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Whether the Doctrine of the Trinity Supports Egalitarianism

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THE SAINT PAUL SEMINARY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
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Whether the Doctrine of the Trinity Supports Egalitarianism

A THESIS

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This thesis by Daniel R. Furey fulfills the thesis requirement for the Master of Arts degree in Theology approved by Stephen Hipp, S.T.D., as Thesis Advisor, and by Mark McInroy, Th.D., and by John Froula, Ph.D. as Readers.
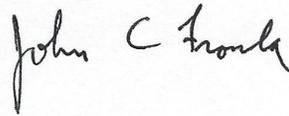
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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the connections between the Trinitarian Persons, their relations, and the hierarchy of created beings, particularly in the structures of marriage, civil societies, and the Church. First, the discussions around each of these three areas are presented. With regards to the marriage debate there are two main camps: egalitarians and complementarians. Some complementarians argue for a functional or eternal subordination of function of the Son to the Father and see this as analogous to the way in which marriages should be structured. By contrast, egalitarians appeal to *perichoresis* or the mutual indwelling of the Persons and argue that this ought to inform marriage. Likewise, egalitarians claim that the Trinity supports democratic and/or socialistic rules of governance. In regard to the Church, egalitarians argue that the Trinity supports the collapse of the clerical hierarchy. Instead, this paper will argue that the relationships between the Persons, though not hierarchical in itself, supports a hierarchical structuring of marriage, civil societies, and the Church on account of the order of the processions.

Introduction

The last half-century has seen a revival in scholarship on the Trinity in both Protestant and Catholic circles. On account of this revival, doctrines of the Trinity are being employed in many contemporary arguments, perhaps most interestingly in those relating to egalitarianism in societies—in marriage, in the state, and in the Church.[1] A great number of articles and books have recently been published on the Trinitarian implications on egalitarianism in marriage alone.[2] This thesis is a Catholic contribution to the debates about how the doctrine of the Trinity

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[1] "In recent years theologians have devoted a great deal of attention to the debate about hierarchical versus egalitarian understandings of the Trinity." Miroslav Volf, "The Trinity is our social program: The doctrine of the Trinity and the shape of social engagement," *Modern Theology* 14, no. 3, (1998), 407. Egalitarianism in its most general formulation simply holds that "people should be treated as equals, should treat one another as equals, should relate as equals, or enjoy an equality of social status of some sort." Richard Arneson, "Egalitarianism," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford University, April 24, 2013), https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/egalitarianism/. "Egalitarianism" in this thesis refers to the belief that hierarchical social structures are unjust. With regards to marriage, the Church, and the state, egalitarians tend towards the suspension of the idea of the husband as the chief authority in the family, the collapse of ecclesial hierarchy, and communist/Marxists and/or pure democratic states, respectively.

[2] In his dissertation, Schemm compiled a short list of publications as of 2001 that dealt with the structuring of marriage of the Trinitarian relations Schemm's list includes 12 publications. Many more could be added as of the writing of this thesis in 2019. Peter Schemm, *North American Evangelical Feminism and the Triune God: A Denial of Trinitarian Relational Order in the Works of Selected Theologians and an Alternative Proposal*, 2001, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

ought to influence our human relationships in marriage, civil society, and the Church.[3] While

Catholic figures have weighed in on some of the possible applications of social egalitarianism,[4]

the specifically Trinitarian dimensions of their thought have yet to be addressed critically.[5]

The lack of a clear and contemporary Catholic response in these matters is somewhat of a

disappointment considering the immense weight of the question at hand. What is at stake in the

question, at least theoretically, is the fundamental structure of human relationships on every scale

from the smallest, most intimate personal relationships, to the economic policies of world

superpowers. Moreover, the debate has not merely involved fringe theologians. On the contrary,

some of the most influential theologians (particularly in Europe and the United States) have

given their voice to the issue. These thinkers exercise great influence, and their Trinitarian

theology will no doubt have a great impact in the years to come. Therefore, this thesis aims to

reintroduce Catholic principles into the debate to show how egalitarian Trinitarian theologies are

incompatible with Catholic theology.

I begin by describing the contemporary arena of thought on the subject, highlighting the

main Trinitarian arguments for egalitarians and complementarians.[6] The main proponents of an

egalitarian understanding of marriage discussed in this paper are Stanley Grenz and Millard

Erickson, though the views of others will be cited in order to convey the popularity of their

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[3] Some of the interlocutors of this paper are self-professed Catholic, though it will be shown that much of their theology cannot be held in tandem with the tradition of the Church, or "classical theism" more broadly. Elizabeth Johnson's works, which are cited throughout this paper, are a prime example. See Elizabeth Johnson "Trinity: To Let the Symbol Sing Again," *Theology Today* 54, no. 3 (1997): 299-311. 306-307.

[4] For instance, papal condemnations of socialism and communism from Leo XIII (*Humanum Genus*), Pius XI (*Divini Redemptoris*), Pius XII (*Summi Pontificatus*), and John Paul II (*Centesimus Annus*).

[5] It may be, and likely is the case, that there exist natural arguments better suited for pointing out the impracticality of the conclusions of many of the interlocutors of this paper. However, in order to properly respect the ideas, it is worthwhile to face them where they are leveled, that is, in the arena of theology (as opposed to economics or political philosophy, for instance).

[6] Arguments against the conclusions of these authors will not be made in this section, as the goal here is to present their thoughts clearly and succinctly so that they can be opposed later.

beliefs.[7] With regard to societal restructuring (both in the Church and in civil governments), the thought of Leonardo Boff and Jürgen Moltmann is foundational and representative. Elizabeth Johnson has represented their thoughts more recently, to popular acclaim. The rationale for the order in which I proceed—marriage, society, Church—is to begin with the more fundamental society (the family), followed by the naturally superior society (the state), and to end with the supernaturally perfect society (the Church).

Next is a brief overview of scriptural, patristic, and scholastic sources that will help build up the principal arguments of the thesis itself. Of key importance in the patristic period are the writings of the pre-Nicene fathers—Justin, Origen, and Irenaeus. Following them are the post-Nicene fathers—Athanasius, Athenagoras, the Cappadocians, and Augustine. As far as the scholastics go, the Trinitarian theology of Thomas Aquinas provides the foundation for the central arguments of the thesis, though Bonaventure and Anselm will be useful for contextualizing the terminology.

Following the exposition of the sources, arguments are presented as to why attempts to argue for egalitarianism from the Trinity fail. Of those that do not fall into outright tritheism, the rest, in their attempts to advance their own political philosophies, collapse the *ordo* of the Trinity *ad intra,* and in so doing remove the very logic of distinction between the persons, rendering the doctrine of the Trinity essentially meaningless. Furthermore, the thesis argues that the Trinitarian processions, in their *ordo,* are the *ratio* of created hierarchy itself. Hierarchy, then, is a thing willed by God generally, and hierarchical institutions cannot be objected to on the sole basis of

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[7] See the work of Stanley Grenz: Stanley Grenz, "Anticipating God's New Community: Theological Foundations for Women in Ministry," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38, no. 4 (December 1995): 595-611, and "Theological Foundations for Male-Female Relationships," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41, no. 4 (December 1998): 615-630; See also Stanley Grenz, *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

the equality of the Persons of the Trinity. After this conclusion is reached, objections to the main

arguments of this thesis are then presented. While first-hand objections from the interlocutors are

not available, they will be derived from their own theology as faithfully as possible so as to avoid

attacking a straw man in the replies. The debates around ecclesiology and marriage rely on the

same fundamental principles—principles that may be defined loosely as those of "Social

Trinitarianism".[8] Therefore, the egalitarian positions can be defeated by attacking these

underlying premises.

Before speaking about the *ordo naturae*, something first needs to be said about the

processio. The reason for the procession of creatures in their hierarchical structure and their

subsequent hierarchically mediated return is rooted in the Trinity.[9] Creatures proceed out of the

creative act in a hierarchical order, and they return to God through Christ and the Holy Spirit by

way of the Church.[10] While there is no hierarchy in the Trinity, there is a constitutive element of

it: order.[11] Furthermore, creatures also ascend the entire created hierarchy in the *reditus*, since

man is aided by the angels and lower creation is sanctified by the salvation of man. *Reductio* is a

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[8] Though Social Trinitarianism might not be inherently false depending on how it is defined, the interlocutors of the thesis all seem to fall into the trap of conceiving of the Persons as "three distinct and equal centers of consciousness who together constitute one God." Gijsbert van Brink, "Social Trinitarianism: A Discussion of Some Recent Theological Criticisms," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16 no. 3, (2014), 331-350. 336.

[9] "The action of the Trinity ad extra thus reproduces the order of the divine nature in the Trinity: The Father creates all things through the Son and the Holy Spirit who proceed from him, and all is returned to the Father through the mission of the Holy Spirit and of the Son." Gilles Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas*, 2nd ed., trans. Matthew Levering, Heather Buttery, Robert Williams, and Teresa Bede, (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2006), 45. "The exitus of the persons in the unity of essence is the cause of the exitus of creatures in a diversity of essence (*exitus enim personarum in unitate essentiae est causa exitus creaturarum in essentiae diversitate).*" Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas,* 58. The quotation is from Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences*, I, d. 2, q. 1.

[10] Commenting on the Gospel of John, Aquinas writes, "the reason this gives glory, that is, that this obedience of the disciples to the Son gives glory to the Father, is stated when he says, "for I have given them the words which you gave me." First he states that knowledge comes from the Father to the disciples; secondly, that the minds of the disciples are led back to the Father." Aquinas, *Commentary on John*, 17: 6-11a, 2200, trans. James Weisheipl, O.P. (Albany, NY: Magi Books, Inc, 1980).

[11] The lacking element is difference. This will be further explained in the thesis.

metaphysical and logical principle employed by Aristotle and adopted by Aquinas to describe the return of something to its principle.[12] For instance, potencies are reduced to act, many complex arguments can be reduced to one if they rely on all the same principle or principles, and effects are reduced to their causes.[13] Aquinas utilizes this last point to describe the return of creatures to God in the economy, a theme which dominates his commentary on the Sentences[14] and is present in many of his other works.[15] Hierarchy, then, is an essential part of the world that God has created and an intrinsic good. Understood in the light of faith, it reflects something about God Himself *ad intra*, that is, in the order owing to the processions. To reject hierarchy is not only to reject a practical way of organizing a society, it is to reject the ladder that God created. Therefore, one can make a Trinitarian appeal for the necessity of hierarchy without resorting to any kind of subordinationism.

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[12] Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, XI, l, 3, at www.aquinas.cc

[13] "*In statu enim innocentiae non oportuisset aliquem ad profectum virtutis inducere per poenalia exercitia. Unde hoc ipsum quod est poenale in talibus reducitur ad originalem culpam sicut ad causam.*" Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 87, a. 7, co., at www.aquinas.cc

[14] "Respondeo dicendum, quod in exitu creaturarum a primo principio attenditur quaedam circulatio vel regiratio, eo quod omnia revertuntur sicut in finem in id a quo sicut a principio prodierunt. *Et ideo oportet ut per eadem quibus est exitus a principio, et reditus in finem attendatur.*" Emphasis mine. Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences,* I, d. 14, q. 2, a. 2, co., at www.aquinas.cc "...oportet enim omnis actionis reductionem in primum agens fieri sicut in causam." II, d. 36 q. 1, a. 3, ad 1. "omnis potentia passiva quae est non reducta ad actum, est imperfecta" IV, d. 49, q. 2, a. 5, arg. 5.

[15] "Now, in the genus of the efficient cause there is a reduction to one cause, called God" Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I cap. 28 n. 7, trans. Charles J. O'Neil (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975). "Whatever is subsequent is reduced to what is first in that class as to its cause. Now, creatures are uttered by God. Therefore, they are reduced to the first which God utters. But God first utters Himself. Hence, by the fact that He utters Himself, He utters all creatures." Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 4, co. at www.isidore.co.

Section I: Contemporary Discussion

Part I: Marriage

As noted in the introduction (fn. 2), the relationship between husbands and wives has already become the subject of some of the most adamant debates concerning egalitarianism and the Trinity, especially in the U.S.[16] A number of authors have already weighed in in order to organize and explain the theological arguments building off of Trinitarian principles. Millard Erickson provides a comprehensive overview of the matter in his book *Making Sense of the Trinity: Three Crucial Questions*. Erickson divides the sides of the debate into two general camps, the "equivalentists" and the "gradationists," and places himself in the equivalentist category.[17]

The gradationists are those that see a kind of authoritative inferiority on the part of the Son and the Holy Spirit in relation to the Father. Moreover, they view the authoritative hierarchy in the Trinity as analogous to the way in which a wife must be submissive to her husband. According to the gradationists (who are often Evangelical Christians), in the Trinity as in marriage, a relation of inferiority is not essential, or having to do with the natures or essences of the *relata*, but rather it is a result of the differences in roles that the Trinitarian/married persons play.[18] The result is that "traditional" (hierarchically conceived) marriage relationships are seen

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[16] With respect to the Trinitarian marriage debate, "egalitarianism" is defined by Paul C. Maxwell as "a view of gender relationships that rejects all gender-based authority hierarchies, on the basis of rejecting as a heresy the notion that the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father according to his person—that any metaphysical insertion of "authority hierarchy" into the distinguishing properties of the Trinitarian persons indicates a decrease in dignity, in the Trinity and in marriage." Paul Maxwell, "Is There an Authority Analogy Between the Trinity and Marriage?: Untangling Arguments of Subordination and Ontology in Egalitarian-Complementarian Discourse." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 59, no. 3 (2016): 541–570. 542.

[17] For all intents and purposes, "equivalentist" is not really distinct from "egalitarian."

[18] To be perfectly clear, just as the gradationists would not say that the Son is lesser in being than the Father, they would also not affirm that the wife is somehow lesser in being than the husband. Inferiority, according

as an image of the Trinity, and therefore ought to be encouraged and followed. Many

gradationists refer to themselves as complementarians (owning to the complementary

roles/functions that spouses have in marriage), so they will be referred to as such.[19]

Thomas R. Schreiner, representing evangelical complementarians, argues that the

Incarnation and the earthly mission of the Son as sent by the Father provides the evidence for a

"functional" subordination in the Trinity that grounds a functional subordination in marriage.[20]

He claims that this does not necessitate any sort of inferiority of the Son to the Father. It is

worthwhile to quote Schreiner in full here:

> The point is not that the Son is essentially inferior to the Father. Rather, the Son willingly submits Himself to the Father's authority. The difference between the members of the Trinity is a functional one, not an essential one… This point is often missed by evangelical feminists. They conclude that a difference in function necessarily involves a difference in essence; i.e., if men are in authority over women, then women must be inferior. The relationship between Christ and the Father shows us that this reasoning is flawed. One can possess a difference function and still be equal in essence and worth. Women are equal to men in essence and in being; there is no ontological distinction, and yet they have a different function or role in church and home. Such differences do not logically imply inequality or inferiority, just as Christ's subjection to the Father does not imply His inferiority.[21]

Not only does Schreiner argue the compatibility between subordination of function and

equality of essence, he also argues that this view is traditional and present in the teachings of the

Church Fathers. According to Schreiner, "what the Nicene fathers called a subordination in order

is another way of saying that they saw a subordination in role, or subordination in the economic

Trinity."[22] The use of the term "subordination" is, to be sure, a bold move. It has not been

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to the gradaitonists, only obtains with respect to the operations and/or functions on the part of the Son/wife relative to the Father/husband.

[19] Maxwell provides some useful descriptions of complementarianism. "Complementarianism defends the authority of the husband over the wife, by appeal to the Son's eternal functional subordination to the Father—positing that the two persons are equal in nature and dignity like the husband and wife, yet there exists an authority hierarchy between the two." Maxwell, "Is There an Authority Analogy Between the Trinity and Marriage?," 542.

[20] Terms such as "functional" and "eternal" subordination will be explained in the body of the thesis.

[21] Thomas R. Schreiner, "Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity" in *Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity*, in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1991), 128.

