

Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository

---

5-28-2021 10:00 AM

## Personhood, Particularity, and Perichoresis: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Identity and Faith Formation

Tabitha Petrova Edgar, *The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor: Badcock, Gary D., *The University of Western Ontario*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Theology

© Tabitha Petrova Edgar 2021

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Edgar, Tabitha Petrova, "Personhood, Particularity, and Perichoresis: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Identity and Faith Formation" (2021). *Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository*. 7900.  
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/7900>

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact [wlsadmin@uwo.ca](mailto:wlsadmin@uwo.ca).

## Abstract

This thesis argues for the importance of doctrine in faith formation and retention among emerging adults in contemporary Canadian Christianity. Advocating a holistic approach to faith which blends mindful doctrinal engagement with the practical and emotional aspects of faith, the thesis maintains that the relevance of doctrine has largely been underestimated by the churches. Recent cross-denominational research commissioned by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, in *Hemorrhaging Faith* (2012) and *Renegotiating Faith* (2018), is used to argue this case, alongside recent treatments of the doctrine of the Trinity. The latter is used as a case study, drawing on the work of Colin Gunton, Kevin Vanhoozer, and Miroslav Volf. Special attention is given to Gunton's definition of personhood – beings-in-relation – and to its potential intersection with theories of psychosocial development, drawing on Erik Erikson, Jeffery Arnett, and Paul Verhaeghe. A renewed trinitarian outlook is thus applied to emergent adult identity formation and discipleship.

## Keywords

Trinity, Colin Gunton, Kevin Vanhoozer, emergent adults, discipleship, Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

## Lay Summary

This thesis explores the importance of theology to contemporary Christianity, particularly among Canadian young people ages 18-29. Advocating a holistic approach to faith which values beliefs alongside practices and emotional engagement, the thesis maintains that the relevance of theology and the mind of faith has largely been underestimated by the churches. Drawing on the work of several twentieth century theologians, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is used as a case study to advocate for renewed theological depth and to address some of the practical concerns raised in recent Canadian research regarding the identity formation and faith formation of young adults. Special attention is given to theologian Colin Gunton's definition of personhood (beings-in-relation) and emphasis on living as persons-in-relationship-with-others instead of as autonomous individuals.

## Acknowledgments

Foremost, I wish to acknowledge and express sincere gratitude to my thesis advisor, Dr. Gary Badcock, for providing guidance and motivation throughout this project. I am especially thankful for your understanding regarding the many unexpected demands in my family life (beginning with the surprise arrival of my son!) which have shaped my rather unconventional path in this graduate program and often distracted my focus from the academic task at hand. I am grateful for the wisdom and insights you have imparted, the ways you have helped me articulate and develop my ideas, and the many “theological friends” to whom you have introduced me in this research process.

I also offer special thanks to my brother, Jonathan, for his assistance in editing several drafts; and to him and my brother-in-law, Spencer, who made their home offices available to me throughout the past 14 months of pandemic restrictions. Without your very practical help I could not have seen this project through to completion.

There are many people in my life who, in various capacities, have provided the inspiration and support for this thesis. In particular, I want to recognize my husband, Jason, for his daily encouragement, unparalleled patience, and sacrificial support; our former youth at Highland Baptist Church; my parents, Sharon and Peter Rozeluk; Dr. Marjorie Phillips Hopkins and the “Lehman Ladies” of ’06-’09; and the dear family friends my children affectionately refer to as aunts and uncles. Thank you for showing me the supreme value of community and what it means to live as persons-in-relation.

# Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Lay Summary.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1.....	7
1 Christian Theology and the Mind.....	7
1.1 The Decline of Doctrine.....	8
1.2 The Importance of Doctrine.....	15
1.3 The Purpose of Doctrine.....	20
1.4 The Relevance of Doctrine.....	24
1.5 The Recovery of Doctrine.....	30
1.6 Conclusion.....	38
Chapter 2.....	40
2 Doctrine of the Trinity in the Theology of Colin Gunton.....	40
2.1 Gunton’s Theological Approach.....	41
2.2 Challenges in the Western Theological Tradition.....	44
2.3 New Definitions: personal vs. individual.....	55
2.4 The Context of Trinitarian Theology.....	59
2.5 The Impact of a Renewed Doctrine of the Trinity.....	63
2.6 Conclusion.....	70

Chapter 3.....	72
3 The Trinity and Emergent Adult Faith.....	72
3.1 Identity Crisis.....	73
3.2 The Challenge of Neoliberalism.....	79
3.3 Trinity and Identity Formation.....	82
3.4 Trinity and Faith Formation.....	85
3.5 Conclusion.....	96
Conclusion.....	98
Bibliography.....	100
Curriculum Vitae.....	109

## Introduction

“How do I do this?” Eleanor<sup>1</sup> asked me, “I don’t know who I’m supposed to be or where I belong.” Her tears and cracked voice conveyed the anguish she had been trying so hard to contain during the bus ride back to our church. We had just returned from a weekend youth retreat where Eleanor and her peers had been filled with the excitement and enthusiasm typical of evangelical worship experiences. But, instead of feeling energized, Eleanor felt overwhelmed and ill-equipped with the prospect of incorporating her renewed spiritual passion with the practical aspects of her life as a student, peer, daughter, sister, employee, and friend. Her love for God, while vibrant and, indeed, sincere, lacked the mindful engagement and theological depth necessary to wrestle with these questions of identity and faith.

Reflecting on my eighteen years of vocational and volunteer Christian ministry experiences in eleven Mainline and Evangelical Protestant denominations, a common theme emerges: there seems to be a “decline of the mind” in Canadian Christianity which is greatly impoverishing the other aspects of a life of faith. Most recently, my husband and I have worked with young people ages 12-30 as Youth Ministers at a local Baptist church; and, unfortunately, Eleanor’s story is not unique. What began as anecdotal evidence and emerging patterns gleaned from my leadership experiences in various churches, camps, and faith communities across Southern Ontario has developed into a passionate study of emergent faith development and spiritual growth. This research seeks to integrate a systematic theology of doctrine with some of the pressing pastoral concerns faced by the Canadian Church today. In particular, I want to bring attention to a cross-denominational document that is extremely important in contemporary Christianity in Canada: *Hemorrhaging Faith: Why and When Canadian Young Adults Are Leaving*,

---

<sup>1</sup> Name has been changed to protect privacy.

