of *perichoresis* played a crucial role in clarifying and deepening the conception of the *Monarchia* for the understanding of the interlocking of Unity and Trinity, Trinity and Unity, in the doctrine of God. It may be helpful to cite here a paragraph from a document of the Orthodox/Reformed Commission commenting on the *Monarchia* in this connection.

Of far-reaching importance is the stress laid upon the Monarchy of the Godhead in which all three divine Persons share, for the whole indivisible Being of God belongs to each of them as it belongs to all of them together. This is reinforced by the unique conception of coinherent or perichoretic relations between the different Persons in which they completely contain and interpenetrate one another while remaining what they distinctively are in their otherness as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is intrinsically Triune, Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity. There are no degrees of Deity in the Holy Trinity, as is implied in a distinction between the underived Deity of the Father and the derived Deity of the Son and the Spirit. Any notion of subordination is completely ruled out. The perfect simplicity and indivisibility of God in his Triune Being mean that the *Arche* (ἀρχή) or *Monarchia* (μοναρχία) cannot be limited to one Person, as Gregory the Theologian pointed out. While there are inviolable distinctions within the Holy Trinity, this does not detract from the truth that the whole Being of God belongs to all of them as it belongs to each of them, and thus does not detract from the truth that the Monarchy is One and indivisible, the Trinity in Unity and the Unity in Trinity.

#### 4) PERICHORESIS AND THE PROCESSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The doctrine of the one Monarchy together with the doctrine of the perichoretic

interpenetration of the three divine Persons in one another within the one indivisible Being or Communion of the Holy Trinity, puts our understanding of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father on a deeper and proper basis, as procession from the one Being of God the Father which is common to the Son and the Spirit. Moreover, it is to be borne in mind that ‘the Father’, when considered absolutely or simply, refers to the Godhead, that is to the one Being (οὐσία) of God, but when considered relatively refers to the Father of the Son, i.e. to the Person (ὑπόστασις) of the Father. We recall that the conflation of these two senses by the Cappadocians gave rise to serious difficulties, not least in connection with their conception of the Unity of God as deriving ‘from the Person of the Father (ἐκ τῆς ὑποστάσεως τοῦ Πατρὸς)’, thereby replacing the Nicene formula ‘from the Being of the Father (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Πατρὸς).’ In the Cappadocian framework this meant that procession is regarded as taking place between different modes of existence or relations of origin, which is hardly satisfactory for it falls short of affirming the *homoousion* of the Spirit. However, in holding that the Spirit proceeds from the Person of the Father, thus understood, rather than from the Being of the Father, the Cappadocians were nevertheless intent on rejecting any suggestion that the Spirit, who is not begotten of the Father like the Son, is to be regarded as created by God as he was held to be by Arian and Macedonian heretics. While their intention was certainly right in rejecting Arian error, the problematic role they gave to the Person of the Father *vis-à-vis* the Son and the Spirit provoked the reaction associated with the *ex Patre filioque* clause which the Western Church inserted unecumenically into the Creed, thereby creating a serious impasse in the relations between the East and the West.

In view of the idea that the Spirit proceeds from the Father, although he is sent by the Son, Western churchmen felt obliged to hold that the Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as the Father, otherwise, they held, the Son would be regarded as subordinate to the Father, as an adopted creature of God, and not really as God of God—thus they too were rejecting Arianism. Following St Augustine, however, they held this in a modified form according to which the Spirit is understood to proceed from the Father principally (*principaliter*). Eastern churchmen, on the other hand, felt that any idea of a procession of the Spirit from the Son as well as the Father, appeared to posit two ultimate Principles or Ἀρχαί in the Godhead—hence they opted for a formula expressing the procession of the Spirit *from the Father only* (ἐκ μονοῦ τοῦ Πατρὸς). They defended this with reference to the teaching of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, which implies a distinction between *procession* and *mission*, that is, as they interpreted it, between the *eternal* procession of the Spirit from the Father, and the *historical* mission of the Spirit from the Son. The pattern exhibited in the latter reflects the former in virtue of the fact that what

the Father does he does *through* the Son, as Basil pointed out. Does this mean that the sending of the Spirit by the Son has to do only with revelation and faith, and is not grounded immanently in the eternal Being of God? If so, would that not call in question the full homoousial relation of the Holy Spirit to God the Father?

Frequently associated with the defence of this distinction between the eternal procession and the historical sending of the Spirit is the Basilian and Palamite distinction between the divine Being and the divine energies. This tends to have the effect of restricting knowledge and speech of God apophatically (ἀποφατικῶς) to his divine energies or operations (ἐνεργεῖαι, or δυνάμεις) and ruling out any real access to knowing God in himself or in the intrinsic relations of his eternal Being. But it also implies that to know God in the Spirit (ἐν Πνεύματι) is not to know God in his divine Being—to know God is only to know the things that relate to his Nature (τὰ περὶ τὴν φύσιν) as manifested through a penumbra of his uncreated energies or rays. When applied to the procession and mission of the Spirit this appears to be influenced by a dualism inherited from Origenistic tradition,<sup>88</sup> which is made to operate in such a way as to drive a wedge between the inner Life of God and his saving activity in history or between the ontological Trinity and the economic Trinity. This would not be to take the key Nicene concept of identity of being or *homoousion* seriously but to operate instead with some notion of likeness in being or *homoiousion*, which is precisely the sort of subtle error that Athanasius attacked in his *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*. Quite clearly a dualistic approach of this kind detracts from a realist doctrine of the Holy Spirit and from a realist conception of the homoousial and perichoretic interpenetration of the three divine Persons in one another in accordance with which each Person is whole God and all three are together the one Triune God.