[22] Schreiner, "Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity," 129.

ignored by the egalitarians, and perhaps rightly so. Still, he is careful not to assert subordination in the immanent Trinity.[23] For Bruce A. Ware (another "gradationist" according to Erickson), the functional difference of the Father and Son in the economy is necessarily reflective of the immanent Trinity, though it is not clear exactly what is being reflected.[24] For scriptural evidence, complementarians often appeal to 1 Corinthians 11:3[25] as teaching the functional subordination of the Son that then proscribes and parallels hierarchical familial relationships. Wayne Grudem has argued convincingly from biblical and extra-biblical evidence that *kephale* (the Greek word on which seemingly so much depends for either side of this debate, as well as others[26]) is clearly being used to mean a "person of superior authority or rank."[27] Given this reading, the scriptural evidence seems to support some kind of authoritative hierarchy in the Trinity. For complementarians, the authoritative hierarchy is immanent, and is revealed in the economy.[28] Consequently, "God is the head of Christ" is evidence for the proposition that "the Father has authority over the Son."

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[23] Andreas Köstenberger does not shirk from making such a claim and argues for subordination in the immanent Trinity. He says, "there is a personal order and subordination in the Godhead (*taxis*) that does not vitiate the essential equality of the persons." Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son, and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 123.

[24] "The Son was commissioned by the Father in *eternity past* to come as the incarnate Son. As Jesus declares in well over thirty occasions in John's gospel, he was *sent to earth* by the Father to do the Father's will. Could this be reduced merely to the sending of the *incarnate* Son to fulfill the Father's mission . . . ? Or should we think of this sending, this commissioning, as having taken place in *eternity past*, a commissioning which then is fulfilled in time?" Bruce A. Ware, "Tampering with the Trinity," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 6, no. 12 (2001): 9-10.

[25] "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ." (1 Cor 11:2 *NRSV*)

[26] Such as women's ordination. https://womeninthechurch.co.uk/κεφαλή

[27] Wayne Grudem, "The Meaning of Kephale ("Head"): A Response to Recent Studies," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1991), 425.

[28] Gradationists make a distinction between hierarchy of essence and authority between the Father and the Son, using Novatian as an early explorer of the model. "For Novatian, the statements 'the Father is greater than I,' and 'Christ is greater than the Helper (*paracletum*), do not imply a subordination of substance, but a subordination of authority." James L. Papandrea, *The Trinitarian Theology of Novatian of Rome: A Study in Third-century Orthodoxy* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 355.

The equivalentists, on the other hand, deny any kind of authority of one Person over another in the Trinity. Equivalentists, says Erickson, view the equal dignity of the distinct Persons of the Trinity as prescriptive of equality in all things in the marriage relationship. For equivalentists, "the Father-Son relationship is not to be understood on the analogy of the human father-son relationships,"[29] that is, not in terms of a hierarchy of authority, power, etc.[30]

Equivalentists such as Gilbert Bilezikian say that "nowhere in the Bible is there a reference to a chain of command within the Trinity. Such 'subordinationist' theories were propounded during the fourth century and were rejected as heretical."[31] They explicitly deny the assertion that 1 Corinthians 11:3 supports any kind of subordination or inferiority in God, with some claiming that *kephale* is ambiguous enough that it cannot be used with a sufficient degree of certainty for the complementarian position.[32] While Erickson is willing to grant that "a type of subordination took place in the incarnation, when Jesus stepped down from a position of equality with the Father,"[33] he views the consubstantiality of the Persons as being incompatible with any

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[29] Millard J. Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2009), 81.

[30] Paul C. Maxwell provides a similar definition: "Egalitarianism is a view of gender relationships that rejects all gender-based authority hierarchies, on the basis of rejecting as a heresy the notion that the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father according to his person—that any metaphysical insertion of "authority hierarchy" into the distinguishing properties of the Trinitarian persons indicates a decrease in dignity, in the Trinity and in marriage." Maxwell, "Is There an Authority Analogy Between the Trinity and Marriage?," 542.

[31] Gilbert G. Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: A Guide for the Study of Female Roles in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1985), 241.

[32] "The gradationists also have tried to argue from the greater authority of the Father over the Son for a similar authority structure in the family and the Church. They do this in large part based on 1 Cor 11:1-3, and on the idea that kephale there means superior to or having authority over. The word's meaning is sufficiently unclear, however, that this argument cannot carry great weight." Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity?*, 256. See also 81. Other egalitarians such as Kevin Giles simply reject the authority of 1 Cor 11:3 outright. He says that "All texts that imply the equality of the sexes speak of God's ultimate and eschatological ideal; all texts that speak of the subordination of women are culturally limited, time-bound, practical advice to women living in a culture that took for granted the subordination of women. This rule means that all the exhortations to women to be subordinate do not apply in our age and culture." Kevin Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God & the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 203. Such a view is in conflict with *Dei Verbum*.

[33] Millard Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity: Three Crucial Questions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000). 87.

kind of authoritative hierarchy in the immanent Trinity. Taking a page out of the book of the

anti-Arian apologists, Erickson explains that the hypostatic union is sufficient to elucidate the

differences in power and authority between the Son and the Father. Erickson, though, makes an

additional claim. Not only does he say that there is no authority of one Person over another in the

Trinity, but there is also a "mutual subordination of each to the other" on account of the fact that

they "derive their being from one another".[34] Stanley Grenz offers further explanation for this

position:

> In sending his Son into the world, the Father entrusted his own reign—indeed his own deity—to the Son. Likewise, the Father is dependent on the Son for his title as the Father. As Irenaeus pointed out in the second century, without the Son the Father is not the Father of the Son. Hence the subordination of the Son to the Father must be balanced by the subordination of the Father to the Son.[35]

Like Erickson, Grenz advocates for an understanding of the Trinitarian Persons that puts them in

a relation of mutual subordination or dependence with each other. Furthermore, since we are

made in God's image, our relations to other human persons ought to mirror those of the Trinity.

According to the egalitarians, the Trinity, contrary to the complementarians, supports the

absence of hierarchy, rather than the presence of one.

It should be noted that feminist theologians have taken up the Trinitarian argument for

egalitarianism with ease. For instance, Elizabeth Johnson[36] and Lois Malcolm conclude that the

doctrine of the Trinity precludes hierarchy in all human communities including marriage. They

reject the idea that "as the Son is obedient to the Father, so woman should be obedient to man."

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[34] Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity*, 86.

[35] Grenz, "Theological Foundations for Male-Female Relationships," 618.

[36] A self-professed Catholic, Elizabeth Johnson's work is widely celebrated by feminist theologians in America. "Elizabeth Johnson's work can be seen as part of an identifiable and ever growing genre within the wide spectrum of feminist theologies that could be called "Trinitarian feminism"—a development that holds promise, I think, for the successful integration of feminist insights into the regular preaching and teaching of the churches." Harold G. Wells, "Trinitarian Feminism: Elizabeth Johnson's Wisdom Christology," *Theology Today* 52, no. 3 (1995): 330.

Similarly to the equivalentists, they argue against the "functional" subordination of the complementarians, objecting that what the Persons do in the economy of salvation is not as important as the power by which they do it.[37] Therefore, "any argument that seeks to base the subordination of women [on Trinitarian doctrine]—whether that is defined in ontological or merely 'functional' terms—misses the point of Trinitarian doctrine."[38] Such views are said to reinforce patriarchal oppression, which is incompatible with the feminist project.

To summarize, there seem to be two major stances on the issue of whether the Trinity supports hierarchy in marriage.[39] According to the gradationists/complementarians, the order of the processions gives some sort of authoritative priority to the Father such that the husband is analogous to him and enjoys some sort of authoritative privilege in the marriage relationship. Some even go so far as to assert a kind of "subordination" on these grounds. By contrast, the equivalentists/egalitarians, as well as the feminist theologians shown here, assert that there is no subordination at all in God unless the subordination is mutual. So, the Trinity cannot be seen as

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[37] "the doublespeak of subordinate-but-equal is disingenuous, to say the least. But the point to be noted here is the hierarchical pattern of relationship established by a certain kind of Trinitarian theology. As the Father is the source of the Son, so man is the source of woman. As the Son is obedient to the Father, so woman should be obedient to man. Examples of this reasoning can be found in Roman Catholic, Anglican, Protestant, and Orthodox theologians. It is an ecumenical error." Johnson, "Trinity: To Let the Symbol Sing Again," 307. Johnson goes on to appeal to *perichoresis* in the Trinity as evidence against the order of the processions. Johnson, "Trinity: To Let the Symbol Sing Again," 309.

[38] Lois Malcolm, "On Not Three Male Gods: Retrieving Wisdom in Trinitarian Discourse," *Dialog* 49, no. 3 (2010): 245.

[39] The "agnostic" position (the belief that the Trinity is no mysterious that it cannot be used to support one side or the other) has been left out for two main reasons. Firstly, the paper takes the contrary position as its point of departure—the Trinity is not so mysterious that we cannot glean from it anything to say on these issues. Secondly, it is difficult to find anyone that really adheres to the agnostic view and still believes that theology itself is even possible. The following authors listed (in this author's opinion) at least touch on the agnostic position: Karen Kilby, "Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity," *New Blackfriars* 81, no. 956 (2000): 432-445. Brian T. Trainor, "The Trinity and the Male Headship of the Family." *Heythrop Journal* 52, no. 5 (2011): 724-738. Lois Malcolm, "On Not Three Male Gods: Retrieving Wisdom in Trinitarian Discourse," *Dialog* 49, no. 3 (2010): 245. There are also those that table discussion on the Trinity as supporting one side or the other saying need to appeal to it, as Scripture is perfectly clear about the hierarchical structure of marriage as an image of the necessarily hierarchical union between Christ and the Church. See Maxwell, "Is There an Authority Analogy Between the Trinity and Marriage?," 565.

prescriptive of authoritative hierarchy in marriage, but instead as prescriptive of radical equality in all things. The doctrine of the Trinity, then, is employed by each group to arrive at mutually exclusive conclusions.

Part II: Civil Society

Jürgen Moltmann and Leonardo Boff are some of the first to incorporate Trinitarian principles into their egalitarian political arguments. Boff, who is also known as one of the foundational thinkers in the development of liberation theology, largely adopted Moltmann's thought and applied it specifically to his political context in South America.[40] Their work greatly influenced virtually all Trinitarian scholarship on egalitarianism that has come after them, particularly in regard to feminist theology as advocated by Elizabeth Johnson.

In his book *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, Moltmann sets up a dichotomy between what he calls "monotheistic monarchianism" and the doctrine of the Trinity. Monotheistic monarchianism is essentially the belief that, since God is one supreme authority and ruler of all, likewise man ought to be ruled on earth by one supreme authority.

> Let me point out at once here that this monotheistic monarchianism was, and is, an uncommonly seductive religious-political ideology. It is the fundamental notion behind the universal and uniform religion: One God—one Logos—one humanity; and in the Roman empire it was bound to seem a persuasive solution for many problems of a multi-national and multi-religious society. The universal ruler in Rome had only to be the image and correspondence of the universal ruler in heaven.[41]

Moltmann views monotheistic monarchianism as problematic because it tends to be used as a "justification for earthly domination—religious, moral, patriarchal or political domination—and

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[40] "Taking his cue from Moltmann, Leonardo Boff emphasized the full equality of the divine Persons and developed the political ramifications of this view in a distinctively liberationist way." Gijsbert van Brink, "Social Trinitarianism: A Discussion of Some Recent Theological Criticisms," 333.

[41] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl. 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 131.

makes it a hierarchy, a 'holy rule.'"[42] He argues that the early Church was opposed to this kind

of "monotheism" as it was incompatible with both the Trinity and the Incarnation.[43] For

Moltmann, monotheistic monarchianism was eventually conquered by Trinitarianism. However,

he contends that the Latin Church today still bears signs of monotheistic monarchianism, and

ought to be suspected of Modalism (which, says Moltmann, the Church has occasionally taught

dogmatically).[44] Christian monotheism, according to Moltmann, is still a danger to this very day,

and monarchy with it.[45] He claims that, precisely as the troublesome idea of the One God can

only be combated by the Trinity, social structures that subordinate one person to another can

only be opposed by instituting systems without subordination, as exemplified by the Trinity itself

which lives in perichoretic unity.

> If, on the basis of salvation history and the experience of salvation, we have to recognize the
> unity of the triune God in the perichoretic at-oneness of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
> then this does not correspond to the solitary human subject in his claim to lordship over the
> world. It only corresponds to a human fellowship of people without privileges and without
> subordinances. The perichoretic at-oneness of the triune God corresponds to the experience of the
> community of Christ, the community which the Spirit unites through respect, affection, and love.
> The more open-mindedly people live with one another, for one another and in one another in the

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[42] "religiously motivated political monotheism has always been used in order to legitimate domination, from the emperor cults of the ancient world, Byzantium and the absolute ideologies of the seventeenth century, down to the dictatorships of the twentieth. The doctrine of the Trinity which, on the contrary, is developed as a theological doctrine of freedom must for its part point towards a community of men and women without supremacy and without subjection." Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 191-192.

[43] "If the homoousios does not merely identify Christ with God, but identifies God with Christ as well, then the divine unity can no longer be interpreted monadically. It has to be understood in Trinitarian terms. But that leads to fundamental changes in the doctrine of God, in christology and in politics. Christian faith can then no longer be called "monotheistic" in the sense of the One God. God's sovereignty can then no longer be understood as the 'universal monarchy' to which everything is subjected. It has to be interpreted and presented as the redeeming history of freedom." Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 134. Of course, one implication here is that Christianity is in direct conflict with Judaism. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4, RSV)

[44] "But whereas throughout the history of the church Arianism was always tainted with 'liberalism' and heresy, Sabellian modalism was at times established church doctrine; and whether it has really been overcome even now is the question which the Eastern church still puts to the whole Trinitarian doctrine of the churches of the West." Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 136. Patricia Wilson Kaster on the connection between "monotheism" and feminist theology: "As a theological notion, the Trinity is more supportive of feminist values than is a strict monotheism. Popular monotheism is by far more of a support for patriarchy than Trinitarianism, because the one God is always imaged as male." Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Faith, Feminism, and the Christ*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 122.

[45] "'Monarchy' is just as problematic as the 'monad'." Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 138-9.

fellowship of the Spirit, the more they will become one with the Son and the Father, and one in the Son and the Father.[46]

"Perichoretic unity,"[47] says Moltmann, provides the ground for arguing against human relationships that result in subordination. When one models human relationships on the Trinity, what follows can only be "mutual acceptance and participation. That applies too to any human order of society which deserves the name of 'human' in the Christian sense."[48] What Moltmann is proposing is the radical restructuring of human societies along Trinitarian lines, which, for Moltmann, are egalitarian. The relations between the Persons of the Trinity do not admit to any kind of hierarchy, subordination, or authority, and neither should the Church or the state.[49]

In continuity with Moltmann, Boff appeals to *perichoresis* to argue for a flattened society, or one that lacks any and all hierarchy.

> We need to know what type of society accords with God's plan. The form of social organization we have at present cannot be pleasing to God, since most people have no place in it. There is little sharing, less communion, and a great weight of oppression placed on the poor. They are crying out for justice and organizing themselves to throw off their shackles and liberate their lives and their creativity, to bring goodwill to all... This is where faith in the Holy Trinity, in the mystery of perichoresis, of the Trinitarian communion and divine society, takes on a special resonance, since the Trinity can be seen as a model for any just, egalitarian (while respecting differences) social organization.[50]

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[46] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 158.

[47] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 150.

[48] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 158.

[49] "The idea of unity in God therefore provokes both the idea of the universal, unified church, and the idea of the universal, unified state: one God - one emperor - one church - one empire." Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 195.

[50] Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society,* trans Paul Burns (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), 11. *Perichoresis* is defined in Section I Part IV. In her book "What are they Saying about the Trinity?" Anne Hunt describes the implications of Boff's theology: "The goal is therefore to build a society which is in the image and likeness of the Trinity. If the human person really is the *imago Dei*, *the imago trinitatis*, then there must be a *vestigium trinitatis* in any human society deriving from the divine society which the Trinity is. Human community should model Trinitarian community and the divine perichoresis. It should be a community of inclusion, characterized by unity and diversity, and unity in diversity. Only a Church or a society that is structured on such lines is genuinely a sacrament of the Trinity." Anne Hunt, *What Are They Saying about the Trinity?,* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 13.

Boff is very clear; the revelation of the Trinity is perfect evidence that God desires society to be structured according to the principles of egalitarianism. Attempts to circumvent God's plan have resulted in the oppression of the poor and weak, and the only solution is to overthrow such structures.