*Staying and Returning to Church.*<sup>2</sup> Though much of the argument of this thesis will address the situation of contemporary Canadian Evangelicals, I believe it has wide implications for Canadian Christianity in general.

Published in 2012 by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, *Hemorrhaging Faith* is the culminating report of uniquely Canadian research sponsored by The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, The Great Commission Foundation, Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship of Canada, Stronger Together 2011, and Youth for Christ Canada. As its subtitle suggests, the *Hemorrhaging Faith* research focused on data collection in response to questions about faith retention and departure among Canadian young adults who attended local church services and/or youth programs as a child or teenager. This collaborative project includes survey responses from 2049 young adults between the ages of 18 and 34, as well as qualitative research contributions from longer interviews with 72 young people and Think Tank discussions involving 35 church and ministry organization leaders in Canada. The document concludes with a series of questions posed to Christian leaders for further consideration and study, as well as suggestions for practical next steps local churches might take to reengage and retain young adults in their congregations. A follow-up study was commissioned in 2016 and its findings printed in *Renegotiating Faith: The Delay in Young Adult Identity Formation and What It Means for the Church in Canada* by Faith Today Publications two years later. Although not peer-reviewed and published in academic journals, *Hemorrhaging Faith* and *Renegotiating Faith* are the products of extensive cross-denominational research collaboration by several national leaders in Canadian youth and young adult ministry. They remain valuable as two of the most recent and comprehensive studies regarding young adults and the Church in Canada. As such, these documents will be referenced heavily throughout this paper and examined closely in Chapter 3.

---

<sup>2</sup> James Penner, Rachel Harder, Erika Anderson, Bruno Désorcy, and Rick Hiemstra, *Hemorrhaging Faith: Why and When Canadian Young Adults Are Leaving, Staying and Returning to Church* (Richmond Hill, ON: Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, 2012), 139 pp.

While providing a thorough critique of *Hemorrhaging Faith* is beyond the scope of this thesis, I would like to draw attention to two significant weaknesses. First, as pointed out by Kelvin Mutter in his review of the study, the authors' emphasis is on reporting data and is, therefore, limited in its analysis and suggestions of next steps in addressing concerns raised by current trends.<sup>3</sup> *Renegotiating Faith* is limited in much the same way. My second point of critique is the lack of theological depth in these studies (i.e. only a few pages on theology being desired by emerging adults, and only a small percentage of survey questions were about doctrinal beliefs). Furthermore, this expressed desire for theological depth from those surveyed and interviewed is neglected in the study's conclusions. In addition to *Renegotiating Faith*, several excellent works in Canada and the United States have been published in the last decade focusing on practical tasks suggested in *Hemorrhaging Faith* such as parenting resources, developing intergenerational mentorship programs, and creating "safe spaces" of acceptance for youth and young adults within local churches.<sup>4</sup> Canadian Publication, *Faith Today*, even began a series, titled "Hemorrhaging Faith: Youth and Your Church," in spring 2013 to encourage ongoing practical discussions among pastors and faith leaders. However, although the original *Hemorrhaging Faith* report identified four key drivers<sup>5</sup> for nurturing and retaining faith among Canadian young adults, little attention has been given to the fourth driver on teaching and beliefs. As far as I am aware, a primarily theological response to these current trends and concerns has yet to be articulated. Without diminishing the significance of church programs, leadership development, prayer, and the

---

<sup>3</sup> Kelvin F. Mutter, "Book Review: Hemorrhaging Faith: Why and when Canadian young adults are leaving, staying, and returning to Church" in *Christian Education Journal* 12 no. 1 (2015), 207.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Youth & Young Adult Ministry Round Table, *Transfusing Life: Practical Responses to the Hemorrhaging Faith Report* (Toronto, 2012), accessed March 29, 2021 at <https://hemorrhagingfaith.com>; Chap Clark, *Adoptive Church: Creating an Environment Where Emerging Generations Belong* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016); Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); Kara E. Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016); and Tanya Yuen and Alvin Lau, *Transitions: Faith Formation in Children and Youth: Big Picture and the Shifts In Between* (Etobicoke: CBOQ Youth and Family, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Parents, personal experiences of God, community, and teaching and beliefs. *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 42.

like in both faith formation and retention of young people, the impact of theological and doctrinal renewal requires greater attention.

Based on a holistic approach involving overlapping relationships between beliefs, practises, and emotional experiences of faith, this thesis aims to bring the pastoral concerns raised in the *Hemorrhaging Faith* and *Renegotiating Faith* studies into dialogue with contemporary theology, particularly with regards to recent contributions to the doctrine of the Trinity from theologians Colin Gunton, Kevin Vanhoozer, and others. What value might theological renewal bring to pressing contemporary issues faced by the Church in Canada? And for those of us serving as clergy and lay leaders, how might recovering a robust doctrine of the Trinity impact our thinking, actions, and emotions towards the spiritual discipleship of young adults in our respective faith communities?

Chapter 1 includes a literary review, beginning with identifying some of the factors in overall decline of doctrine in North America before discussing the questions of theological importance and relevance in contemporary Christianity. I continue with exploring theology's context and purpose as articulated by several Protestant theologians such as N.T. Wright, Karl Barth, and Miroslav Volf, who, despite their varied backgrounds and approaches, all advocate for increased theological understanding and renewal among Christian leaders and laypeople. Examining *Hemorrhaging Faith* and other recent Canadian research, I argue that theological engagement of the mind remains a vital and relevant component of contemporary Christian faith and suggest the doctrine of the Trinity be used as a case study in the renewal of doctrine in further exploration of the value of doctrine in contemporary faith.

Focusing more closely on the doctrine of the Trinity, Chapter 2 explores the contributions of late British theologian Colin Gunton, whose work will serve as a focal point in a case study in the larger task of doctrinal recovery and (re)engagement of the mind in the Christian life of faith. Gunton summarizes the point of his approach succinctly: "In light of the theology of the Trinity, everything looks different."<sup>6</sup> Trinitarian doctrine is

---

<sup>6</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 7.

examined through a theoretical lens which balances the head, hands, and heart of Christian faith: orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and orthopathy. In identifying and discussing some of the theological challenges posed by a traditional Western trinitarian doctrine, I then explore some of the implications that a restored trinitarian doctrine based on Gunton's definition of persons as beings-in-relation could have on these three dimensions of faith.