Any kind of disparity or disjunction between the Holy Spirit and God the Father was definitely ruled out by the Constantinopolitan form of the Creed in its stating that the Spirit is the Lord and the Giver of Life, and is to be worshipped and glorified together with the Father and the Son, for in the Holy Spirit God communicates *himself* to us, not just something of himself in his uncreated energies—the divine Giver and the divine Gift are one and the same. And of course the Council of Constantinople affirmed, as we have had occasion to mention, the truth that the Spirit is of one and the same being as the Father and proceeds from the Being of the Father.

If we probe behind this state of affairs to the implications of the Nicene *homoousion* and of the Athanasian doctrine of coinherence, we find a rather different situation governed by the conception of the *Monarchia* consisting of three perfectly coequal and coeternal enhypostatic Persons in indivisible Communion with one another in the Holy Trinity. What is crucial here, as Athanasius taught, is that the Spirit and the Son coinhere in one another, and that the Spirit is ever in the hands of the Father who sends and the Son who gives him as his very own, and from whom the Spirit on his part receives. The Spirit is from the Father but from the Father in the Son. Since the Holy Spirit like the Son is of the Being of God, and belongs to the Son, since he is in the Being of the Father and in the Being of the Son, he could not but proceed from or out of the Being of God inseparably from and through the Son. Moreover, for Athanasius the proceeding of the Spirit from the Father is inextricably bound up with the generation of the Son from the Father which exceeds and transcends the thoughts of men. Since it would not be reverent to ask *how* the Spirit proceeds from God, Athanasius did not and would not entertain the question, for that would have implied an ungodly attempt to intrude into the holy mystery of God's Being. Thus the problem of the so-called 'double procession' of the Spirit did not come into the picture. However, he was bound to understand the Spirit's being 'of God' and 'from God', and even 'from and through' the Son, in the light of the Nicene *homoousion* and the explanation given at the Council that 'from the Father' meant 'from the *Being* of the Father'. Hence Athanasius' application of the *homoousion* to the Holy Spirit had the effect, not only of asserting that the Spirit is also of one Being with the Father, but of implying that the procession of the Spirit is from the *Being* of the Father, and not from the *Person* (ὑπόστασις) of the Father, in distinction from his *Being*. For Athanasius the Son and the Spirit are both *of the Being* of the Father so that the idea that the Spirit derives from the *Being* of the Son just did not arise and could not have arisen for Athanasius.

In line with this teaching Epiphanius thought of the Holy Spirit as having personal subsistence, not only 'out of the Father through the Son', but 'out of the same Being', 'out of the same Godhead' as the Father and the Son, for the Holy Spirit is ontologically (οὐσιωδῶς) inseparable from the Father and the Son. As the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son he is 'in the midst of the Father and the Son' and is 'the bond of the Trinity', but he is that Bond as he who is fully

homoousial and perfectly coequal with the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is ever with the Father and the Son, coinhering with them in the one eternal Being of God, but coinhering enhypostatically (ἐνυποστατικῶς) with them in such a way that in the one Being of God the Holy Spirit is always Holy Spirit, as the Father is always Father and the Son is always Son, each being 'true and perfect God', as Epiphanius loved to express it. That is to say, the Holy Spirit belongs to the inner Being of the one God, and to the constitutive internal relations of the Godhead as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is central to the Triunity of God, for God the Father is not the Father nor God the Son the Son, without God the Holy Spirit. Thus understood in this way it may be said that the Holy Spirit proceeds, in Nicene language, as Light from Light from both the Father and the Son. It is in virtue of this developed doctrine of the Triunity of God, which holds together the conceptions of the identity of the divine Being and the intrinsic Unity of the three divine Persons, that the procession of the Holy Spirit is surely to be considered.

It was then in this direction that Epiphanius interpreted and filled out the succinct Athanasian statement that 'the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and receives from the Son', yet in such a way that the enhypostatic realities and distinct properties of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit always remain the same in the perfect equality and homoousiality of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Spirit is 'of one and the same being as the Father and the Son'.<sup>96</sup> And it was in these terms that he put forward the credal statement, including the crucial clauses about the Holy Spirit, which was taken up by the Council of Constantinople in 381. 'We believe in one Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who spoke through the prophets.'