Interestingly, Boff does not ally himself unequivocally with what many might consider to be the most egalitarian of social structures, that is, socialism. On the contrary, according to Boff, socialism actually cuts against one of the most important aspects of the mystery of the Trinity: "difference."[51] Socialist practices, says Boff, have a tendency to "not recognize individuals as different-in-relationship," which does not accurately reflect the "three 'Differents'" in the Trinity. Boff means that on account of free "mutual acceptance and giving," the members of the Trinity establish themselves as different but equal subjects.[52] This free exchange between different subjects cannot be reflected in socialism (or at least, not all kinds of socialism), since, in these systems, the state compels economic exchange between individuals which are only distinguished according to class. On the contrary, societies informed by the Trinity must be free from "class differences and dominations based on power."[53]

Still, Moltmann and Boff are more or less clear when it comes to the practical applications of their theologies. Boff does not endorse "socialist practices" full-scale,[54] but he does argue for a "basic democracy" since it "seeks the greatest possible equality between persons"[55] and thus most perfectly mirrors the Trinity.[56] Moltmann, on the other hand, claims

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[51] Boff may mean what Thomists would mean by "distinct" when he says "different", but it appears that this is not the case.

[52] Boff, *Trinity and Society.* 151

[53] Boff, *Trinity and Society.* 151

[54] Boff, *Trinity and Society.* 151

[55] Boff, *Trinity and Society.* 152

[56] Boff, *Trinity and Society.* 151

that "if we take our bearing from the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, personalism and socialism cease to be antitheses and are seen to be derived from a common foundation" and he encourages the development of "social personalism or personal socialism."[57] This cannot be done apart from the Trinity because the Trinity, says Moltmann, is the solution to philosophical monotheism that justifies domination.[58] Moltmann and Boff share similar political visions based on similar Trinitarian theology. Nevertheless, the contrary practical directives of Boff and Moltmann introduce a difficulty for anyone that might wish to put their theology into political practice. When it comes to applying the principles to the Church, however, both writers on the same page.

Part III: The Church

Naturally, the application of Trinitarian egalitarianism to the Church's hierarchical structure follows from its application to marriage and the state. When the idea of egalitarianism is implemented in ecclesiology, the result is, predictably, a call for the collapse of authoritative hierarchy.[59] The collapse can manifest itself in two distinct though related ways: a rejection of clerical hierarchy (the most extreme form of which is found in the Quakers) and/or ecclesial unilateralism[60] (variations of which are found in both liberal Protestantism and Eastern

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[57] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 199.

[58] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 192-191.

[59] "We have also observed that the gradational view, if applied to church government, would favor more concentration of authority at the top, while the equivalence view would be more in accord with authority generated from the individual members of the congregation." Erickson. *Who's Tampering with the Trinity?,* 256.

[60] ."..it is possible to apply the concept of communion in analogous fashion to the union existing among particular Churches, and to see the universal Church as a Communion of Churches. Sometimes, however, the idea of a "communion of particular Churches" is presented in such a way as to weaken the concept of the unity of the Church at the visible and institutional level. Thus it is asserted that every particular Church is a subject complete in itself, and that the universal Church is the result of a reciprocal recognition on the part of the particular Churches. This ecclesiological unilateralism, which impoverishes not only the concept of the universal Church but also that of the particular Church, betrays an insufficient understanding of the concept of communion." Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Communionis Notio*, 8, (28 May 1992).

Orthodoxy alike). Moltmann, Boff, and Johnson all argue for the rejection (or at the very least

the fundamental restructuring) of clerical hierarchy on Trinitarian grounds.

Recall that Moltmann claims that an overly monotheistic conception of God justifies

oppressive ecclesial hierarchies.[61] The Trinity, on the other hand, "constitutes the church as 'a

community free of dominion.' The Trinitarian principle replaces the principle of power by the

principle of concord." He rejects an "episcopal" understanding of the Church, in which there is a

hierarchy that corresponds to "monarchial monotheism." He attributes inception of this system

historically to Ignatius of Antioch. For Moltmann, the problem with a hierarchical

understanding of the Church is that, when consensus of the faithful moves away from the

episcopacy, the only outcomes are "subjugation or excommunication."[62] Applying egalitarianism

to the problem, the organic alternative is that instead of an episcopal hierarchical order, the

Church ought to be simply "presbyterial and synodal."[63] It appears to be the case that,

effectively, Moltmann argues that there should only be one "class" of Christians that collectively

make decisions about Christianity itself. After making this point, Moltmann begins to discuss at

length the theology of Joachim of Fiore and the "ages" of the Persons, adapting it to his own

needs. While the ages of the Father (Old Testament) and the Son (Jesus' earthly ministry) are

characterized by grades of monarchical rule, he argues that the age of the Spirit is one of

community "without privileges and subjection, the community of the free."[64] According to

Moltmann, Church hierarchy is opposed to the freedom of its members, subjecting them to an

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[61] "Monarchical monotheism justifies the church as hierarchy, as sacred dominion. The doctrine of the Trinity constitutes the church as 'a community free of dominion.' The Trinitarian principle replaces the principle of power by the principle of concord." Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom,* 202. Moltmann is quoting G. Hasenhüttl, an Austrian theologian and former priest that was suspended in 2003 by the CDF under Ratzinger and was formally censured in January of 2019.

[62] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 200.

[63] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom,* 202.

[64] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 210-211.

outside will and limiting their individuality.[65] This does not mirror the Trinity, in which is found

freedom unfettered, since the Persons act and move without opposition to each other.[66] Building

off of Moltmann's idea of hierarchy as a matter of the one oppressing the many and applying it

to ecclesiology,[67] Leonardo Boff describes in greater detail what a Church informed by

Trinitarian egalitarianism would look like more concretely:

> The Trinitarian vision produces a vision of a church that is more communion than hierarchy, more service than power, more circular than pyramidal, more loving embrace than bending the knee before authority. Such a perichoretic model of the church would submit all ecclesial functions (episcopate, presbyterate, lay ministries, and so on) to the imperative of communion and participation by all in everything that concerns the good of all. Then the Church would in fact be 'a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit' (LG 4).[68]

Keeping in mind Boff's preferences for democracy over socialism, he could only be arguing for

a democratization of the Church.[69]

Contemporary feminist theology has run with the ideas of Boff and Moltmann. Its

representatives take issue with the way in which classical theism has supported patriarchal

domination and subordination in both the state and the Church.[70] The solution, says Johnson,

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[65] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 216.

[66] "An immovable and apathetic God cannot be understood as the foundation of human freedom.", Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 218.

[67] Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 152-153.

[68] Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 154.

[69] Boff is one of the sponsors of the "Catholic Scholars' Declaration on Authority in the Church," which states, among other things, that the "exercise of authority in our church should emulate the standards of openness, accountability and democracy achieved in modern society. Leadership should be seen to be honest and credible; inspired by humility and service; breathing concern for people rather than preoccupation with rules and discipline; radiating a Christ who makes us free; and listening to Christ's Spirit who speaks and acts through each and every person." Churchauthority.org, Wijngaard Institute for Catholic Research, 2019. Other notable sponsors encompassing a wide area of expertise include John J. Collins, Hans Küng, Thomas Doyle, and Tina Beattie. Interestingly, the Wijgaard Institute also manages womenpriests.org.

[70] "If there is an absolute heavenly patriarch, then social arrangements on earth must pivot around hierarchical rulers who of necessity must be male in order to represent him and rule in his name. This men do to the exclusion of women by a certain right, thanks to their greater similarity to the source of all being and power. The dissonance sounded by the fact that this supposed similarity lies in sexual likeness, while God is taken to be beyond all physical characteristics, is not noticed. Exclusive and literal imaging of the patriarchal God thus insures the continued subordination of women to men in all significant civic and religious structures." Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 36-37.

invoking Boff and Moltmann, is the doctrine of the Trinity.[71] For Johnson, the doctrine of the

Trinity supports "a different order of unity based on mutual personal relations and shared

responsibility."[72] The goal of Johnson's proposal is a community "in with all are one in shared

responsibility and participation rather than submission to the absolute ruler,"[73] a "community of

equals related in mutuality."[74] Similarly, for Lois Malcolm, Christ's revelation of the Trinity

coincides with the coming of a new community in which human distinctions are absent from the

order of things.[75]

Other more recently published works by theologians have taken up the arguments of Boff

and Moltmann.[76] One example is found in the writings of Peter R. Holmes, who suggests a

number of liturgical practices following from egalitarian Trinitarianism.[77] Another example is

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[71] "At its most basic the symbol of the Trinity evokes a livingness in God, a dynamic coming and going with the world that points to an inner divine circling around in unimaginable relation. God's relatedness to the world in creating, redeeming, and renewing activity suggests to the Christian mind that God's own being is somehow similarly differentiated. Not an isolated, static, ruling monarch but a relational, dynamic, tripersonal mystery of love — who would not opt for the latter?" Johnson, *She Who Is*, 192.

[72] Johnson, *She Who Is*, 197.

[73] Johnson, *She Who Is*, 209.

[74] Johnson, *She Who Is*, 223.

[75] "Far from reinstating a patriarchal order (or any other hierarchy for that matter) what Christ does—as the Son of God who is the Word and Wisdom of God uttered from eternity—is to establish a new community in which all people through faith and baptism are reborn into a new identity based not on human distinctions (e.g., gender, race, or ethnicity) but on the Spirit's power to create new life." Malcolm, *On Not Three Male Gods*, 245.

[76] "We cannot deny that the church is a distinctive form of human community in need of structure and leadership. What does a church look like when it mirrors the Trinitarian fellowship in terms of its leadership and structure? In this regard, Moltmann puts forward a notion for nonhierarchical church structures, which reflect his egalitarian model of the Trinity… Church leadership, therefore, needs to be molded into a social Trinitarian model of leadership which values equality and reciprocity among members." Hye Heo and Charles Fensham, *A Social Trinitarian Feminist Approach to Theology of the Cross in the Korean-North American Context*, 2014, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. 203, 210. See also David S. Cunningham, *These Three are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) and Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: DLT, 2000).

[77] James Merrick provides an interesting review of Holmes' work on this issue. "Occasionally the connection between Social Trinitarianism and his applications appears contrived. For example, how does canceling church the last Sunday of every month follow from the fact that God's being is relationally constituted? The removal of chairs so parishioners can express themselves through dance? Thus, I wonder whether some practices derive less from a social doctrine of the Trinity and more from imaginative deductions or contemporary trends." James R. A. Merrick, review of "Trinity in Human Community: Exploring Congregational Life in the Image of the Social Trinity," *Trinity Journal* 29, no. 1 (2008): 165–166.

Miroslav Volf"s "The Trinity is Our Social Program." Volf is unapologetically convinced that "the question is not whether the Trinity should serve as a model for human community; the question is rather in which respects and to what extent it should do so."[78] He argues that, since it is "unintelligible" to claim that there is any kind of hierarchy in the Trinity, we ought not structure societies with hierarchies either, especially ecclesial ones.[79] Stephen Holmes states that Volf's Trinitarian theology supports "the bottom-up free church ecclesiology that he is—and, incidentally, I am—committed to."[80]

Some theologians have also used similar arguments to advocate for Eastern Ecclesiology. By "Eastern Ecclesiology," I mean an ecclesiology in which the Catholic Church is made up of multiple particular, local churches, all of which enjoy an equality of authority and are held together by a moral unity. If there is primacy between churches, it cannot be had by one church over and against another.[81] While maintaining a hierarchy on the clerical level, Eastern churches themselves are seen as unilateral. Vladimir Lossky, for instance, creatively draws an analogy between the one God and the three Persons with the particular church and the Universal Church. According to Lossky, "the mystery of the catholicity of the Church is realized in the plurality of

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[78] Miroslav Volf, "The Trinity Is Our Social Program," 405.

[79] "Recently, voices have emerged contesting hierarchical constructions of the doctrine of the Trinity and advocating Trinitarian egalitarianism. Joining this growing group of theologians, I have suggested elsewhere that hierarchy is not necessary to guard either the divine unity or the distinctions between divine persons, and here I want to add that in a community of perfect love between persons who share all divine attributes a notion of hierarchy is unintelligible. Hierarchical constructions of the Trinitarian relations appear from this perspective as projections of the fascination with earthly hierarchies onto the heavenly community. They seem to be less inspired by a vision of the Triune God than driven either by a nostalgia for a "world on the wane" or by fears of chaos that may invade human communities if hierarchies are levelled, their surface biblical justification notwithstanding." Volf, "The Trinity is our social program," 407-408.

[80] Stephen Holmes, "Three Versus One? Some Problems of Social Trinitarianism," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 3, no. 1 (2009): 77-89. 83.

[81] "While the fact of primacy at the universal level is accepted by both East and West, there are differences of understanding with regard to the manner in which it is to be exercised, and also with regard to its scriptural and theological foundations." Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, *The Ravenna Document* (13 October, 2007), at http://www.vatican.va.

personal consciousnesses as an accord of unity and multiplicity, in the image of the Holy Trinity which the Church realizes in her life."[82]

Since marriage, the state, and the Church are, *de facto*, all communities built upon human relationships and historically exist in some kind of hierarchical order, all three are subject to restructuring along egalitarian lines. The removal of hierarchy in marriage, the Church, and the state has been argued for separately in the past. Trinitarian egalitarianism provides a three-pronged tool to attack all three points at the same time. Each prong is moved forward by a common thrust which will be examined before moving on to the final section. The thrust is based on Social Trinitarianism and a collapse of Trinitarian order by way of a particular interpretation of the doctrine of *perichoresis*.

Part IV: Social Trinitarianism

Social Trinitarianism is difficult to define since the authors that invoke it mean different things by the term. Minimally, it is simply the belief that the Persons constitute a divine *koinonia*, or community, and perhaps additionally, that this divine community ought to inform our own human societies.[83] Such a claim does not pose any apparent problems. However, some adherents of Social Trinitarianism subscribe to additional propositions, the four most important

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[82] Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, ed. John H. Erickson and Thomas E. Bird with an Introduction by John Meyendorff (Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 192. See also Jean Zizioulas, "The Church As Communion," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38 no. 1 (1994): 3–16.

[83] "The Trinity's *koinonia* or absolutely blissful communion of love presents itself as the ultimate ground and goal of all other such relations-in-communion. In a world where sharing and community have often tragically broken down, the *perichoretic* existence of the tripersonal God invites us to live in communion with each other and with our God. Because the divine life is one of total self-giving and unconditional sharing, human beings, because they are made in the divine image and likeness (Gn 1:16), are invited to exist in a communion and loving solidarity with each other and with the divine persons—an invitation and grace classically expressed by the climax of Jesus' high priestly prayer (Jn 17:26). Whenever human beings struggle to preserve the unity of families and communities and the unity between societies and nations and do so in a way that does not suppress personal distinction, they are in fact transcribing the Trinity's life into the moral commitment." Gerald O'Collins, *The Tripersonal God: Understanding and Interpreting the Trinity*, Second ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 2014), 179.

of which are outlined below. Subsequent to the exposition of the four points, this section shows

how the interlocutors with whom we have been dealing intersect with Social Trinitarianism.

In an attempt to formulate a fuller definition of Social Trinitarianism, Gijsbert van Brink

has identified four main tenets of its proponents. The first ("Three-Personal God") is that the

Father, Son, and Spirit are "three distinct and fully equal centers of consciousness who together

constitute the one God."[84] This first and most important point of the definition is shared by a

number of other theologians and philosophers.[85] Brink notes that some Social Trinitarians equate

"centers of consciousness" with "persons," though this is not always the case. On this point,

Social Trinitarians also generally reject the idea of the Persons as "three modes of being," a

notion made popular more recently by Karl Rahner and Karl Barth in an attempt to avoid the

problem of dual-personhood in Christ on account of His two perfect natures.[86] For instance,

Wolfhart Pannenberg writes that the Persons are not "different modes of being of the one divine

subject," but instead "living realizations of separate centers of action."[87]

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[84] Gijsbert van Brink, "Social Trinitarianism: A Discussion of Some Recent Theological Criticisms," 336.