In addition to Augustine's famous psychological analogy of the Trinity (memory-understanding-will) which has greatly influenced the theological tradition in the West, several alternative analogies have been posited in the development of trinitarian theology.<sup>7</sup> Yet, despite their merits (including the communicative value to laypeople found in Dorothy Sayers and James Smith III's respective analogies from the creative arts), I am not convinced that a different analogy alone can adequately address the fundamental weaknesses which Gunton critiques as typical of a Western approach to the doctrine of the Trinity. Instead, beginning with the Three Persons - God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in their mutually-indwelling relationships - sidesteps the challenge of mathematical conundrum and confusion of how God is one and three, three and yet one. The difficulty with this approach, however, will be in reclaiming a relational-based definition of "person" and stripping the word and what it represents in modern times from its entrenchment in the concepts of individual autonomy and rational consciousness. For, as will be argued, God is three persons but is in no way three individuals.

In Chapter 3, I return to my central thesis question: What value might theological renewal bring to pressing contemporary issues faced by the Church in Canada? Continuing the case study begun in Chapter 2, this final chapter applies a renewed doctrine of the Trinity with Gunton's emphasis on personhood to the very practical and pastoral concerns of

---

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Richard of St. Victor, *On the Trinity* 3; Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (London: Methuen, 1941); Anne Hunt, "Psychological Analogy and Paschal Mystery in Trinitarian Theology", in *Theological Studies* 59 (1998): 197-218; and James D. Smith III, "Ancient Christian Trinitarian Metaphors and a Contemporary Analogy from Music," in *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 33 no. 3 (1990): 353-357.

spiritual discipleship, specifically the faith formation and retention of Canadian young people ages 18-29 in local churches and faith communities.

Drawing on developmental theories from American psychologists Erik Erikson, Jeffrey Arnett, and Belgian psychologist Paul Verhaeghe, I survey some of the common barriers to adult identity formation and examine how a delay in psychosocial development can amplify challenges to faith formation among emergent adults. Following this discussion, I suggest four ways that a renewed trinitarian outlook grounded in Gunton's theology of the person can aid in the spiritual discipleship of young people as they: develop relationally based personal identity, participate in communal identity of the Body of Christ, engage their minds in a holistic approach to faith formation, and experience mentorship relationships in the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Despite current trends of declining participation in religious activities – especially within the demographic of young people ages 18-29 – there is hope for the Church in Canada. And, I believe that this hope can be sparked by a renewal of the mind – as N.T. Wright puts it, “thinking Christianly.”

## Chapter 1

### 1 Christian Theology and the Mind

In this age where information is available in abundance, even excess, it seems there is less value, and therefore interest, in grappling with any one topic for an extended duration. Immediate acquisition of knowledge has displaced thoroughness, diligence, and care in the process of developing of ideas and growing depth of understanding. The deluge of disposable information that comes through electronic media and especially the Internet has tended to make deep understanding and wisdom seem superfluous. Further, the ever-increasing cultural value of blanket tolerance, acceptance, and inclusion for all except “the intolerant” means that communal groups whose membership intrinsically requires some degree of exclusivity are under attack. Even among churches, denominational and doctrinal distinctives seem to be on the decline with the rise of ecumenism and efforts to be as inclusive and welcoming as possible. As American theologian Kevin Vanhoozer puts it, “For many in our postmodern age, ‘feeling is believing’; to formulate one’s beliefs in terms of doctrine is thought to be unnecessary, impossible, or divisive.”<sup>8</sup> Yet it is the long, challenging, often messy process of critically thinking and wrestling with an idea that is needed for growth and purposeful life. When applied to the Christian faith, mere knowledge or information on its own is simply not good enough, as Scripture calls the Christian to understand what one believes, articulate why one believes it, and live out its significance in one’s own life and the broader community.<sup>9</sup> A recovery of doctrine is desperately needed. This chapter will provide an overview of recent treatments of the decline of doctrine and theology in the North American Church; argue for the urgency, importance, and relevance of doctrine; and

---

<sup>8</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), xi.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, 1 Corinthians 2:12-13, Romans 10:9-10, Ephesians 4, Philippians 2:1-18, and 1 John 2:4-6.

explore the possibility of using a theology of the Trinity as a case study in the recovery of doctrine.

## 1.1 The Decline of Doctrine

In his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, Vanhoozer quotes the late British philosopher, Mary Midgley, saying “The devolution of Wisdom into Knowledge into Information may be the supreme source of degeneration in the postmodern society.”<sup>10</sup> There is no question that the religious face of the West has changed dramatically in recent decades. Religion in North America, particularly Catholic and Protestant Christianity, has become increasingly informal, practical, individualistic, and egocentric. American sociologist of religion, Alan Wolfe, observes that during the course of the twentieth century, American church goers have shifted away from touting denominational distinctives which emphasized creeds, doctrinal statements, membership, and their own history of traditions towards a willingness to cross denominational boundaries in search of acceptance, inclusion, more personal faith, and a faith leader who best suits their fleeting “needs” and desires.<sup>11</sup> The unifying aspect of being part of a local faith community as well as a vast history of church tradition has largely been forfeited by contemporary Americans, and instead replaced with meeting personal interests of the moment. According to Wolfe, it appears that particularly among Protestants, the priority of individual choice has displaced communal identity and attachment, even where their global counterparts have retained their value of community. He writes, “in every aspect of the religious life, American faith has met American culture – and American culture has triumphed.”<sup>12</sup> Lest one think these symptoms are exclusive to spiritual sickness in the United States, many of Wolfe’s observations of the religious

---

<sup>10</sup> Mary Midgley, *Wisdom, Information, and Wonder: What is Knowledge For?* (London: Routledge, 1991), quoted in Kevin Vanhoozer, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 24.

<sup>11</sup> Alan Wolfe, *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). See especially chapter 2, the first two sections of which are entitled, “The Anti-Institutional Believer” and “Beyond the Denominational Society.”