Unfortunately the original Tome promulgating the Creed was lost, but we do know from Theodoret that the Council spoke of the Holy Spirit as 'of one and the same being (μιάς καὶ τῆς αὐτῆς οὐσίας) as the Father and the Son.' While the original Creed of Nicaea spoke of the incarnate Son as of one and the same being with the Father, the clause 'God from God' applied to him was sometimes held to imply a difference between the underived Deity of the Father and the derived Deity of the Son, as in the thought of two of the Cappadocians, but any implication of subordination (ὑποταγή) in the Trinity was completely ruled out by the Fathers of the Constantinopolitan Council. In dropping the words 'God from God' (which might be taken to suggest a difference between underived and derived Deity), the Council laid all the emphasis upon '*true* God from *true* God', thereby rejecting any difference in Deity, Glory, Power and Being between the Father and the Son. The Deity of the Son is as true and unqualified as the Deity of the Father. While the Son is

begotten of the Father, he is, with the Spirit, equal in every respect to the Father, apart from his being Father. The same completely mutual relation obtains between the Holy Spirit and the Father, and between the Holy Spirit and the Son. As there is only one Being of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, so the hypostatic Reality of each of them is as eternal and perfect as that of the others. The three divine Persons of course do not share with one another their distinguishing properties as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but they do share completely and equally in the one homogeneous (ὁμογενής/ὁμοφυής) Nature and Being of God. The whole Godhead (ὁλόκληρος Θεότης) belongs to each divine Person as it belongs to all of them, and it belongs to all of them as it belongs to each of them.

It is when we apply the concept of *perichoresis* rigorously to this doctrine of the Holy Trinity together with the concept of the triune *Monarchia* that it becomes possible for us to think through and restate the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father in a way that cuts behind and sets aside the problems that divided the Church over the *filioque*. If we take seriously the understanding of the Trinity in Unity and the Unity in Trinity in which each Person is perfectly and wholly God, and in which all three Persons perichoretically penetrate and contain one another, then we cannot but think of the procession of Holy Spirit from the Father through the Son, for the Son belongs to the Being of the Father, and the Spirit belongs to and is inseparable from the Being of the Father and of the Son. In proceeding from the Being of the Father, however, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the One Being which belongs to the Son and to the Spirit as well as to the Father, and which belongs to all of them together as well as to each one of them, for each one considered in himself is true God without any qualification. The Spirit proceeds perichoretically from the Father, that is, from out of the mutual relations within the one Being of the Holy Trinity in which the Father contains the Son and is himself contained by the Spirit. Thus the procession of the Spirit cannot be thought of in any partitive way, but only in a holistic way as ‘whole from whole’ (ὅλος ὅλου), that is, as proceeding from the wholly coinherent relations of the three divine Persons within the indivisible Being of the one God who is Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity. Strictly speaking, then, it must be said that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the one Monarchy of the Triune God. Interpreted in that sense it would appear that both the expressions ‘from the Father and the Son’, and ‘from the Father through the Son’, are in order—but *not* if they are understood in accordance with the view that the Monarchy is limited to the Father which both the Western and the Eastern Church have held in their different ways; *not* if they are understood in accordance with the view that there is a distinction between the underived Deity of the Father and the derived Deity of the Son and the Spirit; *and not* if they are understood in accordance with the view that the Holy Spirit does not belong equally and completely homoously with the Father and the Son in their two-way relation with one another in the divine Trinity.

It should now be evident that the effect of this understanding of the Holy Spirit, who is of one and the same being as the Father and who proceeds homoously or consubstantially from the one indivisible Being of God, is to cut behind the division

between the East and the West over the *filioque*. It does not allow of any procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son alone, as if the Spirit himself did not belong to the Father-Son relation in the Holy Trinity equally with the Father and the Son. Nor does it allow of any procession of the Spirit from two ultimate Principles or Origins, or Ἀρχαί, although it does allow for a procession of the Spirit from the Father *through* the Son. But 'through the Son', perichoretically understood, cannot but mean through the Son who has one Being with the Father, and so from out of the Communion of the Son with the Father and the Communion of the Father with the Son, which the Holy Spirit himself *is* in his coequal and homoousial relation with the Father and the Son as himself God of God, God the Holy Spirit. In other words, here we have to do not just with a two-way relationship between the Father and the Son in which the Spirit is some kind of connecting link, but with an active three-way or perichoretic relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

This approach is reinforced by consideration of the truth that since *God is Spirit*, 'Spirit' cannot be restricted to the Person of the Holy Spirit, but must apply to the whole Being of God to whom the Father and the Son with the Spirit belong. This implies that any proper understanding of the procession of the Spirit must be of procession from the whole spiritual Being of God the Father which the Holy Spirit has entirely in common with the Father and the Son. Thus in a real sense, the Spirit is to be thought of as proceeding from the Being of God the Father which as Spirit he himself is. As Epiphanius expressed it: 'The Holy Spirit ever is from the same Being of the Father and the Son, for God is Spirit.' 'He is the Spirit of the Son, but in the midst of the Father and the Son, from (ἐκ) the Father and the Son, the third in Name.' 'The Holy Spirit is from both (παρ' ἀμφοτέρων), Spirit from Spirit, for God is Spirit.' The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Son by Nature as well as the Spirit of the Father by Nature, and it is as such that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and is given by the Son, as from the one Being which they both equally share, but share also with the Holy Spirit himself, for the Father is not Father and the Son is not Son apart from the Holy Spirit.