[85] Cornelius Plantinga Jr. outlines his own, similar points on Social Trinitarianism "(1) The theory must have Father, Son, and Spirit as distinct centers of knowledge, will, love, and action. Since each of these capacities requires consciousness, it follows that, on this sort of theory, Father, Son, and Spirit would be viewed as distinct centers of consciousness or, in short, as *persons* in some full sense of that term. (2) Any accompanying sub-theory of divine simplicity must be modest enough to be consistent with condition (1), that is, with the real distinction of Trinitarian persons." Cornelius Plantinga, *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays*, eds. Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Library of Religious Philosophy; v. 1. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 22. Dale Tuggy claims that Social Trinitarians believe that "God contains three distinct minds, centres of consciousness, wills, or thinking things." Dale Tuggy, "Divine Deception, Identity, and Social Trinitarianism," *Religious Studies* 40 (2004): 285. "But what is the nature of the Persons, as ST conceives it? Put simply, the Persons are persons. That is to say, they are individual centres of consciousness and will, capable of entering into personal relationships both with one another and with created persons." William Hasker, "Objections to Social Trinitarianism," *Religious Studies* 46, no. 4 (2010): 422.

[86] "Karl Barth preferred to speak of three 'modes of being' (*Seinsweisen*) in God the Trinity. For his part, Karl Rahner proposed to specify the "personality" of the Three by the notion of 'distinct modes of subsistence' (*distinkte Subsistenzweisen*)." Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering, *The Trinity: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 110.

[87] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, v1 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 319. Pannenberg's use of the word "subject" here seems to be referring to the divine essence, though typically the term refers to one of the three Persons.

The second point ("Relational Ontology") states that the three Persons have the capacity to "freely love and commune with one another…which constitutes their personal subsistence."[88] The Persons "find their personal identity in their eternal perichoretic relationality."[89] Under this point, the distinction of the three Persons is a function of their relations, which are shaped by the *perichoresis* of the three. Taking relational ontology as their starting point for understanding the divinity, Social Trinitarians subsequently understand humans as the *imago Dei* in relational terms as well. Rather than holding that the rational soul is the properly "divine" part about human persons, their capacity for and possession of relations with others is seen as the principle way in which we are *in imago Trinitas*.[90] Elizabeth Johnson exemplifies Social Trinitarinism's affirmation of a relational ontology.

> Relation is the very principle of their being... At the heart of holy mystery is not monarchy but community; not an absolute ruler, but a threefold *koinonia*... the very essence of God is to be in relation, and thus relatedness rather than the solitary ego is the heart of all reality.[91]

This is at odds with Aquinas's conception of the Persons as subsistent relations, or Ratzinger's "pure relations."[92] Moltmann contrasts his position with that of Aquinas by saying that

> It is impossible to say: person *is* relation; [ST I. q40. a2] the relation constitutes the person… Person and relation therefore have to be understood in a reciprocal relationship. Here there are no persons without relations; but there are no relations without persons either. The reduction of the concept 'person' to the concept 'relation' is basically modalistic, because it suggests the further reduction of the concept of relation to a self-relation on God's part.[93]

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[88] Brink, "Social Trinitarianism," 336.

[89] Brink, "Social Trinitarianism," 336.

[90] "Instead of fixing the likeness to God in the individual's possession of a certain capacity, Moltmann defines the image in terms of relationships that correspond to the Trinitarian life. As imago Dei , human beings not only respond in love to God's gift of fellowship but are blessed with the possibility of expressing ecstatic and passionate fellowship toward one another." Joy Ann McDougall, *Pilgrimage of Love: Moltmann on the Trinity and Christian Life,* Reflection and Theory in the Study of Religion (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 115.

[91] Johnson, *She Who Is*, 216. The "solitary ego" referred to by Johnson is the classical, western idea of the single divine essence, or Moltmann's "monotheism."

[92] Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 214.

[93] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 173.

For Moltmann, the Persons are in some sense prior to their relations. There is a further major difference between Social Trinitarians and Aquinas and the medievals in that *perichoresis* (rather than the oneness of the essence itself) serves as the basis for intra-Trinitarian unity.[94]

Third ("Historical Re-orientation"), Western theologians have either ignored or not engaged with this interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity, and so a *ressourcement* is necessary to bring Social Trinitarianism back to the forefront of theological discussion.[95] The sources of the *ressourcement* are, principally, "Eastern" conceptions of the Trinity (as opposed to "Western" ones),[96] the familial analogy, and the scriptural evidence for *perichoresis*. Elizabeth Johnson is perhaps the clearest in advocating for a *ressourcement* into Eastern Trinitarian theology.[97] Moltmann, whose theology is representative of Social Trinitarianism according to Joy Ann McDougall,[98] also sets up a dichotomy between the Eastern and Western theological traditions, saying that the emphasis on the unity of the essence even goes so far as to become "sabellian modalism," which, says Moltmann, "was at times established church doctrine, and whether it has really been overcome even now is the question which the Eastern church still puts

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[94] "The unity of the Trinitarian Persons lies in the circulation of the divine life which they fulfil in their relations to one another. This means that the unity of the triune God cannot and must not be seen in a general concept of divine substance. That would abolish the personal differences. But if the contrary is true - if the very difference of the three Persons lies in the relational, perichretically consummated life process - then the Persons cannot and must not be reduced to three modes of being of one and the same divine subject." Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 175.

[95] Brink, "Social Trinitarianism," 336.

[96] The oft repeated phrase of Trinitarian Egalitarians and Social Trinitarians is that the West takes as their "point of departure" the unity of the divine essence, whereas the East focuses first on the multiplicity of persons. Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 201. This historical generalization is so filled with exceptions that it is hardly a truthful generalization at all. See Edmund Hill, *The Mystery of the Trinity*, Introducing Catholic Theology (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985), 115-117.

[97] "While the solitary god of classical theism is associated with a bare, static, monolithic kind of unity, a unity of divine nature, the triune symbol calls for a differentiated unity of variety or manifoldness in which there is distinction, inner richness, and complexity. How to envision such a oneness? Eastern theology points to it with the Greek term *perichoresis*, a word that signifies a cyclical movement, a revolving action such as the revolution of a wheel… divine life circulates without any anteriority or posteriority, without any superiority or inferiority of one to the other. Instead there is a clasping of hands, a pervading exchange of life, a genuine circling around together that constitutes the permanent, active, divine *koinonia*." Johnson, *She Who Is*, 220.

[98] McDougall, *Pilgrimage of Love*, 101.

to the whole Trinitarian doctrine of the churches of the West."[99] While advocacy of a

ressourcement is a common trait among Social Trinitarians, in reality it is not part of Social

Trinitarianism itself. One need not think that the theologians of the Western tradition have been

lax in their appropriation of social images of the Trinity in order to believe in the other

propositions.

Finally, the fourth point outlined by Brink ("Practical Relevance") states that the doctrine

of the Trinity "is intended to guide and inform Christian ways of viewing, experiencing and

acting in relation to God, ourselves, and the world."[100] In its most basic form, practical relevance

is something that really should be held by all Christians that profess the Trinity. After all, every

aspect of the Christian faith ought to impact the lives of Christians in some way, and this is truest

for the greatest of Christian mysteries. Many Trinitarian Egalitarians argue that the Trinity

should affect the way Christians relate to the world politically, specifically with regards to

societal structures.

Among the four claims common to Social Trinitarians, the assertion with the most

theological weight is the first; that is, that the Father, Son, and Spirit are three distinct and fully

equal centers of consciousness. Social Trinitarians are more uniformly committed to this than

they are to the other three statements. For instance, Vladimir Lossky sees the "plurality of

personal consciousnesses" in the Church as an image of the Trinity.[101] Moltmann (with Elizabeth

Johnson following behind) says that "the Trinitarian Persons are not 'modes of being'; they are

individual, unique, non-interchangeable subjects of the one, common divine substance, with

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[99] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 136.
[100] Brink, "Social Trinitarianism," 336.
[101] Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 192-193.

consciousness and will."[102] each Person, according to Elizabeth Johnson, must be "characterized by his own substantiality and intellectuality…"[103] Furthermore, feminist theologian Patricia Wilson-Kastner writes that the Trinity "is a unity of three centers of awareness and centeredness... who are also perfectly open and interdependent on each other... The "persons" of the Trinity are three centers of divine identity…" the persons exist in "eternal Trinitarian interconnectedness" (*perichoresis)*.[104]

As expected, it is difficult to fit any one figure into the box of Social Trinitarianism neatly, partially because Social Trinitarianism is difficult to define, and partially because it can be difficult to tell what some of the authors mean by what they say. It is easier, therefore, to examine their conclusions rather than all of their premises. Even so, this thesis proposes that there is discernible underlying commonality between Social Trinitarians and Trinitarian Egalitarians. Their argument relies on the idea that *perichoresis* itself negates the possibility of hierarchy or order in the Trinity. Furthermore, this lack of hierarchy is prescriptive, since we ought to always best reflect our creator(s?) in all that we do, especially when it comes to our relationships with each other.

Part V: *Perichoresis* and the Collapse of the *Ordo;* Summary

Perichoresis is an important theological term denoting the way in which things enjoy a close unity while remaining distinct.[105] The idea was originally employed by Gregory Nazianzus

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[102] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 171.

[103] Johnson, *She Who Is*, 207.

[104] Wilson-Kastner, *Faith, Feminism, and the Christ*, 126

[105] From greek "Περιχώρησις," Latin term *circumincessio*. F. L. Cross, "Circumincession," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church,* ed. E. A. Livingstone, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).

to describe the hypostatic union, but also the unity of the Persons of the Trinity.[106] It was further developed by Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus. The term can be translated from the Greek as "interpenetration" or "mutual coinherence." The following part of this section shows that egalitarians appeal to *perichoresis* as evidence of lack of an *ordo* among the Persons of the Trinity. For, if the Persons are so intertwined and inter-penetrating, with one in the other and all in all, one cannot say with any certainty that one proceeds from another in any kind of definitive order. On this view, the Persons are in a relation of mutual dependence, one which is also constitutive of their very being. Therefore, it is no more true to say that the Father proceeds from the Son than to say that the Son proceeds from the Father, or the Son "*a patre spirituque,*"[107] for that matter.

Moltmann sees the doctrine of *perichoresis* as a substitute for the problematic idea of God's unity in the one divine substance. Instead, the unity "must be perceived in the *perichoresis* of the divine Persons."[108] Otherwise, according to Moltmann, one cannot help but fall into Sabellianism or Arianism. Furthermore, there cannot be any order where there is interpenetration. Moltmann's contention is that the Father's place as the source of the divinity, that is, his monarchy, "has no validity" when considering the Persons in their perichoretic unity.[109] Each person is no more from one as from another, otherwise there would be

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[106] Using the verb *perichoreo*, Gregory says "the names being mingled like the natures, and flowing [perichoeo] into one another, according to the law of their intimate union." Gregory Nazianzus, *Epistle CI*, 4. in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Philip Schaff, Second Series. v7. (Grand Rapids, MIU: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 861. Greogry also uses the verb *perichoreo* to describe the Trinity. ."..the Godhead is, to speak concisely, undivided in separate Persons; and there is one mingling of Light, as it were of three suns joined to each other." Gregory Nazianzus, *Fifth Theological Oration: On the Holy Spirit*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Philip Schaff, Second Series. v7. (Grand Rapids, MIU: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 647.

[107] "We might say that Christ comes *a patre spirituque*, from the Father and the Spirit – though in fact it is better to avoid any undifferentiating 'and' in the Trinitarian structure altogether." Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 71.

[108] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 150.

[109] "It is true that the Trinity is constituted with the Father as starting point, inasmuch as he is understood as being 'the origin of the Godhead'. But this 'monarchy of the Father' only applies to the constitution of the

subordination.[110] Moltmann appeals to the different ordering of the Persons in Scripture as

evidence that no particular order ought to take precedence.[111] This is echoed by Elizabeth

Johnson, who proposes "alternative expressions"[112] of Trinitarian ordering.[113] Following this

idea, Wolfhart Pannenberg asserts that it is a mistake to view the persons as being only

constituted by "relations of origin," that is, as one proceeding from another in a particular order.

In a valid logical move, Pannenburg consequently rejects the *filioque* as being "inappropriate

because it describes the fellowship in the vocabulary of a relation of origin." The solution is

found in the doctrine of *perichoresis,* though this idea "has had only a limited impact because of

the one-sided viewing of the intra-Trinitarian relations as relations of origin."[114] Some, such as

Vladimir Lossky, take *perichoresis* so far as to deny any kind of individuality among the

members of the Trinity as well.[115]

Trinity. It has no validity within the eternal circulation of the divine life, and none in the perichoretic unity of the Trinity. Here the three Persons are equal; they live and are manifested in one another and through one another." Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 175.

[110] The contention that there is an absence of any order in the Trinity has interesting implications for the *filioque* controversy. "Even to say 'filioque' is to imply a remaining subordination of the Spirit. Even to say 'filioque' is to presume that a privileged dyad of Father and Son is already established, and that the Spirit then somehow has to be fitted in thereafter. This, we might say in latter-day paradoxical retrospect of Chapter 3 and its arguments, is the ironic 'Nicene' tragedy of the Holy Spirit." Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay on the Trinity*," (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 330.

[111] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 126.

[112] Such as Father-Spirit-Son or Spirit-Father-Son (as opposed to Father-Son-Spirit). Fox, *God as Communio,* 164.

[113] "Jürgen Moltmann has organized the rich scriptural data in a helpful way to show its witness to several orders of proceeding...the structure of the processional model carries an inherent difficulty. While affirming and promoting the equality of divine persons and their mutual interrelation, it nevertheless subverts this by its rigid hierarchical ordering. The Father gives everything and receives back nothing that could be considered ontologically essential. The Spirit on the other hand receives everything and gives nothing essential in return… When the model used, however, focuses on the procession of first to second to third, a subtle hierarchy is set up and, like a drowned continent, bends all currents of Trinitarian thought to the shape of the model used. Through insistence on the right order of certain processions, ontological priority inevitably ends up with the Father while at the other end of the processions the Spirit barely trails along, as we have seen." Johnson, *She Who Is*, 195-196.

[114] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 318-319. Joy Ann McDougall notes that "Moltmann does not subscribe to a narrow social interpretation of the imago Trinitatis in humankind because he predicates his analogy of fellowship in terms of the quality of relationships among the divine persons rather than the relationships of origin that constitute the persons." McDougall, *Pilgrimage of Love*, 119.

[115] "The notion of individuals" has "no place in the Trinity." Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 116.

Two ideas that are intimately linked with the Trinitarian egalitarian view of *perichoresis* are intra-Trinitarian mutual submission and/or dependence. The theme comes through clearly in Moltmann, who says that "the three Persons are independent in that they are divine, but as Persons they are deeply bound to one another and dependent on one another."[116] Similarly, Pannenberg states that "the relativity of fatherhood that finds expression in the designation 'Father' might well involve a dependence of the Father on the Son and thus be the basis of true reciprocity in the Trinitarian relations."[117] In short, the Father is seen as dependent on the Son because the Father cannot be the Father without the Son. So too, the Son cannot be the Son without the Father. The Persons of the Trinity are "interdependent on each other,"[118] relying on each other for their being. Interestingly, for Grenz, mutual dependence is carried over into mutual submission.[119]

Mutual inter-penetration/submission/dependence of the three Persons is the ground for the claim that human societies ought to be devoid of subordination.[120] Leonardo Boff explains it in the following way: "This is where faith in the Holy Trinity, in the mystery of perichoresis, of the Trinitarian communion and divine society, takes on a special resonance, since the Trinity can be seen as a model for any just, egalitarian (while respecting differences) social organization."[121]

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[116] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 172.

[117] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 312.

[118] Wilson-Kastner, *Faith, Feminism, and the Christ*, 126.

[119] "Likewise, the Father is dependent on the Son for his title as the Father. As Irenaeus pointed out in the second century, without the Son the Father is not the Father of the Son. Hence the subordination of the Son to the Father must be balanced by the subordination of the Father to the Son." Grenz, "Theological Foundations for Male-Female Relationships," 618.

[120] "If, on the basis of salvation history and the experience of salvation, we have to recognize the unity of the triune God in the perichoretic at-oneness of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, then this does not correspond to the solitary human subject in his claim to lordship over the world. It only corresponds to a human fellowship of people without privileges and without subordinances." Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 158.

[121] Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 11. See also Elizabeth Johnson, "Trinity: To Let the Symbol Sing Again," 309. "The idea that Trinitarian life is fundamentally dancing in which the "three" interact as equal partners in creative Love is evocative… Herein lies the inspiration of the communion of the Trinity for human community, as well as its prophetic challenge to human relations and social structures that subordinate and marginalize."