<sup>12</sup> Wolfe, 3.

ailment in America reflect the condition of Canadian churches as well. Recent studies of Canadian churches and young people such as “Theology Matters” (2016), *Hemorrhaging Faith* (2011), and *Renegotiating Faith* (2018) reveal that the same trends are just as pervasive in Canada.<sup>13</sup>

Though ecclesiastical “insiders” may question Wolfe’s method or the ability of a self-proclaimed religious unbeliever to give an accurate assessment of the state of religious life within the Church, there is good reason to think that Wolfe has a point. In addition to overwhelming anecdotal evidence that supports his claims, there are many other scholars in the fields of sociology, psychology, religion and theology who draw similar conclusions, as we shall see in the remainder of this chapter and again in the first two sections of Chapter 3. Certainly, none of Wolfe’s observations are new to present church leaders or theologians. Anglican priest and theologian, John Stott, wrote in 1972 about the “misery and menace of mindless Christianity,” and the “inescapable duty both to think and to act upon what [one] thinks and knows.”<sup>14</sup> In his 1984 book, *The Nature of Doctrine*, George Lindbeck notes that with the rise of postmodernism, “propositional understandings of religion have long been on the defensive and experiential ones in the ascendency.”<sup>15</sup> Likewise, in context of his essays on Christology and the Trinity in his book, *Whatever Happened to the Human Mind?*, Eric Mascall wrote about the dire need to recover theology in the mind as well as the Christian life of faith. He states that Christian theology should be “a living and growing intellectual activity organically

---

<sup>13</sup> See David Millard Haskell, Kevin N. Flatt, and Stephanie Burgoyne, “Theology Matters: Comparing the Traits of Growing and Declining Mainline Protestant Church Attendees and Clergy” in *Review of Religious Research* 58 no. 4 (2016): 515-541; James Penner, Rachel Harder, Erika Anderson, Bruno Désorcy, and Rick Hiemstra, *Hemorrhaging Faith: Why and When Canadian Young Adults Are Leaving, Staying and Returning to Church* (Richmond Hill, ON: Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, 2012), 139 pp.; and Rick Hiemstra, Lorianne Dueck, and Matthew Blackaby, *Renegotiating Faith: The Delay in Young Adult Identity Formation and What It Means for the Church in Canada* (Toronto, ON: Faith Today Publications, 2018), 182 pp.

<sup>14</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Your Mind Matters: The Place of the Mind in the Christian Life* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 11, 13.

<sup>15</sup> George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 19.

rooted in the Christian tradition and consciously cooperating within the worshipping and redemptive community, which is the body of Christ.”<sup>16</sup> For decades, theologians have lamented the decline of the human mind in Western society at large as well as the radical decline of doctrine specifically within the church; and many have advocated for doctrinal recovery and engagement of the mind for robust Christian faith.<sup>17</sup> In the Church, however, it appears that for the most part their plea for theological renewal has not been taken seriously.

There are a number of cultural and theological factors leading towards the decline of doctrine in North American Christianity. Wolfe identifies over twenty such factors as he explores practices and attitudes towards doctrine within the Church in the third chapter of his book, *The Transformation of American Religion*. Drawing from his own scholarship as well as summarizing themes from several sociological and ethnographic studies, Wolfe begins by highlighting differences in trends among various Christian traditions which are contributing factors to the overall North American decline in doctrine. Summarizing this research, Wolfe writes that for younger generations of Catholics, faith is rooted in practices of morality and having “right attitudes” rather than “right ideas” about questions of doctrine, theology, ethics, or elements of Church tradition. Like Catholics, he notes that Mainline Protestants tend to have a similar focus on being people of good moral character guided by the “Golden Rule,” the overall effect of which Wolfe describes as “theologically fuzzy.”<sup>18</sup> He also observes that leaders of Mainline denominations have a desire to avoid the doctrinal strife that has characterized so much of Church history; thus, Scripture is generally viewed as a source of guidelines for moral pragmatism rather than

---

<sup>16</sup> Eric L. Mascall, *Whatever Happened to the Human Mind? Essays in Christian Orthodoxy* (London: SPCK Publishing, 1980), ix.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Colin E. Gunton, “The Indispensability of Theological Understanding: Theology in the University,” in *Essentials of Christian Community: Essays for Daniel W. Hardy*, ed. David F. Ford and Dennis L. Stamps, pp. 266-77 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1996); Alister McGrath, *The Passionate Intellect: Christian Faith and the Discipleship of the Mind* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010); Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994); and N.T. Wright, “The Challenge of Pauline Theology,” *R.T. Orr Lecture*, live streamed at Huron College, London, ON November 25, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kc9Pvlo-YoM>.

<sup>18</sup> Wolfe, 86.

for its doctrinal depth in Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, and United traditions in America.

In contrast to Mainline Christians, Protestant Fundamentalists take doctrine the most seriously of all the Protestant and Catholic (as well as Jewish) denominations Wolfe studies. Interestingly, and despite many similarities, Wolfe differentiates between the more extreme fundamentalist sects and popular American evangelicalism within a wider scope of what is often termed “conservative Christianity.” Here, I highlight reasons suggested by both Wolfe and Lindbeck for lack of doctrine among the most conservative and extreme fundamentalist Christian groups, and in the following paragraph will shift the discussion to Evangelicals in a broader sense. Wolfe notes that Protestant Fundamental groups center core teachings not only on outward appearances and behaviours, but also on how and what they think.<sup>19</sup> However, what at first appears to be encouraging news for the Christian mind turns out to be misguided optimism. For although biblical literacy is generally high among this group, the value for theology – discussing, wrestling, and puzzling over matters of faith – tends to be near absent. Wolfe identifies supreme belief in Biblical inerrancy to be the root of the literal interpretations of Scripture that are characteristic of extreme fundamentalist believers. He explains,

[F]undamentalist belief in biblical inerrancy produces theology of a decidedly cut-and-paste quality, for if the truth is contained, loud and clear, in the words of the Bible... there is no need for systematic thinking, techniques of exegesis, and canons of argumentation, all of which have been central to the kinds of theological inquiry that have shaped other faiths. For all their Bible reading, most fundamentalists familiarize themselves only with in-house commentary. [...] Doctrinaire they may be but interested in doctrine they are not.<sup>20</sup>

Lindbeck suggests another reason for theological shallowness among this group, arguing that it is intellectually easier to embark on an “individual quest for personal meaning”

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 68-9.

than develop a thorough theological basis of faith.<sup>21</sup> He highlights the emphasis that conservative Christianity typically places on the individual's testimony of divine encounter, experience of conversion, and pursuit of piety. The overall approach tends to emphasize the subjective and experiential aspects of faith. Such inward self-focus leaves little room for doctrinal study or theological imagination.