Here we may recall again the remarkable passage from Athanasius in which he puts into the mouth of Christ words interpreting the relation of the Spirit to the



Son. 'I, being the Father's Word, I give to myself become man, the Spirit, and in him I sanctify myself become man, so that henceforth in me who am the Truth ('For Your Word is Truth') all may be sanctified.' The point for us to note here is that while the Holy Spirit is given to us through the incarnate Son, he gives it to us from out of himself as eternally his own, that is, out of the fullness of his divine Being. Thus Epiphanius could say of the Holy Spirit that though he is not begotten he is 'out of the same Being as the Father and the Son.'<sup>105</sup> As Cyril of Alexandria expressed it: 'The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (ἐκ Πατρὸς καὶ Υἱοῦ), for he belongs to the divine Being and inheres in it and issues from it substantially (οὐσιωδῶς).' Properly understood, then, when it is said that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, or from the Father through the Son, what is meant is that the Spirit proceeds from the Community of Being of the Father and the Son, or from the Communion (Κοινωνία) between the Father and the Son which the Holy Spirit himself is, and the three Divine Persons are in their eternal perichoretic relations with one another. It is, then, the conception of *perichoresis*, the doctrine of coinherence in the one identical Being of God, according to which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit mutually indwell one another and contain one another, while remaining what they are in their otherness from one another, that must be allowed to govern our understanding of the procession of the Spirit from the Father through the Son. But if we think in this way of the Spirit as proceeding from the Father and the Son we must do so in the conviction that the Father and the Son are *with the Spirit* the one identical Being of the Godhead, the Triune Monarchy.

The question must now be asked whether the difficulties that have arisen over the procession of the Holy Spirit do not have to do, in part at least, with the fact that we do not know at all what 'proceeding (ἐκπόρευσις) from the Father' really means, any more than we know what 'begotten of the Father' really means. As we noted in an earlier chapter we do not really know what 'father' and 'son' mean even when they are applied to God by divine revelation. As Gregory Nazianzen said, they stand for relations, real or substantive relations, in God which transcend our finite comprehension. What we are concerned with is the substantive and personal relation between the Father and the Son, the Son and the Father, to which the human words 'father' and 'son' are used by divine revelation in such a way as to point beyond themselves. Problems arise immediately we try to understand divine Fatherhood and Sonship, and not least the concept of 'the begotten Son', in terms of what human fatherhood, sonship, and begetting mean. This problem is particularly acute when we think of the Spirit as going forth (ἐκπορευόμενον) from the Father in a way that is different from the begetting of the Son by the

Father, and have to find a way of expressing that difference. What does *procession*, or its equivalent *spiration* mean?

The three basic relations with which we have to do in the doctrine of the Trinity were variously referred to by the Church Fathers as ‘fatherhood’ or ‘unbegottenness’, ‘sonship’ or ‘begottenness’, and ‘procession’ or ‘spiration’—the principle they followed is that each of these relations must be understood in accordance with the revealed nature and the hypostatic properties or particular characteristics of the Person or Persons concerned, thus *υικῶς* in respect of the Son, and *πνευματικῶς* in respect of the Spirit. What is theologically significant about the expressions ‘procession’ or ‘spiration’, is that they speak of a distinctive relation of the Holy Spirit, in accordance with the nature of his particular Person, to the Father in comparison with and in difference from the distinctive relation of the Son to the Father. But these expressions, Fatherhood, Sonship and Procession, are used not because they have been applied by us to the Godhead but because, as Pseudo-Cyril pointed out, ‘they are communicated to us by the Godhead’. That is to say, as divinely given they are irreplaceable ultimate terms which we cannot but use and which are always to be used only with godliness, reverence, and fidelity. They denote ineffable relations and refer to ineffable realities, of which we know only in part through the incarnation of the Father’s only begotten Son in Jesus, through the teaching of Jesus about his Father and the gift of the Holy Spirit, through his breathing the Spirit upon the disciples after his resurrection and his pouring out of the Spirit upon the Church after his ascension. But what do ‘breathing’ and ‘pouring’ or ‘proceeding’ mean beyond indicating divine actions which in their nature are quite incomprehensible to us? As Karl Barth pointed out, we can no more offer an account of the ‘how’ of these divine relations and actions that we can we define the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and delimit them from one another.

It is instructive to note the adverbial qualifications of these relations that were used, e.g. by Gregory Nazianzen and Epiphanius: without beginning (*ἀνάρχως*), without time (*ἀχρόνως*), without cause (*ἀνατιῶς*), without explanation (*ἀνεκδιηγῆτως*), etc. They signify to us that when we speak of the begetting of the Son or the proceeding of the Spirit we have to suspend our thought before the altogether inexpressible, incomprehensible Nature of God and the onto-relations of the Communion of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, which the Holy Spirit eternally is. To cite Athanasius once again, ‘Thus far human knowledge goes. Here the cherubim spread the covering of their wings.’ If ‘Father’, ‘Son’ and ‘Holy Spirit’ stand for inexpressible although real relations, ‘begetting’ and ‘proceeding’ which are relations between relations are no less ineffable, and should surely be left undefined—we cannot but use them if we are not to be altogether

silent, but let us use them only with apophatic reserve and reverence. With Basil again, ‘We confess to knowing what is knowable of God, and yet what we know reaches beyond our apprehension.’