Boff, as was already shown, applies the "perichoretic model" to the church as well, saying that "all ecclesial functions" ought to be under the imperative of the greater community.[122] Perhaps the weightiest of testimonies for a *perichorectic* ecclesiology is given by the Metropolitan of Pergamon, Jean Zizioulas. "Infallibility," says Zizioulas, "appears in the Spirit to be a dynamic, circular movement. It does not repose statically on any structure or ministry," that is, it is not proper to the most prominent member of the hierarchy, "but it expresses itself through a certain ministry by a dynamic *perichoresis* in and through the whole body."[123] Regardless of exactly what Zizioulas has in mind here, Patricia A. Fox concludes from these statements that they necessitate a dramatic restructuring of the Church hierarchy along "Trinitarian" lines.[124] Fox's interpretation seems to be an apt interpretation, since Zizilouas also says "all pyramidal notions of Church structure vanish in the ecclesiology of communion. There is *perichoresis* of ministries, and this applies also to the ministry of unity."[125]

The above section shows that contemporary theological discussion is all but buzzing with Trinitarian reflection and interest in marriage, the state, and the Church. The fundamental proposition at work is that, consequent to the revelation of God as Trinity, societies on every level ought not to be structured hierarchically. The moral imperative is a result of a necessity to mirror that interpenetrating communion found within the Holy Trinity, where there is no greater

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[122] Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 154. A large portion of this passage is quoted on page 18 of this paper.

[123] He continues, "Thus a layman in his membership in the body, which is by definition charismatic, can point to the Truth by contesting the bishop's deviation from it. Yet if this is done in the Spirit, it can only happen by a constant strengthening of the bond of participation in the community." Jean Zizioulas, "Pneumatological Dimension of the Church," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 1 (1974): 153-154. It should be noted that there is a way in which Zizioulas can be interpreted in a decidedly Catholic way on this point, since the Church of course acknowledges the infallibility of anyone who assents to a mystery of the faith. However, the infallibility of such a member of the Church is a function of their participation with the head and source of that infallibility properly speaking, and is not their participation in the larger community *per se*. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), 889-892.

[124] Fox, *God as Communion*, 77-78.

[125] Zizioulas, "The Church As Communion," 10.

or lesser, before or after, first or second. Practical implications of Trinitarian egalitarianism are more difficult to elucidate, but there is a consensus among the aforementioned authors that 1) husbands should not or do not enjoy greater authority than their wives, 2) civil societies ought to be structured on socialistic/communistic or basic democratic models, and 3) the Church should either not admit of an ecclesiastical hierarchy with a sole primacy belonging to one on earth, and/or individual churches should not be subject to a single authority over and against any others.[126]

It is the principle claim of this thesis that the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be used to support the proposals mentioned above. Rather, the *ordo* of the Trinitarian processions is the *ratio* of created hierarchy, and therefore the essential equality of the Persons of the Trinity neither negates nor proscribes hierarchical structures in marriage, the state, and the Church. However, it remains to be seen whether or not these claims can be substantiated. In order to resolve this problem, the next section lays the foundation for the thesis argument by locating the *ordo* of the processions in the theological tradition of the Church.

Section II: Evidence from the Tradition

Introduction: A Definition of "Order"

Before examining the evidence for the *ordo trinitatis* in the tradition, it is first necessary to define order and distinguish it from other notions commonly associated with it, namely

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[126] The philosophical and logical errors of the aforementioned authors have been glossed over in the present section so as to avoid distracting from my intent: to present their thoughts clearly and succinctly. Their mistakes will be addressed briefly in section three after a sufficient demonstration of the theological weaknesses of their arguments on Trinitarian grounds has been given.

priority, distinction, and the particular principle of an order (*ratio ordinis*). A distinction between hierarchy and order is also offered.

"Order," to use a spatial analogy, refers to the arrangement of things in a way that serves some end. It requires the division of a whole through distinctions. The kind of order is determined by a particular principle. For instance, an orderly room is one where the objects within the room are placed in a way that facilitates good living. The priority and posteriority that exists among the objects is determined by the principle of order. In a bedroom, one might give priority to the bed and place it in the best possible position first (since it was the greatest impact on good living), with the other items (dresser, desk, bookshelf, etc.) following therefrom. This type of order does not admit of a hierarchy of nature (beds are not in themselves more important than desks), but a hierarchy relative to some accidental principle (beds are more important than desks for living well).

An order that does admit of a hierarchy of essence is the order of nature. Angels, by nature, are superior to man, since they are created in greater similarity to God, whose essence is not distinct from existence. Moreover, man is superior by nature to animals, animals to plants, plants to non-living beings, and so on. If there is order in the Trinity, it cannot be one of a hierarchy of essence. Otherwise, the consubstantiality of the Persons, or their equality of essence, is lost.[127] An orthodox conception of the order of the Trinity must therefore have something other

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[127] "Equality is measured by greatness. In God greatness signifies the perfection of nature, as above explained (Article [1], ad 1), and belongs to the essence. Thus equality and likeness in God have reference to the essence; nor can there be inequality or dissimilitude arising from the distinction of the relations." *Summa theologiae,* I, q. 42, a. 4, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province.

than nature as we understand it in terms of essence as its principle of order. According to the Fathers, that principle by which we determine the order of nature of the Trinity is origin.[128]

Part I: Patristic Fathers

The purpose of this section is to show that order in the Trinity is an (until recently) uncontested truth of Catholic doctrine,[129] and one that belongs to what theologians commonly classify as "*theologice certa*" or in the very least as a "*sententia communis*."[130] Still, detailed Trinitarian discussion in very early Christianity is relatively hard to come by, and one must be cautious not to adopt any pre-Nicene subordinationism (as arguably found in Justin and Origen) while looking for evidence of an *ordo trinitatis*. However, Newman's Assimilating Power of Dogmatic Truth is applicable here; the words of earlier heretics show up in the works of later doctors.[131] One need not defend the orthodoxy of every author if the particular ideas under discussion reappear in those whose orthodoxy is unquestionable. So, while many of the following figures expressed some views that have since been found to be heterodox, we must take each point at face value and glean from it what is good. The section proceeds in a loose chronological order, beginning with the early Christian apologists, moving through the rich

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[128] "There must likewise be order according to origin, without priority; and this is called the 'order of nature': in the words of Augustine, "not whereby one is prior to another, but whereby one is from another." *Summa theologiae,* I, q. 42, a. 3, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York, 1947).

[129] Protestant theologians writing not long after Aquinas maintained this doctrine as well. "This is, therefore, the order, according to which the persons of the Godhead exist: The Father is the first person, and as it were, the fountain of the divinity of the Son and Holy Spirit, because the Deity is communicated to him of no one; but he communicates the Deity to the Son and Holy Spirit. The Son is the second person, because the Deity is communicated to him of the Father, in the eternal generation. The Holy Ghost is the third person, because the Deity is communicated to him from the Father and the Son, in the eternal spiration of procession." Zacharias Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, in The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1954). 135.

[130] For an explanation of theological grades of certainty and their corresponding theological notes, see Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*. 4th ed. (Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books and Publishers, 1974), 9-10.

[131] John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. New Ed., ed. Charles Frederick Harrold (New York: Longmans, Green, 1949), chapter 8.

theology of the Cappadocians, and ending at the height of the tradition on the *ordo trinitatis* with the scholastics.

The earliest extra-biblical source for the ordering of the Persons comes from Justin Martyr. Speaking in a way that might sound somewhat unsettling to today's readers (or readers in the fifth century, for that matter), Justin attributes a first, second, and third place to the Father, Son, and Spirit respectively. The language of ordering appears most notably in the First Apology within an explanation for the worship of the "crucified man," who is in "a place second to the unchangeable and eternal God," with "the prophetic Spirit in the third."[132] In addition, Justin frequently refers to the Father alone as the one "above whom there is no other God."[133] Within this order, expressed numerically, the Father holds the capital place. This idea is repeated by Irenaeus, who says "he [who] is the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, above whom there is no other God, nor initial principle, nor power, nor pleroma,—He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ..."[134] Origen seems to agree with the placement of the Father

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[132] "We reasonably worship Him, having learned that He is the Son of the true God Himself, and holding Him in the second place, and the prophetic Spirit in the third, we will prove. For they proclaim our madness to consist in this, that we give to a crucified man a place second to the unchangeable and eternal God, the Creator of all; for they do not discern the mystery that is herein, to which, as we make it plain to you, we pray you to give heed." Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 13, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Philip Schaff. v1. (Grand Rapids, MIU: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 436. Later on, Justin discusses how Plato's ordering was related to the Trinity. "Which things Plato reading, and not accurately understanding, and not apprehending that it was the figure of the cross, but taking it to be a placing crosswise, he said that the power next to the first God was placed crosswise in the universe. And as to his speaking of a third, he did this because he read, as we said above, that which was spoken by Moses, 'that the Spirit of God moved over the waters.' For he gives the second place to the Logos which is with God, who he said was placed crosswise in the universe; and the third place to the Spirit who was said to be borne upon the water, saying, 'And the third around the third.'" Justin, *First Apology*, 60, 488.

[133] "Then I replied, 'I shall attempt to persuade you, since you have understood the Scriptures, [of the truth] of what I say, that there is, and that there is said to be, another God and Lord subject to the Maker of all things; who is also called an Angel, because He announces to men whatsoever the Maker of all things—above whom there is no other God—wishes to announce to them.'" Justin Martyr, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 56, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Philip Schaff. v1. (Grand Rapids, MIU: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 595. Hippolytus echoes, saying that the Father is "above all," the Son is "through all," and the Holy Spirit is "in all." Hippolytus, *Against the Heresy of One Noetus*, 14, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Philip Schaff, v1. (Grand Rapids, MIU: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 556.

[134] Ignatius of Antioch, *Against Heresies*. I, 22, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Philip Schaff. v1. (Grand Rapids, MIU: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 912.

as well.[135] Similarly, Christ appears to have a place over the Holy Spirit. Putting the matter in

non-ideal language in a proof of the divinity of Christ, Novatian asserts that "Christ is greater

than the Paraclete, because the Paraclete would not receive from Christ unless He were less than

Christ. But the Paraclete being less than Christ, moreover, by this very fact proves Christ to be

God."[136] On the face of things, it is hard to imagine a statement that might better exemplify what

we now consider to be subordinationism.[137] However, Novatian goes on to locate these relations

of greater and lesser "in this economy," that is, in the economy of salvation as opposed to within

God himself. What is perhaps more interesting is that Novatian uses the order of the Son and

Father as the first (and therefore in his mind the most apparent) premise for proving their real

distinction in the face of the unity of God.

> "For thus they say, if it is asserted that God is one, and Christ is God, then say they, if the Father and Christ be one God, Christ will be called the Father. Wherein they are proved to be in error, not knowing Christ, but following the sound of a name; for they are not willing that He should be the second person after the Father, but the Father Himself. And since these things are easily answered, few words shall be said. For who does not acknowledge that the person of the Son is second after the Father…"[138]

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[135] "One axiom is, 'In the beginning was the Word,' a second, 'The Word was with God,' and then comes, 'And the Word was God.' The arrangement of the sentences might be thought to indicate an order; we have first 'In the beginning was the Word,' then, 'And the Word was with God,' and thirdly, 'And the Word was God,' so that it might be seen that the Word being with God makes Him God." Origen, *Commentary on John*, II. 1, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Philip Schaff. v9. (Grand Rapids, MIU: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 323. "Origen, in conscious or unconscious rivalry of contemporary theological schemes, places God the Father at the top of a hierarchy of spiritual entities." Kellen Plaxco, *Didymus the Blind, Origen, and the Trinity*, (2016), ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. 57.

[136] Novatian takes for granted the divinity of the Paraclete and says everyone else does the same. Novatian, *Treatise on the Trinity*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Philip Schaff. v5. (Grand Rapids, MIU: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 26.

[137] Elsewhere Novatian also speaks of "degrees of reciprocal transfer" among the Trinitarian Persons. "The true and eternal Father is manifested as the one God, from whom alone this power of divinity is sent forth, and also given and directed upon the Son, and is again returned by the communion of substance to the Father. God indeed is shown as the Son, to whom the divinity is beheld to be given and extended. And still, nevertheless, the Father is proved to be one God; while by degrees in reciprocal transfer that majesty and divinity are again returned and reflected as sent by the Son Himself to the Father, who had given them; so that reasonably God the Father is God of all, and the source also of His Son Himself whom He begot as Lord." Novatian, *Treatise on the Trinity*, 31.

[138] Novatian, *Treatise on the Trinity*, 26.

Novatian's reply to this familiar objection to the Trinity is ultimately scriptural and based on faith. After rhetorically asserting what the faithful all hold to be true, namely, that the Son is second to the Father (and therefore distinct), he goes on to provide scriptural evidence for the faith claim. His citations are almost all from the Gospel of John; they are those commonly associated with distinguishing the Father and the Son.[139] For Novatian, order and distinction are intimately connected. Athenagoras claims as much when he says that the Father, Son, and Spirit have their "power in union and their distinction in order."[140] Tertullian, to whom the tradition owes a great debt with respect to Trinitarian theology, also affirmed an order with the Father as the Source, or the first.[141]

These are the words of some of the Church's earliest writers on the matter. They were tasked with interpreting Scripture and explaining it to Christianity's enemies, as well as those that believed and continued to seek understanding. The Cappadocians had a different position in history and sought to systematize with greater accuracy the doctrines of the Trinity. In general, the project of the Cappadocians was to mitigate the apparent contradictions of the Faith with the Greek philosophical tradition that they encountered in their studies, and in so doing defend the Faith from rationalism. Perhaps the greatest problem they faced was the reconciliation of the unity and distinction of the Trinity. It is here that we will leave the air of subordinationism

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[139] In the order they are given by Novatian: Jn 6:38; 14:28; 20:17; 8:18; 12:28; 17:5; 11:42; 17:3

[140] "Who, then, would not be astonished to hear men who speak of God the Father, and of God the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and who declare both their power in union and their distinction in order, called atheists?" Athenagoras, *A Plea for Christians*, 10, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Philip Schaff. v2. (Grand Rapids, MIU: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 293.

[141] "we declare that the Son is a prolation from the Father, without being separated from HIm. For God sent forth the Word, as the Paraclete also declares, just as the root puts forth the tree, and the fountain the river, and the sun the ray… Now the Spirit indeed is third from God and the Sonl just as the fruit of the tree is third from the root, or as the stream out of the river is third from the fountain, or as the apex of the ray is third from the sun. Nothing, however, is alien from that original source whence it derives its own properties. In like manner the Trinity, flowing down from the Father through intertwined and connected steps, does not at all disturb the *Monarchy*, whilst it at the same time guards the state of the *Economy*. Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean*, 8 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Philip Schaff. v3. (Grand Rapids, MIU: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 1333.

behind, but at the same time enter into a more difficult struggle of maintaining order in the face of unequivocal, explicit consubstantiality.

Beginning with Basil, in *De Spiritu Sancto*, he asks "In what sense do they say that the Son is 'after the Father;' later in time, or in order, or in dignity?"[142] Of the three terms he lists (time, order, and dignity), he clearly argues against the first and third having any bearing on our understanding of the order of the Persons. For, there is no time when either the Son or the Father were not, and the Son cannot be said to be lesser in dignity than the Father if the Son is indeed consubstantial with the Father. However, Basil seems to stay silent on the second term. He never uses the word "order" again in that chapter. Perhaps he considered all the terms to be synonyms, and in rejecting the first and third he rejected the second. That is unlikely given his other thoughts on the matter. In the same text he goes on to say that "the superior remoteness of the Father is really inconceivable, in that thought and intelligence are wholly impotent to go beyond the generation of the Lord..." as if to say that the Father is more remote or distant than the Son, but in some inconceivable and unimaginable way. He is referring to the doctrine of the monarchy of the Father, which he defends later.[143] Interestingly, Basil also takes issue with the "sub-numeration" of Justin Martyr, claiming that those who speak of a "first and second and third" are, perhaps unknowingly, advocating for a polytheistic theology.[144] However, while Basil does not find Justin's language appropriate for describing the mystery of the Trinity, he is careful not

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[142] Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, 6, 14, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Philip Schaff. Series II, v8. (Grand Rapids, MIU: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 155.