Charismatic and Pentecostal Christians, for their part, favour "signs and wonders," the mystical and supernatural experiences of God, over systematic reflection of faith and theological traditions of the Church. This group, along with Evangelicals in general, tend to avoid "theological conundrums and complex moral reasoning [...] by offering down-to-earth interpretations of Scripture meant to convey the simplicity and directness of the teachings of Jesus."<sup>22</sup> Yet unlike their Fundamentalist cousins who also prefer plain text readings of Scripture, Evangelicals are more likely to communicate overarching biblical themes than doctrinal details or theological nuances as they focus on sharing the good news of the Gospel in "optimistic determination... to save as many souls as possible."<sup>23</sup> Often rooted in John 15:15, where Jesus calls His disciples "friends," the prominence of one's personal relationship with God leads to disregard and mistrust for ecclesial authority, contributions of Church traditions and history, and the need for formal doctrinal guidance or study. Wolfe observes that in efforts to distance themselves from Catholic and mainline Christians, believers from Charismatic, Pentecostal, and Evangelical traditions stress their personal experiences and feelings of faith. A one-sided stress on the immanence of God in relational intimacy between Christ and the individual believer both reflects and reinforces the North American cultural devaluation of the mind. I argue that this is to the detriment of contemporary Christianity.

Nearly two decades before Wolfe's sociological study of mindless Christianity in America, Lindbeck made similar observations citing additional examples of the Church's

---

<sup>21</sup> Lindbeck, 22.

<sup>22</sup> Wolfe, 76.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 70.

accommodation to the cultural priority of individual experience. Individualistic, self-oriented faith has become an even bigger problem in this “post-Christian period” as it seems faith leaders must now market their own “brand” of religion to stand out among the plethora of consumerist religious and spiritual options available.<sup>24</sup> Lindbeck also points out the hostility that Western culture has to the mere notion of doctrinal assertions dictating communal norms. He writes, “the suggestion that communities have the right to insist on standards of belief and practice as conditions of membership is experienced as an intolerable infringement of the liberty of the self.”<sup>25</sup> Already at the time of Lindbeck’s writing in 1984, the cultural shift to postmodernism was evident, particularly regarding the religious outlook in North America. As a response to these concerns, Lindbeck rejects both the Enlightenment’s search for ultimate authoritative truth and late modernity’s preoccupation with the “experiential-expressive,” and instead advocates for a rather postmodern “cultural-linguistic” theological approach which locates authority in the *use* of Scripture by the believing community.

Repeatedly throughout *Transformation of American Religion*, however, Wolfe points to surrounding American culture of anti-intellectualism and emphasis on self-autonomy as prime reasons for a lack of theological depth within churches (as well as other religious groups). Especially as they present in evangelical traditions, these two foci can be observed in a variety of ways. These include the pursuit of emotional experiences rather than mindful engagement with theology, belief in the priesthood of all believers instead of a trained clerical elite, the prominence of private Christianity at the expense of communal dimensions, and the valuation of individual salvation experiences and testimony over Church tradition. Describing shifts in worship practices, Wolfe writes, “Despite the widespread diversity of worship styles throughout a society as divided by race, ethnicity, and class as the United States, one common thread can nonetheless be

---

<sup>24</sup> Lindbeck, 22.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

detected [...] all of America's religions face the same imperative: Personalize or die."<sup>26</sup> Wolfe cites what he describes as the "small group movement" as an example of radical personalization in American churches. He observes that even practices of Bible reading, study, and prayer now seem to center around meeting private needs of individual members rather than thinking deeply about faith or nurturing spiritual development. While emphasis on having a personal relationship with God has, at times, served to inspire greater religious devotion and piety, the value of *feelings* and individual experience to the near exclusion of *thinking* in popular North American evangelicalism has, too often, led to shallow self-absorbed faith.

Yet interestingly, Wolfe views the source of these measurable shifts in religion as a reciprocal relationship between faith and culture: he notes the church's capitulation to and adoption of postmodern culture, *and* the influence of American evangelicalism on both the religious and mainstream culture. Wolfe describes how Jews, Catholics, and Protestants are all shifting towards more individualistic, personal, and intimate experiences and expressions of faith, and sees American religion in general being influenced by American evangelicalism: "evangelical patterns of worship – joyful, emotional, personal, and emphatic on the one hand, impatient with liturgy and theologically broad to the point of incoherence on the other – have increasingly become the dominant worship style in the United States."<sup>27</sup> Notably absent in this list of characteristics is any mention of the activity of the mind: thoughtfulness, critical study, careful exegesis, contemplation, meditation. Further critiquing megachurches and popular evangelicalism that seems to market and cater towards narcissism and self-help, Wolfe warns, "the biggest challenge posed to American society by the popularity of megachurches and other forms of growth-oriented Protestantism is not bigotry but bathos."<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Wolfe, 35.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 35-6.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 36.

Sadly, rather than bringing balance to more traditional approaches to faith, it appears American evangelicalism has both reinforced and contributed to the pervasive North American culture that elevates, and even idolizes, the self. Regardless of whether one ultimately views the influence of evangelicalism on American religion positively, negatively, or some combination of the two, it remains clear that emphasis on individualization and meeting private needs has significantly contributed to the decline of doctrinal and intellectual focus among North American Christians.

## 1.2 The Importance of Doctrine

Contrary to pervasive cultural trends in North American churches, I argue that Anselm's famous definition of theology, *fides quaerens intellectum*, is not reserved for academics and theologians. Rather, seeking understanding and thinking deeply on matters of faith should be normative for all Christian believers. Addressing the question of to whom the task of theology belongs, Anglican theologian and former bishop N. T. Wright states, "[Theology] is a task that the whole Church has to hold onto... Paul does not envisage an elite who do the thinking and a non-elite who don't do the thinking. [...] His language about learning to 'think Christianly' is for everybody."<sup>29</sup> Wright goes on to describe the decline of the mind in Western Christianity as a "tragedy" in the Church. If Wright (and Paul) are correct in this assertion, then a recovery of doctrine is needed for the health and future of Christianity in North America.