#### 5) PERICHORESIS AND THE COACTIVITY OF THE HOLY TRINITY

It is very easy when using technical terms of thought and speech like *homoousion*, ‘hypostatic union’, *perichoresis*, and even ‘Unity’ and ‘Trinity’, to think concepts rather than the realities denoted by them, and to lapse into some static mode of thought. This applies to all our theological terms which through their use may acquire an independent authority in themselves in virtue of which they tend to exercise a determinative and formative function over the truth, as if that only is true which can be reduced to conceptual expression. Rather do we have to use these technical theological terms as under the formative impact of divine revelation they take shape as aids to our weakness in saying something about realities which cannot be mastered in human forms of thought and speech, and as a means of pointing to those realities which may shine through them but which are to be known apart from them and independent of them, and by which the forms of thought and speech we use are themselves relativised. Theological concepts are used aright when we do not think the concepts themselves, thereby identifying them with the truth, but think through them of the realities or truths which they are meant to intend beyond themselves. This applies not least to the concept of *perichoresis* in which we are concerned with real objective onto-relations in the eternal movement of Love in the Communion of the Holy Trinity as they have been disclosed to us in the incarnate economy of God’s revealing and saving acts in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

We recall that the biblical and patristic concept of the Being or οὐσία of God, governed by the self-revelation of God as *I am* in his incarnate Son, is concretely personal and dynamic in its significance. Likewise the compound concept of the *homoousion*, was used in Nicene theology to signify the oneness in Being and Act between the incarnate Son and the Father, and later also the oneness in Being and Act between the Holy Spirit and the Father. God’s triune Being is to be understood as his Being-in-Act, and his Act as his Act-in-Being (to borrow Karl Barth’s expressions), which was recognised and expressed by Athanasius in his concept of God’s activity as inherent in his Being, ἐνούσιος ἐνέργεια. He had already discerned that the *homoousion* implies a mutual indwelling or a mutual coinherence of the three divine Persons not only in their Being but in their Activity. It is that triune *coactivity* of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that we are now to consider with the help of the concept of *perichoresis* which, as we have seen, is to be

understood as essentially active in its basic significance without any split in its wholeness between ontological and dynamic aspects.

The original understanding of coinherence which was developed and refined through the concept of *perichoresis* arose as an interpretation of the mutual indwelling of the Son and the Father of which we learn in the discourses of Jesus relayed to us in the Fourth Gospel, especially in its reports of his 'I am' sayings and of his teaching about his relations with the Father, and about the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father in the Name of the Son and acts in his place as 'another Paraclete'. This account of the reciprocal indwelling or inexisting between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, however, is presented to us in evangelical contexts which have to do with the interrelation between the miraculous *works* of Jesus and the *works* of God the Father. Thus when Jesus was challenged by the Jewish authorities about his act in healing on the Sabbath day a man who had been lying helpless at the Pool of Bethesda for thirty-eight years, which they deemed had broken the Sabbath, Jesus replied with the terse sentence: 'My Father works up to now, and I am at work.' He was thereby claiming that in his miracle of healing he was in fact continuing the creative activity of God, by implication, beyond the sixth day when the original creation ended,<sup>115</sup> and was engaged in bringing it to its completion.

Throughout this fifth Chapter of St John's Gospel we have recorded words of Jesus concerning a oneness in act as well as in being between himself and the Father, even in respect of the ultimate acts of God in resurrection and judgment, for the Father has given the Son both to have life in himself and to do all that he the Father does. That is to say, here we are told that the message of the Gospel, the truth of Jesus, is grounded in and arises out of complete coinherence *in being and act* between the Father and the Son. This is followed, of course, in the Fourth Gospel by the statements we have already discussed in which Jesus claims that he and the Father are one, for the Father is in him and he is in the Father, and that it is in virtue of this living relation of being, doing and loving between the Father and himself that he undertakes his work of redemption in laying down his life for us and taking it up again, and in sending the Holy Spirit to act in his place in the actualising of his saving presence and power in the life and faith of his followers. Throughout the Gospel we learn that the self-revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit takes place through the Word and Work of Christ as they are integrated in his Life and Being, who as the incarnate *I am* of the Lord constitutes the one exclusive Way to the Father, for he who sees Jesus sees the Father. 'Do you not believe', Jesus asked Philip, 'that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you, I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does the works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves.'