[143] "Thus the way of the knowledge of God lies from One Spirit through the One Son to the One Father, and conversely the natural Goodness and the inherent Holiness and the royal Dignity extend from the Father through the Only- begotten to the Spirit. Thus there is both acknowledgment of the hypostases and the true dogma of the Monarchy is not lost." Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, 18, 46.

[144] "They on the other hand who support their sub-numeration by talking of first and second and third ought to be informed that into the undefiled theology of Christians they are importing the polytheism of heathen error." Basil, *On the Holy Spirit,* 18, 46.

to throw the baby out with the bathwater; he still upholds the order, but only the "order prescribed by the Lord,"[145] that is, the order of the processions signified by their typical enumeration: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[146] Basil is adamant in preserving the order of the Persons given by Christ and even points out that, in passages such as 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 (where Paul invokes the Persons in a different order), he explains that "just because the Apostle… mentions the Spirit First, and the Son second, and God the Father third, do not assume that he has reversed the rank."[147] He has strong words for those who alter the order given by Christ: "He who confuses this order will be no less guilty of transgressing the law than are the impious heathen."[148] For Basil, the *ordo* is a matter of strict faith, but it does not injure or harm the consubstantiality and equal dignity of the Persons.

Gregory Nazianzen is equally concerned with avoiding tritheism or inferiority in the Trinity. He struggles, though, to understand how to profess both order and equality at the same time.

> I should like to call the Father the greater, because from Him flows both the Equality and the being of the Equals (this will be granted on all hands), but I am afraid to use the word Origin, lest I should make Him the Origin of Inferiors, and thus insult Him by precedencies of honour. For the lowering of those Who are from Him is no glory to the Source. Moreover, I look with suspicion at your insatiate desire, for fear you should take hold of this word Greater, and divide the Nature, using the word greater in all senses, whereas it does not apply to the Nature, but only to Origination. For in the Consubstantial Persons there is nothing greater or less in point of Substance.[149]

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[145] "Who could be so rash as to reject the Lord's commandment, and boldly devise an order of his own for the Names?" Basil, *Letter CCLI*, 4, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Philip Schaff. Series II, v8. (Grand Rapids, MIU: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 802.

[146] Matthew 28:19. According to Gregory of Nyssa, the order of this formulation is not arbitrary. ."..In consequence of the Father being a conception prior to the Son (as the Faith truly teaches), the order of the names themselves must be arranged so as to correspond with the value and order of that which underlies them..." Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, I, 39, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Philip Schaff. Series II, v5. (Grand Rapids, MIU: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 181. Jesus reveals the Trinity as Father, Son, and Spirit, because the Son proceeds from the Father and the Spirit through the Son.

[147] Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, 16, 37.

[148] Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, 18, 46.

[149] Gregory Nazianzus, *The Oration on Holy Baptism*, 43, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Philip Schaff. Series II, v7. (Grand Rapids, MIU: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 748.

Each of the two Cappadocian companions acknowledged the difficulty at hand. While neither were comfortable with Justin's formulation as it is too readily interpreted as being incompatible with consubstantiality, both continued to affirm the order of the Persons and maintained the Father as the Source or Origin. Gregory of Nyssa, on the other hand, more confidently claims that all three Persons (though speaking specifically about the Holy Spirit, who is "third in the order of the transmission") are complete in their "Supreme Goodness" (divinity), and, "except for the distinction of order and Person, no variation in any point is to be apprehended."[150] Again, just as their predecessors affirmed, the Trinitarian order of Persons is intimately connected with their distinction, for the distinctions of the Persons are based on their relations, and their relations are a function of their ordered procession.

Augustine is in great continuity with the Cappadocians on the order of the Trinity as a function of their distinctions in origin and the consubstantiality of the Persons.

> "He [the Son] was not sent in respect to any inequality of power, or substance, or anything that in Him was not equal to the Father; but in respect to this, that the Son is from the Father, not the Father from the Son; for the Son is the Word of the Father, which is also called His wisdom." He did not however say, "whom the Father will send from me" as he had said whom I will send from the Father (Jn 15:26), and thereby he indicated that the source of all godhead, or if you prefer it, of all deity, is the Father. So the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son is traced back, on both counts, to him of whom the Son is born."[151]

Part II: Aquinas

Aquinas, having been steeped in Scripture and the writings of the Fathers, continued to develop and systematize the Trinitarian theology that came before him. Aquinas's most famous

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[150] Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Holy Spirit*, in N*icene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Philip Schaff. Series II, v5. (Grand Rapids, MIU: Christian Classics Ethereal Library). This is because, "we cannot conceive of either [Father or Son] apart from their relationship with each other." Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, 6, 14.

[151] Augustine, *On the Trinity,* IV, 20, 27, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Philip Schaff. Series I, v3. (Grand Rapids, MIU: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 165.

contribution to Trinitarian theology is the redefinition of the divine Persons as subsistent relations. The key to his doctrine is that "the Persons and hypostases in God are distinguished by the relations alone."[152] which was itself a development of the Cappadocians' idea that, "except for distinction of order and Person, no variation in any point is to be apprehended."[153] Since both faith and reason dictate that God is utterly simple, the Persons themselves must be identical to their distinguishing factors (their opposing relations), and in turn each are identical to the divine essence. Nevertheless, for Aquinas, "there must be some order between them [the persons]," otherwise there could be no distinction between them.[154] Just as in the Cappadocians, the distinction and origin/order of the Persons are intimately connected in Thomas.[155]

The Angelic Doctor addresses the question explicitly in his *Summa*, where he says plainly that "in God order exists.[156] Aquinas views order as the logical necessity of origin in the Trinity. Origin is demonstrated by the fact that the Father is the principle of the Son and the Spirit.[157] Moreover, since "order always has reference to some principle," and "principle, according to origin, without priority, exists in God..." then "there must likewise be order according to

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[152] Thomas Aquinas, *De Potentia*, q. 8, a. 3, trans. English Dominican Fathers, (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1952).

[153] This maxim was also repeated by Augustine, whom Aquinas quotes more often than any other Pastristic father. "God is everything that he has except for the relations through which each person is referred to each other." Augustine, *City of God*, XI, 10, 1, in Gerald O'Collins, *The Tripersonal God,* 137 (Schaff's translation is equivalent, but O'Collins' translation emphasizes the role of the opposing relations. Anselm of Canterbury first put the formulation into scholastic terms: *"ubi non obviat aliqua relationis oppositio, nec relatio perdat quod suum est, nisi ubi obsistit unitas inseparabilis."* Anselm of Canterbury, *De processione Spiritus Sancti,* I, 2, in *Sancti Anselmi Cantuariensis Opera Omnia 2, ed.* F. S. Schmitt (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1968), 181.

[154] "So if from the one Person of the Father, two persons proceed, the Son and the Holy Ghost, there must be some order between them. Nor can any other be assigned except the order of their nature, whereby one is from the other." *Summa theologicae*, I, q. 36, a. 2, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province.

[155] "There is no order without distinction." Aquinas, *De Potentiae*, q. 10, . 3, trans. English Dominican Fathers.

[156] "Where plurality exists without order, confusion exists. But in the divine persons there is no confusion, as Athanasius says. Therefore in God order exists." *Summa theologiae*, I. q. 42. a. 3, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province.

[157] A principle is, simply speaking, "that whence another proceeds." *Summa theologiae*, I. q. 33, a. 1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province.

origin."[158] Careful readers no doubt will have noted an interesting and unique caveat that

Aquinas has introduced into the discussion. In order to safeguard the consubstantiality and

coeternity of the Persons, Aquinas maintains that the order that is found in the Trinity is an order

"without priority." That is, the kind of order of origin in God is unlike that of creatures, for in

God the principle is prior neither in time nor in nature to the procession. According to Aquinas,

there is real order in the Trinity, but that order is had by way of origin and not by any kind of

anteriority or posteriority. By making this distinction, Aquinas addresses the concern of Gregory

Nazianzus, who was afraid to use the word "origin" lest he deny consubstantiality. So, in the

Trinity, there is order of nature "inasmuch as one is from another; not one before another."[159]

The idea that there could be such a thing as an order without priority is, to put it simply,

"very mysterious."[160] So much so that many in the past have rejected the idea outright, saying

that there must be some kind of priority in the Trinity for there to be order. It may be the case

that Aquinas avoids the notion of priority because, if he allows it, he will be forced to accept

hierarchy within the Trinity.[161] Still, Thomas recognizes that there exists logical priority in God.

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[158] *Summa theologiae*, I. q. 42. a. 3, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province.

[159] Aquinas, *De Potentiae,* q. 10, a. 3. trans. English Dominican Fathers

[160] "We have then an order of origin without any priority, even that of nature. This is, of course, quite mysterious. Cajetan notes that many theologians admit a 'priority and posteriority of origin.' His reply was: 'Let them have this opinion, but let them be quiet about it.' He probably meant that they could hold this opinion inasmuch as there is a kind of priority and posteriority according to our imperfect method of understanding but not in fact, and that as far as possible we ought to try to correct our imperfect method of knowledge." Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Trinity and God the Creator: A Commentary on St. Thomas' Theological Summa*, Ia, Q. 27-119, trans Frederic C. Eckhoff. (Lexington: Ex Fontibus Company, 2015). 299.

[161] "it is necessary to observe that St Thomas distances himself from the idea of a 'hierarchy' within the Trinity. The hierarchy theme, linked to the reception of the works of Pseudo-Denys the Areopagite, won through in some quarters. For instance, St Bonaventure connects the universe of 'created hierarchies' to the divine hierarchy. For the Franciscan master, this divine hierarchy consists in the perfect Unity and Trinity in God, which implies an order within the communication of the Good. The Dominican theologian is more reticent about it, because the word 'hierarchy' connotes an inequality of degrees or levels, so it is incongruous to speak of a 'hierarchy' within the Triune God. He is very firm about this: between the divine persons, there is no priority whatsoever, neither in rank, nor in dignity, nor in any other way. The notion of principle enables one to avoid these ambiguities, and St Thomas remains strictly attached to it. It is by means of this notion (plus the related theme of order) that he describes paternity as a personal property, and the Father's unbegottenness: '"to be principle" is proper to the Father in so far

That is, priority according to our way of thinking as creatures, and here we might invoke

Gregory of Nyssa's idea of the "Father being a *conception* prior to the Son"[162] However, there

does not appear to be any creaturely reality that admits of real order without priority.

Gilles Emery explains the impact that Thomas's doctrine of the *ordo naturae Trinitatis*

has on Trinitarian theology as a whole:

> There is within the Trinity an 'order of nature' (ordo naturae), which does not imply anything like antecedence or posteriority amongst the divine persons, but purely a relation of origin: "if two persons, Son and Spirit, proceed from the one person of the Father, they must have some sort of order between them. And it is not possible to assign any but the order of nature whereby one person is from the other." (STI, q.36, a.2.) To deny any such ordering within the Trinity will lead to the construction of internal conflations which the distinctions in the Trinity should exclude. Doubtless more than it would for us today, the context for Thomas' understanding of such order is the order he can observe in the world, in human affairs, amongst the angels, and in the whole universe which shines with the beauty ordained for it by the divine wisdom. But the argument is not merely 'aesthetic,' but actually has a metaphysical value, closely tied to the idea of being: such an order is involved in every kind of distinction and plurality.[163]

On this reading of Aquinas, one cannot deny the order of the Trinity without also denying their

distinction, and by extension the Trinity itself. Moreover, Emery notes the great attractiveness of

Aquinas's system in that it recognizes the order of creation (*ordo creaturae)* as yet a further

image of God Himself according to the mystery of the Trinity. Just as we might hold that the

various perfections in creatures are participatory of God's Perfection in the single divine essence

(*ad intra*) and are caused by it, so too can we say that the distinction and ordering of creation as

proceeding via the simple act of God (*ad extra*) is participatory in the distinction and order of the

Trinity.[164] However, whereas our distinction also includes division and priority

(substance/accident, matter/form; time, cause, etc.), these do not obtain in God.

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as the Father is the principle of the Son through generation'." Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Francesca Aran Murphy, (Oxford: OUP, 2007), 159-160.

[162] Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, I, 39, 181. Emphasis mine.

[163] Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 287.

[164] "The exitus of the persons in the unity of essence is the cause of the exitus of creatures in a diversity of essence (*exitus enim personarum in unitate essentiae est causa exitus creaturarum in essentiae diversitate*)." Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas*, 58. The citation is from Aquinas' Commentary on the Sentences, I, d. 26, q. 1 pr.

Perhaps the most obvious way in which the *ordo naturae Trinitatis* has impacted creation is that it is, for Augustine and Aquinas, the reason for the order of the Divine Missions. "It is not proper that the Begetter, who begets of Himself, be sent, but rather the Begotten from the Begetter: truly this is not an inequality of substance, but an order of nature..."[165] If one accepts the classic principle that what God does *ad extra* is revelatory of what God is *ad intra*, then the order of the Divine Missions points immediately to the order of the processions.

Section III: Against the Doctrine of the Trinity as Supportive of Egalitarianism...

Part I: In Marriage

Recall that the marriage debate consists of two opposed camps, each employing the doctrine of the Trinity to argue either for or against egalitarian marriages. On the one hand, the complementarians assert that, since the Father exercises or occupies a place of authority relative to the Son and Spirit,[166] so too should the husband be understood to possess the place of authority relative to his wife. The second group, the egalitarians, claim that the equal dignity of the Persons as well as their mutual indwelling does not allow for one-way subordination in the Trinity, including the "functional" subordination of the complementarians. Moreover, mutual subordination in the Trinity is prescriptive for marriages, so spouses ought to mutually submit to one another.

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[165] Augustine, *An Answer to Maximinum*, II. 14.8, in *Arianism and Other Heresies: Heresies, Memorandum to Augustine, To Orosius in Refutation of the Priscillianists and Origenists, Arian Sermon, Answer to an Arian Sermon, Debate with Maximinus, Answer to Maximinus, Answer to an Enemy of the Law and the Prophets.* trans. Roland J. Teske, S.J., ed. John E. Rotelle, (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1995), 286.

[166] "The differences in authority among the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the only interpersonal differences that the Bible indicates that exist eternally among the members of the Godhead." Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 429.

In this section, I will argue that the complementarians are, in a certain sense, right to predicate authority to the Father differently than they do to the Son, but the authority (*auctoritas*) of the Father is a matter of appropriation, which is only made possible on account of the *ordo Trinitatis*. Furthermore, the Son cannot be understood as being subordinate to the Father in terms of authority, will, or function. For their part, the egalitarians cannot maintain their thesis of mutual submission of the spouses arising from consideration of submission in the Trinity. Moreover, while they are absolutely right to point out the equality of the Persons in their consubstantiality, this does not mean that there is no order among the Persons in their real distinction, which does indeed point towards created hierarchies like the family, even if there is no hierarchy within God Himself. The following claim from Thomas R. Schreiner represents the complementarian position:

> C. Kroeger objects that to make God the head over Christ is to fall into the christological heresy of making Christ subordinate to God. But this would only be a heresy if one asserted that there was an ontological difference (a difference in nature or in being) between Father and Son. The point is not that the Son is essentially inferior to the Father. Rather, the Son willingly submits Himself to the Father's authority. The difference between the members of the Trinity is a functional one, not an essential one…. This point is often missed by evangelical feminists.[167]

The problem with this claim is that, while it is true that Christ submits to the Father, He does so in His human will, not His Divine Will. Moreover, Christ's human will is indeed inferior to his Divine Will substantially speaking, as no creature is equal to God. Therefore, the argument is fundamentally flawed from the outset, as it fails to distinguish between the two natures of Christ. It is not the case that Christ (a name which itself denotes the humanity of the Lord) could submit to the Father in His Divine Will at all, since this would require a multiplicity of wills in the

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[167] Schreiner, "Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity," 128.

Trinity—a point which is foreign to the Church's tradition.[168] The same can be said of authority

in the Trinity,[169] though not without an important caveat.

Authority can indeed be attributed in a special way to the Father, but only on the level of

appropriation.[170] Authority in itself is had by God absolutely on account of His essence.