In the Gospels, Jesus instructs His hearers to love God with the entirety of their beings, engaging their minds as well as their hearts: "'The most important [commandment],' answered Jesus, 'is this: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your *mind* and with all your strength.'"<sup>30</sup> Throughout his epistles, the apostle Paul urges believers to renew

---

<sup>29</sup> Wright, 1:02:06ff.

<sup>30</sup> Mark 12:29-30. Emphasis added. All Bible references taken from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted. Kenneth L. Barker, gen. ed., *The Holy Bible, New International Version: NIV Study Bible, Fully Revised* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

their minds, be transformed having the mind of Christ, and to intellectually engage with God through Scripture and prayer. For example, in Romans 12:2 Paul writes, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Commentator William Barclay paraphrases this verse from Romans to emphasize the degree of transformation Paul is suggesting: “And do not shape your lives to meet the fleeting fashions of this world: but be transformed from it, by the renewal of your mind, *until the very essence of your being is altered...*”<sup>31</sup> Highlighting the continual nature of this transformative process, Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun translate Paul’s instruction using the present imperative verb tense: “Keep being transformed,” alluding to the continual process of transformation and renewal for which the latter advocates. Volf and Croasmun continue, “as we live in time, and as the time in which we live is filled with tension between the old and the new, transformation must be ongoing, in fact a *growth* out of the old schema and into the new one.”<sup>32</sup>

Similar instructions are found in the apostle Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus: “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”<sup>33</sup> Wright expounds on these and other passages in the New Testament Scriptures, explaining that one of Paul’s greatest desires was for believers in Christ to think with the mind of Christ:

Paul believed that in Jesus... Israel’s God had unveiled His new creation, that followers of Jesus were called to be part of that new creation, and that would mean thinking ‘new creation-ally’

---

<sup>31</sup> William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, second edition, fifth impression (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1963), 167. Emphasis added.

<sup>32</sup> Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2019), 124.

<sup>33</sup> Ephesians 4:22-24. See also Romans 15:5, 1 Corinthians 2:12-16, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, and Philippians 2:1-5, 4:6-8.

– in a new way. [...] For Paul, this vocation and activity [both learning to think in this new way and the content of this new thinking], which I loosely call ‘Christian theology,’ was loadbearing. Without it, the Church couldn’t be and wouldn’t be what it was called to be.<sup>34</sup>

The instruction of Scripture is clear: theology, “thinking Christianly,” is the responsibility of all Christians, not just an academic or priestly elite. Thus, a recovery of doctrine is vital. Christian faith requires deliberate engagement of the mind in addition to one’s attitudes and actions.

Many historical and contemporary theologians have attempted to articulate connections between systematic and pastoral theology – particularly in reference to the doctrine of the Trinity. Arguing that theology is profoundly relevant, Roger Olson and Christopher Hall state that “in the end, [the concept of the Trinity] is not an esoteric idea but a supremely practical doctrine for the guidance of Christian life and thought.”<sup>35</sup> Volf and Croasmun identify knowledge and understanding as only *part* of the theological enterprise, emphasizing the transformative power of Christian theology in the lives of its proponents and of the world, stating: “were theology to limit itself to such research [scholastic endeavors], were it to proceed as if it were another science, it would fail in its very methodology to sufficiently honor the goal of the incarnation, which is to help align the world with God’s purposes.”<sup>36</sup> Far from being mere intellectual fancy, theology is deeply practical. To be hearers and doers of the Word (James 1:22-25), the Christian’s feelings, actions, and mind must all be engaged.

In his book, *Whatever Happened to the Human Mind?*, Anglo-Catholic theologian Eric Mascall laments the prevailing culture of anti-intellectualism that we face and urges his readers towards a renewal of constructive thinking for the benefit of the Church’s life and

---

<sup>34</sup> Wright, 6:42ff.

<sup>35</sup> Roger E. Olson and Christopher A. Hall, *The Trinity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 4.

<sup>36</sup> Volf and Croasmun, 48.

witness. He argues that the human mind *is* capable of knowing truth, apprehending both complex and mysterious realities other than itself, i.e. God, and posits that we must “recover the conviction that we are intelligent beings, embodied minds, living in an intelligible world, which we grasp not *by* but *through* our senses.”<sup>37</sup> Quoting Kenneth Leech, Mascall highlights the dynamic quality of the mind of faith, “Theology is an encounter with the living God, not a detached intellectual exercise.”<sup>38</sup> For Mascall, life’s truth and purpose are not found in intellectual pursuit and fanciful rhetoric, but rather in the “conformity of the mind with reality,” between “understanding and reality.”<sup>39</sup> A recovery of the mind is not an end in and of itself because it is inextricably linked with the activities of human life; thus, a recovery of the Christian mind, of theology, can and should be powerfully transformative.

That doctrine and intellectual engagement with Christian belief has all but vanished in North American Christianity aside from the academy is a serious problem specifically evidenced in two areas of faith, namely worship and missions. Liturgy, when void of mindful engagement, lacks understanding and lapses into either empty ritual or shallow experience. Both alternatives lack the transformative power of the gospel as one does not allow one’s whole self to be engaged in worship. Scripture states that Jesus comes to give humankind *abundant* life (John 10:10) as *new creations* in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Here, Paul urges his readers toward complete transformation and renewal, not just of outward actions and expressions but inward transformation as well in the re-orienting of one’s thoughts, values, attitudes, and desires towards God. Such total transformation includes and requires both intellectual renewal and engagement as balance is needed between the “head, hands, and heart” of faith. Yet tragically, North American Evangelicalism and many charismatic traditions all too often emphasize individual emotional experiences of worship to the eclipse of the mind. And, as Wolfe and

---

<sup>37</sup> Mascall, 12. Emphasis in original.