The threefold coactivity of God manifested in the missions of the Son and the Spirit from the Father was given summary expression in the words of St Paul: 'For

of him, and through him, and to him are all things (ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα). And again: 'There is one God and Father of all who is above all, and through all, and in all.'<sup>119</sup> This was paraphrased in the Council of Constantinople, 'For one is the God and Father, from whom are all things, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through who are all things, and one Holy Spirit in whom are all things.' There is a significant coordination and unity of Being (οὐσία) and Activity (ἐνέργεια) in the Holy Trinity, *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *in* the Holy Spirit, although the distinctive mode of operation by each of the three divine Persons is maintained, indicated by the prepositions 'from (ἐκ)', 'through (διά)', and 'in (ἐν)'. All three divine Persons have one Activity which is ever the same for 'the Father does all things through the Word and in the Spirit'.

Particular attention must be given to the middle term in the one coordinate activity of God, 'through', for it is through the *incarnate* Son of God, the one Mediator between God and Man, that the activity of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is disclosed to us in the life and works of Jesus as objective events and truths of God's saving activity in history. There is no separate activity of the Holy Spirit in revelation or salvation in addition to or independent of the activity of Christ, for what he does is to empower and actualise the words and works of Christ in our midst as the words and works of the Father. Everything in the message of the Gospel, and everything in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, hinges upon the concrete mediatorial activity of Christ in space and time, for it is through the incarnate *parousia* of the Son of God in Jesus that the activity of God in its nature and reality is revealed to us and its saving power is actualised among us in the Spirit whose coming to us is made possible on the ground of Christ's atoning and reconciling work. Calvary and Pentecost, the blood of Christ and the Spirit of Christ, may not be separated from one another.

The proper evangelical understanding of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father in the Name of the Son and his sending by the Son in union with the Father is very important (apart from the problem which we have discussed above), for two reasons. On the one hand, it is on the inseparable relation of the Spirit in his Being and Activity to the incarnate Being and Activity of Jesus Christ that our participation in the economic Activity of God depends; but on the other hand, it is on the oneness of the historical mission of the Spirit from the incarnate Son with the eternal outgoing of the Spirit from the Father that the truth of the Gospel is

ultimately grounded. If the ontological bond between the historical Jesus Christ and God the Father is cut then the substance falls out of the Gospel, but if the ontological bond between the Holy Spirit and the incarnate Son of the Father is cut, so that there is a discrepancy between the economic Trinity and the ontological Trinity, or between the saving activity of the love of God in history and the transcendent activity of God in eternity, then we human beings are left without hope and can have no part or lot in *God's* saving activity in Jesus Christ. This is why the Church found it of the utmost importance and necessity in the proclamation of the Gospel under constraint of its divine truth to assert the *homoousion* both of Christ and of the Spirit, for, as Athanasius argued so powerfully, the *homoousion* of the Son and the *homoousion* of the Spirit belong inseparably together—neither can be maintained apart from the other. It is in this all-important homoousial bond between them that the procession of the Spirit *through* the Son is to be appreciated, for it is a procession through him in God and from the Father in the Son—the Spirit is sent by the Son in the Father. It is worth noting in this connection Athanasius' comment on the trinitarian benediction: 'The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.'

For the grace and gift that is given is given in the Trinity, from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. As the grace given is from the Father through the Son, so we can have no communion in the gift except in the Holy Spirit. For it is when we partake of him that we have the love of the Father and the grace of the Son and the communion of the Spirit himself.

The truth of this trinitarian understanding of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in their personal onto-relations with one another and in the unity of their Being and Activity is considerably deepened and reinforced with the help of the concept of *perichoresis* in which we are not concerned simply with a one-way set of relations but with a dynamic three-way reciprocity. This enables us to think of the Triunity of God both in terms of the mutual containing of the particular divine Persons in one another, and in terms of the reciprocal interpenetration of their distinctive activities, and think of them at one and the same time, or in perichoretic circularity and wholeness. Just as we think of the particular properties of the three divine Persons not as holding them apart from one another but rather as contributing to their inseparable Communion with one another, without in any way diminishing their respective characteristics; so we think of the different activities of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, not as dividing them from one another but as constituting their dynamic oneness with one another, without in any way diminishing their differences. Perichoretic relations characterise both the hypostatic subsistences and the hypostatic activities of the three divine Persons, so that they are not only Triune in Being but are Triune in Activity. Since God's Being and Activity completely interpenetrate each other, we must think of his Being and his

Activity not separately but as one Being-in-Activity and one Activity-in-Being. In other words, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit always act together in every divine operation whether in creation or redemption, yet in such a way that the distinctive activities of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, are always maintained, in accordance with the propriety and otherness of their Persons as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This may be called the 'perichoretic coactivity of the Holy Trinity'.