However, it bears a special affinity with the Father because of his unique relationship to the other

Persons as their ultimate source. Just as the work (or authorship, *auctoritas*) of creation is

appropriated to the Father on account of his innascibility, likewise authority (*auctoritas*) is

appropriated to Him as the *fons divinitatis*.[171] In his commentary on John, Aquinas makes this

appropriation on multiple occasions. For instance, he reads the first "with" in the Prologue and

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[168] "Reverting to the Scriptures, I shall endeavour to persuade you, that He who is said to have appeared to Abraham, and to Jacob, and to Moses, and who is called God, is distinct from Him who made all things,—numerically, I mean, not [distinct] in will." Justin Martyr, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 56. "All (the persons) are one nature, one essence, one will…" Gregory Thaumaturgus, *On The Trinity*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Philip Schaff. v6. (Grand Rapids, MIU: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 118. Thomas Joseph White, O.P., addresses the idea of obedience within the Trinity as found in the theology of Karl Barth. Early on in his treatment, White makes the concession that we might understand obedience in some metaphorical sense following from the Son's "receptivity" of the divine essence. Still, this relatively "benign (re)interpretation… does not imply any real multiplicity of wills in God…" Thomas Joseph White, "Intra-Trinitarian Obedience and Nicene-Chalcedonian Christology," *Nova et Vetera* 6, no. 2 (2008): 378-379.

[169] "If anyone will not confess that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have one nature or substance, that they have one power [*dunamis*] and authority [*exousia*], that there is a consubstantial Trinity, one Deity to be adored in three hypostases, or persons: let him be an anathema. For there is only one God and Father, from whom all things come, and one Lord, Jesus Christ through whom all things are, and one Holy Spirit, in whom all things are" Peter Hünermann, Helmut Hoping, Robert L. Fastiggi, Anne Englund Nash, and Heinrich Denzinger. *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 421. Denzinger translates *dunamis* as "might" and *exousia* as "power," but "authority" seems to be to be preferable considering *exousia* is the most common word used for "authority" in Scripture. In any case, the meanings are clearly related.

[170] "Appropriation is the name for the theological procedure in which a feature belonging to the nature of God, common to all three persons, is specially ascribed to one of the divine persons. This process aligns the persons' properties with their essential attributes." Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 312.

[171] "*Pater enim est fons divinitatis*." Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on II Timothy*, 4, 130, at www.aquinas.cc. "If, therefore, in the mission of a divine person the authority of the person sending be considered with respect to the person sent, only that person from whom another proceeds can send the other. Thus, the Father sends the Son, and the Son sends the Holy Spirit, not however the Holy Spirit the Son; and it is in this sense that Athanasius speaks. But, if in the mission of a divine person the effect for the sake of which the person is said to be sent is considered, then it may be said that the person is sent by the whole Trinity, since the effect is common to the whole Trinity. (For the whole Trinity produced the flesh of Christ and produces wisdom and charity in the saints). In this way Augustine understands the matter." Thomas Aquinas, *Contra Errores Graecorum*, 1, 14, trans. Peter Damian Fehlner, F. L., at www.aquinas.cc.

the order of the terms God and Word as signifying the "authority" of God the Father with respect

to the Word. "For we do not, properly speaking, say that a king is with a soldier, but that the

soldier is with the king."[172] Aquinas says much the same in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*,[173]

Contra Errores Graecorum,[174] and the *Summa Theologiae*, where he says, "it belongs to the

authority of the Father that He is from no one."[175] The Father's place in the *ordo naturae*

Trinitatis is what makes the appropriation of authority to Him possible, and provides the logic

for the *ordo missionum*, which the complementarians are right to affirm.[176] However, insofar as

the complementarians see the *ordo missionum* as subordination (even that of "function"), unless

they root that subordination in Christ's humanity alone as opposed to his divine Personhood

(which they do not), they must part ways with Aquinas and the tradition, for divine actions and

effects outside of God are performed and caused by all the members of the Trinity inseparably,

because the power of God proceeds from His one essence.

The complementarians, in an effort to defend the *ordo naturae Trinitatis*, have stepped

over the bounds of orthodoxy, or at least made a mistake in theological predication. The

egalitarians, though, have their own problems when it comes to their language of the Trinity.

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[172] He goes on to say that, "Although the Word has no beginning of duration, still he does not lack a principle or author, for he was with God as his author." Aquinas, *Commentary on John*, 1, 48, trans James Weisheipl, O.P.. Again, "and the Word was with God, indicates... the authorship of the Father in relation to the Word, according to Hilary."

[173] "Thus, He says in John (7:16): 'My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me.' Many things of this kind are discovered in the words of our Lord which establish in the Father the authority of the principle." Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, IV, 25, 2, trans. Charles J. O'Neil.

[174] Aquinas, *Contra Errores Graecorum*, 1, 14.

[175] *Summa theologiae*, I. q. 32. a. 3 ad 4, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province.

[176] This is how I read the following statement from Ware: "The Son was commissioned by the Father in eternity past to come as the incarnate Son. As Jesus declares in well over thirty occasions in John's gospel, he was sent to earth by the Father to do the Father's will. Could this be reduced merely to the sending of the incarnate Son to fulfill the Father's mission... ? Or should we think of this sending, this commissioning, as having taken place in eternity past, a commissioning which then is fulfilled in time?" Bruce A. Ware, "How Shall We Think About the Trinity," in *God Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents God*, ed. Douglas S. Huffman and Eric L. Johnson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 275.

There are two arguments that can be made against the egalitarian notion of "mutual submission" in the Trinity. Interestingly, the first is that, in their efforts to avoid hierarchy and subordination, they find themselves in the midst of both.

First, the very same argument against intra-Trinitarian subordination on account of divine simplicity can be made against the egalitarians when they advocate for "mutual subordination" in the Trinity. Subordination at all, unless understood in a purely metaphorical sense, cannot exist in the Trinity since it requires a multiplicity of wills. Moreover, if there really is mutual subordination between the Persons, then that subordination cannot be in the same respect for each Personal relationship. That is, the Son cannot be subordinate to the Father in the same way that the Father is subordinate to the Son, otherwise they would not really be subordinate to one another at all. The conclusion must be, then that there are at least four different relationships of subordination. So much for arguing against subordinationism. Second, the argument given by Grenz that the Persons are subordinate to one another because "the Father is dependent on the Son for his title as the Father,"[177] and so on with all the Persons is likewise problematic. First of all, it confounds the intentional order with the real order, the reality of things with the way in which we form concepts of them. Circling back to Aquinas, while we always conceive of a son being posterior to a father (both in time and in causality, and therefore dependent on him), there can be no such priority or posteriority in God. Relations of dependence in God cannot be said to exist, otherwise at least one subject divine would not be God, since relations of dependence are causal relations. Causal relations in God really would introduce the kind of priority, posteriority, and hierarchy that the egalitarians are so apt to shun. The further specification of mutual

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[177] Grenz, "Theological Foundations," 618. Erickson makes the same point: "Mutual subordination" is in the Trinity, since "Not only do the Son and Spirit derive their being from the Father, but they also derive it from one another, as does the Father from each of them." Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity*, 86.

dependence does not solve the issue. For, if there were mutual dependencies in the Trinity, they could not be dependent on one another in the same respect. While the baker and the surgeon are mutually dependent on each other for health, they are dependent under different circumstances (ordinary and extraordinary, respectively). Neither is dependent on the other for the kind of health that he himself can give. Furthermore, they are still the cause of each other's health. In God, the Persons are lacking nothing on account of their unity in the divine essence. They have no relations of dependence, but only relations of origin; these are constitutive of the *ordo naturae Trinitatis.*

It remains to be seen what implication the Trinity really has, if any, on Christian marriage. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to offer a complete Trinitarian account of the sacrament of marriage, it seems necessary to offer an alternative understanding after having argued against two major schools of thought on the issue. There is nothing that is novel in the following proposal, and it aims to be consistent with the Trinitarian theology of Thomas Aquinas and the larger tradition.

It has been argued that the Persons of the Trinity do not really submit to one another. However, all would agree that the Persons of the Trinity really do love one another. For, the Beloved Apostle himself says that "God is love."[178] Moreover, if "*amare est velle alicui bonum,*" and there are three *aliqui* in God,[179] then by their love the Persons really do desire the good and behalf of others. Such love is a prime model for the love that ought to exist between spouses, but this type of love (ultimately supernatural charity) is not unique to marriage. The Apostle exhorts all Christians to love one another with the love of God many times throughout his letters.[180]

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[178] 1 Jn 4:8

[179] "*Alia est enim persona Patris alia Filii, alia Spiritus Sancti*" *Quicumque Creed,* (DH 75)

[180] Perhaps most memorably in 1 Cor 13.

Where the Trinity does have something unique to say about marital love is in the analogy of the generation of the Son and the production of the Spirit with the generation/production of offspring in the conjugal union. Creaturely generation/production is an image of two procession in the Trinity, even though there is of course a far greater dissimilarity. In addition, there is an analogy between the Father as the Source of the Divinity and the human father as the source of the family. Social progress has not eliminated the custom that a man should be the one to "leave his father and mother"[181] and choose a bride for himself,[182] nor can it change the fact that he remains the active principle of new members of that family. This analogy gets at what must be the reason for why the Father chose to reveal himself precisely as a "Father" at all. Indeed, the Father has chosen his people,[183] and seeks to bring new life out of union with them through his Son and their Spirit.[184]

Part II: In Civil Society

Leonardo Boff and Jürgen Moltmann's arguments from the Trinity for egalitarianism can likewise be refuted by a proper consideration of the *ordo naturae Trinitatis*. The argument that they popularized may be simplified in the following way: Societies ought to model themselves after the Trinity. The Trinity is an egalitarian communion of Persons. Therefore, societies ought to be egalitarian communions of persons.[185] "Egalitarian" here means lacking hierarchy and

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[181] Gen 2:24, Matt 10:7, Eph 5:31

[182] Tob 7:11-12

[183] Hos 2:19-20

[184] As a final note, I believe that the analogy of Christ and the Church is a better model for marriage and more conducive to the fulfillment of the sacrament. *Casti connubii* presents a wonderful summary of the tradition on the nature and joy of a properly ordered marriage. For the relationship of the husband and wife in matters of authority, see DH 3707.

[185] Section I part II of this thesis explored what Boff, Moltmann, and their interpreters believe such a society might look like, at least in principle.

subordination.[186] We must object to the second premise on the grounds that, while it is true that there is no hierarchy in the Trinity, there is order and distinction. Furthermore, since there cannot exist a creaturely society that admits of order and distinction and not hierarchy, if we must mirror the Trinity in civil society, we will necessarily have order and hierarchy. In addition, Boff and Moltmann's advocacy of basic democracy and socialism as an imagine of the Trinity is unfounded, since democracies and socialistic societies are necessarily composed of many individuals with distinct wills. However, in God there is but one will; God is not a committee.

Section II demonstrated that the *ordo naturae Trinitatis* is a common and theologically certain Catholic teaching. The Church has always professed belief in the order of the Persons, but has at the same time wrestled with preserving consubstantiality in the face of the *ordo.* Aquinas argued that the *ordo* was one without priority, as it is derived from the subsistent relations of origin that constitute the Persons themselves in their distinction. Consequently, the *ordo naturae Trinitatis* is radically unlike any order we find in creation, since whenever there is both order and distinction in creatures there is also priority and hierarchy.[187]

It is not unreasonable to desire to model societies after the Godhead. If we ought indeed to structure societies after the Holy Trinity,[188] then we are necessarily obliged to structure them in a way that reflects the *ordo*. But, as creatures, we cannot have order without priority in at least some respect. Humans are not free to live in order without priority any more than they are able to live as omniscient deities; there is an infinite metaphysical gap that cannot be overcome. However, Christians can have a real participation in God's omniscience by knowing what they can know according to their own natures. The same can be said about man's imaging of the

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[186] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 158.

[187] As in the angelic hosts, for instance.

[188] I am not committed to this premise, but I will grant for the purposes of brevity.

Trinity in our civil societies. So, while we cannot have order without priority, we must have it according to some principle or principles. The real question then is what those principles ought to be, but this brings us out of the realm of Trinitarian theology, and so is beyond the present scope.

The view of Boff and Moltmann that basic democracy (in the case of Boff) and socialism (in the case of Moltmann) best represent the Trinity is another instance of their importing creaturely realities into the Godhead. Moltmann especially views the Trinity as being opposed to monotheism, with the three members being independent in Person and yet dependent in being.[189] Their independence, for Moltmann, is necessary to account for the freedom of the three subjects in God.[190] The perceived greater freedom and equality granted by democracy and socialism are supposed to better mirror the Trinity. However, it is erroneous to conceive of the freedom of the Father, Son, and Spirit as being in their capacity to choose apart from each other. On the contrary, "There are three free and intelligent subjects although they have the same nature, the same essential intellect, the same liberty, and the same essential love."[191] Unlike individuals in a human society, the Persons of the Trinity do not have different freedoms and wills that they choose the exercise in unison. Rather, all three have the very same will. Such has been the view throughout the tradition and affirmed by the magisterium of the Church.[192] God is not a committee. The one will of the divine Persons is a consequence of their one divine essence.

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[189] "The three Persons are independent in that they are divine, but as Persons they are deeply bound to one another and dependent on one another." Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 172.

[190] "The doctrine of the Trinity which, on the contrary, is developed as a theological doctrine of freedom must for its part point towards a community of men and women without supremacy and without subjection." Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 191-192.

[191] Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Trinity and God the Creator*, 155.

[192] "All (the persons) are one nature, one essence, one will…" Gregory Thaumaturgus, *On The Trinity*, 118. "Anyone who denies that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have one Godhead, one might, one majesty, one power, one glory, one lordship, one kingdom, one will and truth is a heretic." (DH 172). "We believe in the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one almighty God; and that in the Trinity the whole Godhead is the same essence, the same substance, equally eternal and equally almighty, of one will, one power, and majesty." (DH 851).

Therefore, there is no real analogy between democratic or socialistic human societies composed of a multiplicity of wills acting in service of the common good for the particular good of each member of the community. In God, there is already only one Act and one Good, which is had immediately and essentially by all the persons in virtue of their one divine essence. So, the Trinity cannot be used as a model for human societies because, in short, the Trinity is not a society.[193]

Something still needs to be said about Moltmann's opposition to what he calls "monotheistic monarchianism." His argument is that the doctrine of the Trinity actually contradicts monotheism, and consequently, monarchy. "Christian faith can then no longer be called "monotheistic" in the sense of the One God. God's sovereignty can then no longer be understood as the 'universal monarchy' to which everything is subjected."[194] For Moltmann, God is not a universal ruler because God is not one. He argues there are three in God that rule, that there are three divine wills that subject their wants and desires to one another, and the idea that there could be three Persons and one Will is modalistic.[195] However, it is manifestly clear that the Church has never seen monotheism to be contradictory to the Trinity (though of course it has dealt with the apparent difficulty). Furthermore, the doctrine of the Persons exercising one identical Will is just as secure in the tradition. Therefore, it is not inappropriate to speak of God

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[193] A society is not merely a group of persons, which can be said equally of a council and twins in the womb. A society is "the permanent moral union of two or more for the specific common good to be attained by their cooperative activity." Bernard J. Wuellner, "Society," in *A Dictionary of Scholastic Philosophy* (Milwaukee: Bruce Pub., 1956), 116. The members of the Trinity are not in a moral union because they do not have distinct wills. Moreover, they do not act by cooperation, as if they had different natures from which would spring their different powers.

[194] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 134.

[195] Hence his claim that "Sabellian modalism was at times established church doctrine; and whether it has really been overcome even now is the question which the Eastern church still puts to the whole Trinitarian doctrine of the churches of the West." Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 136. Zizioulas concerns, saying "This interpretation in fact prevailed in Western theology and unfortunately entered into modern Orthodox dogmatics with the arrangement in the dogmatic handbooks of the headings 'On the One God' followed by 'On the Trinity.'" Zizioulas, "Being as Communion," 40.

as the Monarch (*mono arche*, one ruler), since he really does rule creation (which is an act *ad extra*, and therefore also one) with one Will. Nevertheless, we need not hold that monarchy is therefore best under every circumstance.[196] Monarchy is, according to Aquinas, the most efficacious system of government, since "a united force is more efficacious in producing its effect than a force which is scattered or divided."[197] Yet, he acknowledges that monarchy is a double-edged sword, as a king is always only one choice away from becoming a tyrant.[198] For this reason, modern man has tended towards democracy, for

> if the government should turn away from justice, it is more expedient that it be a government by many, so that it may be weaker and the many may mutually hinder one another. Among unjust governments, therefore, democracy is the most tolerable, but the worst is tyranny.[199]

In the case of God's rule, however, we need not worry about it turning away from justice. For this reason, the Father's government is a monarchy, and he saw it fitting to establish a monarchy on earth through his Son.