<sup>38</sup> Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend* (London: Sheldon Press, 1977), 35, as quoted in Eric Mascall, *Whatever Happened to the Human Mind? Essays in Christian Orthodoxy* (London: SPCK Publishing, 1980), xii.

<sup>39</sup> Mascall, 22-3.

*Hemorrhaging Faith* research have demonstrated, this trend is not exclusive to Evangelicals but is widespread across the Christian landscape in both Canada and the United States.

To be clear, I am not arguing here for an over-intellectual pursuit of Christianity or study of theology. In fact, I grieve and lament the fact that scholastic pursuits currently seem to have a monopoly on theological interest and study.<sup>40</sup> To put it another way, it is not the “level” of intellectual engagement with theology that is important (otherwise, children and those with mental disabilities would be excluded from faith – which, as Jesus states in Matthew 19:14, is clearly not the case!), but, rather, that one approaches faith with the willingness and expectation of total transformation by the Spirit’s re-creative power. I suggest that this transformation must include the renewal of the mind in addition to one’s actions and emotive orientation.

Australian professor of religion, Charles Ringma, expands on the intertwined concepts of right thinking (orthodoxy), right actions (orthopraxy), and right feelings and attitudes (orthopathy) of faith in his article, “The Church’s Calling in a Troubled World.” Ringma observes that over the last century, liberation theologians have emphasized the *praxis* of faith, adding to the modern preoccupation with pragmatism in the West. Referring to orthopathy as the “missing link” he argues for the necessity of orthopathy in conjunction with orthodoxy and orthopraxy for a fully integrated faith. He writes,

Orthopathy can be the fuel that moves us from orthodoxy to orthopraxy. Orthodoxy gives theological justification and shape to our orthopraxy. And orthopraxy gives authenticity and embodiment to our orthodoxy. [...] The three together in an integrated way means that one is thoughtful and informed,

---

<sup>40</sup> Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun discuss this problem of waning theological interest in Western Christianity as well as several external and internal factors of this decline in, *For the Life of the World*. See especially chapter 2, “The Crisis of Theology,” 35-59.

passionate and empathetic, and willing to get one's hands 'dirty' in the long march for restoration, justice, and shalom.<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, I would argue with Ringma that a properly balanced account of Christian faith and life must include the affective and emotional along with the practical and pastoral, but not to exclusion of the doctrinal and intellectual.

### 1.3 The Purpose of Doctrine

Theology is important because Christians have something to say to the world; and its purpose is relevant to all people, not just believers. To do this successfully, or indeed at all, requires attention both to our understanding of faith and to what it is that we are meant to communicate. In both senses, an adequate theology is indispensable. By speaking of God, one also speaks of one's self on a deep level as, in a Christian worldview, humans exist in the context of relationship with their Creator. Rowan Williams demonstrates this kind of approach in his book, *On Christian Theology*, highlighting the relationship between thought and speech.<sup>42</sup> Faith which lacks understanding is incomplete and must be communicated. Theological understanding and communication is also not a task reserved for some Christian elite, for this task is shared by all in some sense, as all together are called to believe and bear witness. This has significant implications for the theology and life of the Church as communication takes place in two directions: vertically in response to God which is Christian worship, and horizontally among fellow believers which is Christian discipleship as well as horizontally outward to the world which is Christian mission.

In a lecture on the relevance of Christian theology, N. T. Wright not only outlines its definition (intentional thinking 'Christianly' or 'new creation-ally') and features (to be the 'Scripture-soaked,' prayerful, communal activity of all believers), but he also

---

<sup>41</sup> Charles Ringma, "The Church's Calling in a Troubled World: The Grand Design and Fragile Engagement," in *Zadok Papers S225* (2017), 5.

<sup>42</sup> Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology: Challenges in Contemporary Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000).

describes the direction and purpose theology is supposed to have as he believes Paul intended. About theology's purpose Wright says, "... the activity of the whole church thinking with renewed minds and hearts [...] about who the one God is, who God's people are, and what God's future is for the world."<sup>43</sup> Colin Gunton made a similar claim in his essay, "The Indispensability of Theological Understanding," stating there are unique contributions that only theology, and the specific framework of Christian theology, can offer. Elsewhere he writes, "The doctrine of God has important implications for other, indeed all, aspects of human life and the being of the world."<sup>44</sup> In this view, doctrine is important and good theology relevant, not just for the spiritual wellbeing of those already part of the Church, but so that Christians can live out the commissioned purpose to which Christ has called them (Matthew 28:19-20).

In his introduction to Karl Barth, John Webster emphasizes that Barth was a church theologian, and that "the primary public for his writing was the Christian community (not the academy)."<sup>45</sup> Scottish theologian Paul Nimmo agrees, reminding readers that Barth's original audience were his students; the bulk of the content of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* is adapted lectures and are therefore pastoral and missional in nature, focused on Christian practice in addition to doctrinal orthodoxy.<sup>46</sup> Reflecting on the purpose of theology for Karl Barth, Nimmo writes,

Theology undertaken correctly, for Barth, has implications for what the church thinks and believes; and more than this, it has implications for what the church confesses and does, and for how individual Christians live and work and witness in the world.... Far from being confined to some ivory tower, theology

---

<sup>43</sup> Wright, 8:12ff.

<sup>44</sup> Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 11.

<sup>45</sup> John Webster, "Introducing Barth," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 10.

<sup>46</sup> Paul T. Nimmo, *Barth: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 16-17.

is a deeply *practical* undertaking which at times can be radical and even dangerous.<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, our minds are essential to our participation in our new identity, or, as in Barth's view, our true identity, as the Body of Christ. Barth asserts God ordained humankind for salvation, for "participation in His own being"<sup>48</sup> – a being which Gunton readily defines as a Trinity of persons-in-relation. Thus, in Barth's view, the purpose of Christian mission is joining in Christ's prophetic work in the world: communication of Christ's gospel and humanity's new reality as His redeemed body.<sup>49</sup> The gospel we communicate is not a Christian gospel or the Church's gospel, but the gospel of Christ Himself, in whom we have been grafted.