In every creative and redemptive act the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit operate together in fellowship with one another but nevertheless in ways peculiar to each of them. It is not possible for us to spell that out in terms of any demarcations between their distinctive operations, if only because within the coactivity of the three divine Persons those operations perichoretically contain one another and pass over into one another while remaining what they distinctively are in themselves. It is only from within the incarnate economy of God's saving self-communication to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit that we can say anything at all about this. The primary distinction was made there, of course, for it was the Son or Word of God who became incarnate, was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and rose again from the grave, and *not* the Father or the Holy Spirit, although the whole life and activity of Jesus from his birth to his death and resurrection did not take place apart from the presence and coactivity of the Father and the Spirit. And it is in the light of what the Lord Jesus himself revealed about his relation to the Father and the Spirit, and what he did for us in his miraculous works and saving acts, thereby manifesting on earth the works of the Father, that we are able to discern something of the way in which the Father and the Spirit participated in the economy of redemption. This enables us to believe that what God is toward us in Jesus Christ and in his manifestation in the history of salvation as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, he really is antecedently and eternally in his triune Self.

It is, then, in the activity of the economic Trinity alone that we may learn something of the activity of the ontological Trinity, for we believe that the pattern of coactivity between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the economic Trinity is through the Communion of the Spirit a real reflection of the pattern of the coactivity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the ontological Trinity. It is indeed more than a reflection of it, for it is grounded in it, is altogether inseparable from it, and actually flows from it. While not everything that took place in the historical economy can be read back into eternity, the intrinsic oneness between the coactivity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the economic Trinity

and their coactivity in the ontological Trinity are soteriologically and epistemologically absolutely essential.

We cannot say precisely what the Father does and what the Spirit does in distinction from what Christ has done and continues to do for us. Nevertheless we cannot but say that both the Father and the Spirit participated in ways appropriate to their distinctive natures and properties in the birth of Jesus, in his servant ministry as Son of Man, in his atoning sacrifice on the Cross for sin, in his triumphant resurrection, in his ascension to the Father, in his heavenly intercession for us, and his rule over all things at God's right hand. And so we cannot but hold that the Father and the Spirit continue to participate in the saving work of God's Love, and will participate with Christ in the consummation of all things at the final judgment and resurrection. We can also say in the light of the incarnation that as the Word made flesh, the Word by whom all things that are made were made, Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of God's eternal purpose for his creation, that it is in Jesus Christ himself that all things in heaven and earth are reconciled, and that the whole created universe consists in him as its Head. Thus in virtue of the incarnation and the renewing and redeeming activity of Christ we can say something of his participation as the Word and Wisdom of God in the creation of all things, and in the covenant of grace established by God as the inner basis and framework of the created order which we read back from its fulfilment in Christ into the very beginning. As the First and the Last, the Alpha and Omega, the Lord Jesus Christ gathers up all things from the beginning in himself as the Head of the created universe in the consummation of God's eternal purpose of Love—all this also belongs to our understanding of the oneness of the economic Trinity with the ontological Trinity.

There are two further considerations that need to be taken into account.

*First*, the fact that in God's eternal purpose it was God the Son, *not* God the Father and *not* God the Holy Spirit, who became incarnate for us and our salvation once for all, sets aside as evangelically and theologically unentertainable any other alternative such as the possibility that the Father or the Holy Spirit could have or might have become incarnate. Certainly the incarnation and the atoning death of Christ are inconceivable apart from the Trinity for it was precisely in his differentiation as Son from the Father and from the Holy Spirit that Christ was born of the Virgin Mary and died on the Cross as the Saviour of the world. However, it was and is the *actuality* of God's exclusive revelation and communication of himself once for all in the incarnation of his only begotten Son that decides the hypothetical question whether the incarnation of another divine Person was a possibility. That also definitely rules out any suggestion that there may still be a *Deus absconditus* behind the back of Jesus Christ or some hidden God for which Jesus Christ does not stand surety. We cannot argue hypothetically (let alone reverently) from what God *has done* to what we think he might otherwise have done, for that would assume that the absolute singularity of Christ and his mission of love from the Father to be the Saviour of the world has no real or revelatory bearing upon the inner Life and Nature of God, so that in fact God remains ultimately unknown to us. It would deny the supreme truth that God himself is the content of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, for it would assume that divine Nature and human natures are not inseparably united in the one Person of Christ.



It would presuppose that there is only a transient functional and not an ontological relation between the economic self-revelation of God consummated in him and what God is antecedently and eternally in himself. To say the least, that would disregard the uniqueness of the one Word of God, and the comprehensiveness and absolute finality of God's economic self-revelation in the incarnation of his only begotten Son! And that, as Karl Rahner pointed out, would create havoc with theology, for in that case there would no longer be any connection between 'mission' and the intra-divine Life. That is why he insisted so strongly that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, although as we have noted that 'is' may not be construed in a logically necessary or reversible way.

*Second*, in view of the complete perichoretic interpenetration of the three divine Persons and their distinctive activities in one another, the so-called 'law of appropriations' brought in by Latin theology to redress an unbalanced essentialist approach to the doctrine of the Trinity from the One Being of God, which obscured the evangelical approach from the economic Trinity,<sup>130</sup> falls completely away as an idea that is both otiose and damaging to the intrinsic truth of Christ who, as the Word and only begotten Son of God, constitutes the *one* revelation of the Father and the *one* way by which we can go to the Father. This principle of appropriation carried the idea that some attributes and activities common to the whole Trinity may be specially assigned or 'appropriated' to one Person rather than another in order to reveal his distinctive hypostatic character. However, since God is Triune, all his acts toward us cannot but be acts of the Trinity in Unity and of the Unity in Trinity, while in all these acts each Person who is himself whole God acts without any surrender of his distinctive hypostatic properties as Father, Son or Holy Spirit, so that the problem addressed by the principle of appropriations need not have arisen in the first place. This would seem to be the way in which Karl Barth restated the doctrine of appropriation, in his radically economic and trinitarian way of appropriating 'creation', 'reconciliation' and 'redemption' to the hypostatic distinctions between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in which the order of God's economic self-revelation is grounded in the order of the ontological Trinity.