Part III: In the Church

Part III Section I showed that Trinitarian Egalitarians also apply their arguments to the Church, concluding that the Church ought to be devoid of hierarchy which causes oppression and subjection. Moltmann proposed that the Church ought to be "presbyterial and synodal,"[200]

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[196] "But in matters merely political, as, for instance, the best form of government, and this or that system of administration, a difference of opinion is lawful. Those, therefore, whose piety is in other respects known, and whose minds are ready to accept in all obedience the decrees of the apostolic see, cannot in justice be accounted as bad men because they disagree as to subjects We have mentioned; and still graver wrong will be done them, if - as We have more than once perceived with regret - they are accused of violating, or of wavering in, the Catholic faith." Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical on the Christian Constitution of States *Immortale Dei* (1 November 1885), 48.

[197] Aquinas, *De Rengo*, I, 4, 23, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1949).

[198] "Both the best and the worst government are latent in monarchy." Aquinas, *De Rengo*, I, 5, 30, trans. Gerald B. Phelan.

[199] Aquinas, *De Rengo*, I, 4, 24, trans. Gerald B. Phelan.

[200] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom,* 202.

meaning that all Christians should be on more or less equal footing when it comes to the

management of the Church in matters both ecclesial and dogmatic. This is similar to Vladimir

Lossky's idea of the Church as the "Council of the Saints."[201] The Trinity, however, cannot be

used to support this view any more than it can be used to support egalitarianism in marriage or

civil societies, and for the same reason: there is order (without hierarchy or priority) in the

Trinity, which cannot be participated in by creatures except in an hierarchical fashion. In

addition, the Godhead cannot be said to possess a multiplicity of wills necessary for making

democracy an appropriate analogy for the intra-Trinitarian communion of the Persons.

Of course, the biggest hurdle that Trinitarian Egalitarians would have to overcome in

applying their thesis to the Church is the clear testimony of Scripture and the Magisterium.

According to both, the Church is a kingdom.[202] Furthermore, it has a King.[203] The Magisterium

has proclaimed as much all the way down to the present day. Indeed, various groups throughout

history have tried to argue for egalitarianism in the Church.[204] For, condemnations of Moltmann

and Boff's positions on the democratization of the Church are implicit in the condemnations of

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[201] "The mystery of the catholicity of the Church is realized in the plurality of personal consciousnesses as an accord of unity and multiplicity, in the image of the Holy Trinity which the Church realizes in her life: three consciousnesses but a single Subject, a single "Divine Council" or "Council of the Saints," a divine catholicity, if we dare apply this ecclesiological term to the Holy Trinity." Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 192-193.

[202] "For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you." Lk 17:21

[203] Isa 9:6; Jn 18:37; Acts 2:30; Eph 1:20-21; 1 Tim 6:15; Rev 9:16

[204] Consider the private judgement of the Montanists, the equality of priests and bishops according to Aerius, the rejection of Papal supremacy by the Orthodox, the conciliarism of the Gallicans, and Calvin's Presbyterian Polity. Speaking on the Reformation, Leo XIII writes in *Immortale Dei*, "Amongst these principles the main one lays down that as all men are alike by race and nature, so in like manner all are equal in the control of their life; that each one is so far his own master as to be in no sense under the rule of any other individual; that each is free to think on every subject just as he may choose, and to do whatever he may like to do; that no man has any right to rule over other men. In a society grounded upon such maxims all government is nothing more nor less than the will of the people, and the people, being under the power of itself alone, is alone its own ruler. It does choose, nevertheless, some to whose charge it may commit itself, but in such wise that it makes over to them not the right so much as the business of governing, to be exercised, however, in its name." *Immortale Dei,* 24.

Conciliarism/Gallicanism and affirmations of Papal supremacy.[205] *Quanta fraternitati* professes that

> although they [priests] have a common dignity, [their] rank is not the same: because even among the most blessed apostles there was a certain distinction of power along with a similarity of honor; and although the selection of them all was the same, nevertheless, it was given to one of them to be preeminent over the rest.[206]

That priests, bishops, and popes are equal in authority was condemned as an arch-heresy by John XII.[207] Pius II authoritatively rejected the idea that a council could overrule the authority of the Pope.[208] This is because the bishops, and all Christians, are subject to the authority and power of the Pope, just as all Christians and the Apostles were subject to Peter.[209] *Auctorem fidei* condemns as heretical the proposition that priests and bishops receive their power and jurisdiction from the community of the faithful (as is the case of elected leaders in democratic governments).[210] Trent declared that the Catholic Church is hierarchically structured. "If anyone says that in the Catholic Church there is no hierarchy instituted by divine ordinance that consists of bishops, priests, and ministers, let him be anathema."[211] The hierarchical structure of the Church is not a human invention, but willed by God and instituted by Christ.

Section IV: Objections and Replies

Having finished presenting the arguments of the interlocutors and applying the tradition of the *ordo naturae trinitatis*, the following brief section will outline a few of the most pertinent objections to this thesis. Some of the objections (as well as their replies) were alluded to

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[205] DH 2285
[206] DH 282
[207] DH 944
[208] DH 1375
[209] DH 1052
[210] DH 2602-2603
[211] DH 1776

previously in the paper, but it will be useful to represent them here as clearly as possible. The two objections to be addressed are that order necessitates subordination and that perichoresis obfuscates the *ordo*.

The first objection may be phrased in the following way: if there is order in the Trinity, then there must be subordination as well. However, there cannot be subordination in the Trinity, otherwise one or more of the Persons are not really God, but this is contrary to the faith. Therefore, there must not be order in the Trinity. Something like this is argued by Elizabeth Johnson, who says, "Through insistence on the right order of certain processions, ontological priority inevitably ends up with the Father while at the other end of the processions the Spirit barely trails along, as we have seen."[212] The defense for the second premise is the testimony of Scripture and the proclamations of the Church, especially at the Christological Councils. The defense for the first premise is simply that there is no way to understand the order of the Persons without some kind of priority inserting itself into our conception of the Trinity. There is no natural analogate to the order without priority found in the Trinity. Moreover, many of the champions of the *ordo naturae trinitatis* in the tradition have been retroactively declared to be spurious on a number of points.[213] Ought we not suspect that these theologians, who may have erred in their Christology, also may have erred in their Trinitarian theology? If so, then the *ordo naturae Trinitatis* is nothing but the shadow of an old heresy adhered to by some celebrated Fathers in their ignorance, but that is nevertheless wrong.

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[212] Johnson, *She Who Is*, 196

[213] Even the Cappadocians are accused of Neo-platonistic emanationism in response to their treatment of the processions.

However, it is not more difficult to affirm that, in God, there can be order without priority and subordination than to say that God is both Three and One.[214] That there is order in the Trinity without priority is a mystery, since it is at the heart of that greatest of Christian mysteries. Like the Trinity, order without priority is paradoxical and unimaginable,[215] but it does not contradict any of the truths of Revelation or reason itself. In fact, it follows necessarily from Revelation and the fact that the Persons are distinct in their relations of origin alone.[216] It is true that some Church Fathers like Justin may have understood the Trinity as being hierarchically structured, that is, admitting of an order with priority. Even so, by an act of faith, the Christian can and ought to affirm the one (order) without the other (subordination).

Rather than denying that there is an order in the Trinity (on the grounds that it would necessitate subordination), the second objection grants that there is order, but denies that there is only one kind of order. Instead of understanding the *ordo naturae* as simply being Father-Son-Spirit, some have argued that other orders are just as valid. For instance, Elizabeth Johnson (following after Moltmann) rejects what she calls the "processional model" whereby the Father is first and the Son and Spirit are second and third according to the order of the processions. Appealing to perichoresis, she argues that there ought to be "a different order of unity based on mutual personal relations and shared responsibility."[217] Moltmann argues that the Tradition has wrongly focused exclusively on the Father-Son-Spirit formulation given by Christ in Matthew

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[214] Or that the Son is God, the Father is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, but the Father is not the Son or Spirit, the Son is not the Father or Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father or the Son.

[215] This is as opposed to, as Johnson would argue, "an inherent inconsistency." Johnson, *She Who Is*, 197.

[216] Just as orthodoxy requires the affirmation that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God, but the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Father, the Spirit is not the Son, and the Spirit is not the Father, so too must we say that the Son is from the Father and the Spirit is from the Father and the Son, but the Son is not from the Spirit and the Father is not from the Son or the Spirit.

[217] Johnson, *She Who Is*, 197.

29:19. According to Johnson and Moltmann, there is good scriptural evidence that there is indeed

more than one order.

> When the totality of biblical witness is taken into account, it becomes apparent that theology has been highly selective in its focus on the Father-Son-Spirit pattern, for other options are also realizable. In a key Lukan passage, for example, it is not the Father but the Spirit who sends Jesus to bring good news to the poor and proclaim liberty to the oppressed (Lk 4:16-20). Jürgen Moltmann has organized the rich scriptural data in a helpful way to show its witness to several orders of proceeding. Before the resurrection the sequence reads Father-Spirit-Son… After the resurrection the order becomes Father-Son-Spirit… These various scriptural options make it possible to conceive of the trinitarian persons in different patterns of relation from a set series of sequential processions. Instead, the three interweave each other in various patterns of saving activity and can be spoken about in concepts such as given over and receiving back, being obedient and being glorified, witnessing, filling, and actively glorifying.[218]

To complete the argument, if it is the case (as has been said earlier in this thesis) that what God

does *ad extra* is revelatory of what God is *ad intra*, then the accounts in Scripture of the Spirit

seemingly sending the Son (for instance, at the Incarnation or at Jesus's baptism) reflect a

different and equally-valid *ordo*. For this reason, Moltmann gives the Trinity a new name: "The

Open Trinity."[219] It can be ordered in at least three ways; Father-Spirit-Son, Father-Son-Spirit, or

Spirit-Son-Father.

Responding to the objection, it must be pointed out that all these other orders are

formulated according to principles other than intra-Trinitarian origin. Moltmann himself notes

that the Father-Spirit-Son order is according to God's "delivering up and resurrection of Christ."

The Father-Son-Spirit order is according to the "lordship of Christ and the sending of the Spirit."

Finally, the Spirit-Father-Son is had according to the "eschatological consummation and

glorification."[220] Each of the alternative orderings, and even the Father-Son-Spirit order just

presented, are based on the works of God in the world. These are economic orders of the Trinity.

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[218] Johnson, *She Who Is*, 195.

[219] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 94.

[220] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 94.

The Father-Son-Spirit order, however, while also manifested economically, is based on God's

intrinsic ordering by way of origin within the immanent Trinity. This is the *ordo naturae*

Trinitatis, of which there can only be one if the Persons are truly distinct. The *perichoresis* of the

Persons cannot negate this, since *perichoresis* itself requires that there be truly distinct subjects

that co-inhere in each other.[221] The various other orderings of the Trinity not only pertain

principally to the economy, but to the second person of the Trinity considered in His humanity.

For instance, when Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit (Mathew 1:18-20), when He says He

has been sent by the Spirit (Luke 4:16-20), and when the Spirit descended upon Him at the

beginning of the public ministry (John 1:32-34), these pertain to the humanity of Christ. For, in

Luke, Jesus is speaking the words of the prophet Jeremiah, and likewise Christ was sent by the

Spirit in that His human nature was conceived by the same Spirit. Likewise, Christ's ministry on

earth (above all His dying and rising) are actions or sufferings proper to His humanity. Rather

than revealing that the Son proceeds from the Spirit, these verses reveal that the Spirit informs

Christ's human mission unceasingly from the very beginning. The Spirit is, then, in and with the

Son, but the Spirit does not send the Son according to His personhood. Instead, the gift of the

Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son at Pentecost only after the mission of the Son on earth,

authored by the Father, is complete. The tradition's incredible focus on the order presented in the

baptismal formula, then, should not be seen as a historical blunder (as it is by Johnson and

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[221] The only way for Johnson and Moltmann to continue with their thesis is to deny either the processions of the Persons or their distinction. Consequently, it seems that Johnson cannot help but deny both. Against this, Matthew Levering writes, "Johnson interprets the Trinity through the lens of power rather than of wisdom. The "order" against which Johnson - in calling for a social and theological ordering based upon her views of "women's reality" and human happiness - contends is in fact the biblical order of begetting and spiration. Since this order *is* the Trinity, it is not metaphorical speech but analogical. Johnson's withdrawal of the notion of 'order' from Trinitarian theology cuts off Trinitarian theology from its foundation in revelation, and constructs a myth." Matthew Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004), 172.

Moltmann), but rather as a testament to the Church's understanding of the importance of the immanent order of the Persons from the very beginning.

Section V: Summary and Conclusion

The first section of this thesis explored the contemporary arguments using the doctrine of the Trinity to support egalitarianism in marriage, civil societies, and the Church. Concerning marriage, the complementarians argued that the Father-Son relationship is one of a functional subordination on the part of the Son, and that wives should likewise be subordinate to their husbands. The equivalentists, on the other hand, argued that there is so such relationship among the persons, and rather than proscribing a hierarchical conception of the family, the Trinity supports one in which the spouses mutually submit to one another. Concerning the state, the interlocutors have argued that the relationship of equality in the Trinity should also inform how we structure our civil societies, and that democracy and socialism were the systems most conducive to the will of God since they more perfect image Him. Concerning the Church, the same figures argued that the doctrine of the Trinity does not support any kind of hierarchy; various practical measures were proposed for creating a more egalitarian Church. The final parts of the first section linked these arguments together with the common thread of Social Trinitarianism, as well as an appeal to the *perichoresis* of the Persons as a evidence of the lack of an *ordo naturae Trinitatis*.

The second section showed that, on the contrary, the *ordo naturae Trinitatis* is part of the *sententia communis*. The Church's greatest theologians, from Justin to Aquinas and beyond, affirmed the order of the Persons without denying their consubstantiality and distinction. Aquinas in particular played a pivotal role in reaffirming and systematizing this reality. The *ordo* is founded in the distinction of the Persons based on their relations of origin, an exists in a

paradoxical order without priority. Aquinas's interpreters, from Cajetan, Garrigou-Lagrange, and Emery, have all defended his explication of the doctrine of the *ordo naturae Trinitatis* to great effect.

The third section applied the writing of the Fathers and Aquinas to the egalitarian Trinitarians, demonstrating not only that the Trinity does not support egalitiarianism in marriage, the state, and the Church, since the Persons neither submit to one another or depend on one another for their being, nor are they a democratic society in a moral unity. On the contrary, the Trinity actually supports hierarchical structures simply speaking. For, creatures cannot partake in the *ordo naturae* in a completely non-hierarchical way. Scripture and the Magisterium, then, are not mistaken in their profession of the legitimacy of hierarchical governance and the preaching of the Kingdom of God.

The fourth section dealt with two kinds of objections to the *ordo naturae Trinitatis*. The first was that there cannot be such an order in God since it would lead to subordinationism. The second objection argued that *perichoresis* necessitates the acceptance of any order of the Persons, not only the classic order found in the Baptismal Formula. The first reply made the simple claim that the *ordo naturae Trinitatis*, while mysterious, is not any more mysterious than the doctrine of the Trinity itself, and in fact follows necessarily from the distinction of the Persons. The second reply showed that the different possible orders are founded on our creaturely perspective of God's saving actions in the world, whereas the fundamental *ordo naturae* is an intra-Trinitarian reality that cannot be obfuscated or negated by anything *ad extra*.

The doctrine of the Trinity, then, does not support egalitarianism since there is a real order of nature in the Trinity, and this order of nature is the *ratio* for all created order, including created hierarchies. Some hierarchies (such as in the family and the Church) are directly

ordained by God, but they are all a way in which man really participates in the mystery of the Trinity (granted, of course, that he is not otherwise opposed to Charity). Christians can and should embrace the *ordo naturae Trinitatis* as a valuable part of the Tradition of the Church— once that helps us understand God more fully and live in greater charity with one another.

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