The perichoretic coordination and unity of God's saving purposes and their once for all fulfilment in Christ Jesus, and the perichoretic understanding of the one Triune Monarchy, have the effect of setting trinitarian theology upon a sure basis in the homoousial and interhypostatic relations between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as they are revealed in the irreversible events of the incarnate economy of redemption, the mighty deeds of the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world. Any idea which would make the incarnation an adventitious or arbitrary event as one among other possibilities would undermine the ground of soteriological reality in the essential relation between the incarnate self-revelation of God and the Truth of God as he ever is in his Triune Being.

By way of bringing this chapter to a close it may be helpful to recall a significant contribution made by John Calvin to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Of particular importance for him was the expression the Triunity of God given by Gregory Nazianzen.

I cannot think of the One without immediately being surrounded by the radiance of the Three; nor can I discern the Three without at once being carried back to the One. When I think of the Three I think of him as a Whole ...cannot grasp the greatness of the One so as to attribute a greater greatness to the rest. When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one Luminary, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided Light.

In Gregory's 'Oration on the Holy Spirit' there is a similar passage in which he declares:

To us there is one God, and one Godhead, and all that issues from him is referred back to him as to be one with him, although we believe that there are Three. And One is not more and another less God, nor is One before and another after ...But differentiated as the Persons are, the entire and undivided Godhead is One in each Person, and there is one mingling of light, as it were three suns joined to each other.

Calvin had another way of expressing the nature of this Unity of the One Godhead in whom a Trinity of Persons coexist in Communion with One Another, when he borrowed the unusual expression *in solidum* from Cyprian. This was originally intended to speak of the episcopate as essentially corporate which is held in *solidum* by one and all alike. The one episcopate belongs to each bishop only as it belongs to all. Calvin adopted this to present his own doctrine of the ministry as a corporate episcopate or presbyterate held by all pastors alike in such a way that, while it involves a parity of ministers before God, it also allows for administrative

distinctions within the ministry. Here, however, he adapts and transfers ‘*in solidum*’ to help him express the mysterious Unity in Trinity and Trinity in Unity of God, that is, to say something of how the three Persons relate to one God without losing their distinctiveness and interrelations as three. Each of the divine Persons, Calvin declares, *in solidum* is God (*quorum quisque in solidum sit Deus*), and the Being of God is totally and in *solidum* common to the divine Persons, such that with respect to their Being there is no difference between the one and the other (*restat ut tota et in solidum Patris et Filii sit communis*). In other words, all three divine Persons, who do not share with one another their distinguishing properties, nevertheless share together completely and equally, not partially, in the one indivisible Being of God: the whole Being of God belongs to each of them as it belongs to all of them, and belongs to all of them as it belongs to each of them.

The language that Calvin used about what the Father shares with the Son and what they both hold in common, points to the Athanasian statement that the Deity (Θεότης) flows unbrokenly and ineffably between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. In this way Calvin used the concept of *in solidum* to fill out the Nicene and Athanasian conceptions of *ousia* as self-existent being considered in its internal relations (*in se*) and of *hypostasis* as subsistent being considered in its objective otherness (*ad alios*). Thus while he thought of the whole Being of God as dwelling in each Person, he thought of each Person and of all three Persons, with their differentiating properties and in their mutual interrelations, as dwelling hypostatically and consubstantially in the one indivisible Being of God. The *in solidum* concept enabled Calvin to give firm expression to the intrinsically interpersonal cohesion of the Three in One and One in Three, in which there is no confusion or separation between the Persons. The incommunicable properties distinguishing them do not divide them from one another but on the contrary integrate them in their subsistent reciprocal relations. The whole Being of God belongs to each Person as it belongs to all three Persons, and belongs to all three Persons as it belongs to each Person, and so the Unity of God, utterly simple though it is, is to be understood not in an abstract generic way, nor as an undifferentiated oneness, but as the indivisible consubstantial Communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the fullness of God dwells in each Person, and the fullness of each Person dwells in God, such that the one God is intrinsically hypostatic and completely *personal*, the eternal *I am who I am*, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. To say that God is personal is not to say that he is a Person (i.e. *una persona*) in the relational sense of the three divine Persons, who are Persons *ad alios*, but that, far from being impersonal, he is a Communion of personal Being within himself, for the whole God dwells in each Person, and each Person is the whole God. Thus we may rightly think *in solidum* of the Triune God as intrinsically, perfectly and sublimely Personal.