Miroslav Volf shares a different perspective, asserting that the purpose of theology is "the flourishing life" and its function is to address life's most fundamental questions.<sup>50</sup> He advocates reclaiming the purpose of theology in both the academy and the Church. Together in their co-authored book, *For the Life of the World*, Volf and Croasmun argue for the ongoing importance and relevance of theology for contemporary Christianity:

Today, too, theology has an indispensable contribution to make in countering taste-driven, individualized, unreflective ways of living and helping people articulate, embrace, and pursue a compelling vision of flourishing life for themselves and all

---

<sup>47</sup> Nimmo, 17.

<sup>48</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. by G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), IV /1 §57, 10.

<sup>49</sup> See Barth, *CD IV*, especially §71, §72 and §73 as Barth respectively discusses human vocation of participation in Christ's mission, the sending of the Christian community, and the virtue of Christian hope in this process.

<sup>50</sup> This theme of human flourishing plays a central role throughout Volf's work within the field of Christian theology as well as inter-faith relations. See especially: Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology that Makes a Difference*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2019); David Brooks and Miroslav Volf, "Character, Flourishing & The Good Life: A Conversation with David Brooks and Miroslav Volf," filmed February 22, 2016 at Yale Center for Faith and Culture, New Haven, CT, video, 1:21:15 <https://faith.yale.edu/media/character-flourishing-the-good-life-a-conversation-with-david-brooks-and-miroslav-volf>.

creation. Theology has a contribution to make, and theology *must make* that contribution if it is to remain true to its purpose, which is the same as the goal of Jesus' mission.<sup>51</sup>

Although Volf and Croasmun paint a captivating and, indeed, alluring picture of personal thriving and fulfillment in their description of life's purpose, the emphasis on individual flourishing might, unfortunately, be taken to contribute to the rampant narcissistic self-help culture in so much of North American Christianity. While I remain wary of such anthropocentricity, I think their vision of flourishing has great value when combined with a theology of community as in the Body of Christ. It is also worth noting Volf's role as a public theologian, thus his claim is that flourishing can only come about in the context of a commitment to theology as a larger project.

Furthermore, the context of flourishing for which Volf and Croasmun advocate is *eschatological*. It is not exclusively for individual benefit, but for the realization of God's kingdom on earth. In this light, human flourishing is about complete restoration and transformation, the entirety of creation becoming "the home of God."<sup>52</sup> Ultimately, Volf's description of "the flourishing life" must be carefully defined and understood not only in the context of the Kingdom of God but also in the context of our human identity as persons (beings-in-relation-with-others as opposed to autonomous individuals), so as not to convey the extreme individualistic self-absorption it aims to counter.

Regardless of whether one views the purpose of theology as Wright, Gunton, Barth, Volf, or some hybrid model, consideration must be given to *how* theology is discussed. Successful communication requires participation of both (or all) parties. While the intricacies of communication theory are beyond the scope of this thesis, some basic characteristics of effective language are important to note: language should aim to be

---

<sup>51</sup> Volf and Croasmun, 33.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

concrete, specific, clear, constructive, and *familiar, not obscure*.<sup>53</sup> The means by which one strives to communicate must be culturally and contextually appropriate for the best chance of transmission and any subsequent meaningful engagement.

## 1.4 The Relevance of Doctrine

I have discussed the recent decline of doctrine in North American Christianity and argued for the continuing importance of the mind and purpose of doctrine from a theological perspective. Yet, questions concerning the contemporary relevance of faith remain. Here I will explore the relevance of doctrine to contemporary Christianity, beginning with looking at two recent studies on growth and decline factors in Canadian churches. Based on these important research documents I will not only argue that doctrine is relevant and necessary for mature Christian faith development, but highlight that deeper theological engagement is *desired* by Canadian young people, and conclude by offering Kevin Vanhoozer's model of dramaturgy as a fresh way to reinvigorate theological conversation in contemporary faith.

i) Despite the widespread decline of doctrine in North America and Wolf's somewhat cynical conclusions, the outlook for Canadian Christianity is not as bleak as it may at first seem. In 2015, David Haskell and Stephanie Burgoyne from Wilfred Laurier University along with Kevin Flatt from Redeemer University College conducted a study on church growth factors among mainline Protestant churches in southern Ontario.<sup>54</sup> Comprised of the results and analysis of responses from 2255 attendees and 29 clergy, their research was published the following year and identified conservative theology, evangelism, and emphasis on faith development of young people as significant growth indicators among the 22 churches studied. Even when other variables were controlled, the result was the

---

<sup>53</sup> Evelyn S. Zent, "Effective Use of Language," course materials for TBGEN 490 A Writer's Workshop (Tacoma: University of Washington Tacoma, 2001), accessed March 13, 2021 at <https://faculty.washington.edu/ezent/imelu.htm>. Emphasis added.

<sup>54</sup> David Millard Haskell, Kevin Flatt, and Stephanie Burgoyne, "Theology Matters: Comparing the Traits of Growing and Declining Mainline Protestant Church Attendees and Clergy," in *Review of Religious Research* Vol. 58, no. 4 (2016): 515-541.

same: “in multivariate analysis, the theological conservatism of both attendees and clergy emerged as important factors in predicting church growth.”<sup>55</sup> “Theological conservatism” was determined based on survey results regarding *beliefs* (including primacy of salvation through Christ, non-equivalence of religions, the priority of evangelism as the church’s purpose, and authority of the Bible as a guide for life), *practices* (including higher frequency of personal prayer and Bible reading, contemporary worship style, and focus on youth programs), and *purpose* (including focus on evangelism, and having a clear church mission).<sup>56</sup> This study shows the importance of doctrine in general as well as the specific type of doctrine that serves as a significant growth factor in mainline churches. The theological orientation in growing Ontarian churches is the kind of belief that avoids stagnation as religious observance compartmentalized from other aspects of one’s life, but rather fuels one’s actions and passion in a holistic life of faith.

The doctrinal renewal for which this thesis advocates is that which compels the believer toward complete transformation and renewal in the life of faith. The authors of “Theology Matters” recognize that their report represents preliminary research regarding growth factors in mainline Protestant churches in Ontario; and conclude that although “conservative theology” was both qualitatively and quantitatively measured in their study, it remains unclear precisely *how* theological conservatism contributes to church growth.<sup>57</sup> Examining additional research on church growth and decline in Canada is needed to address this and other questions. For example, what is the current interest in doctrinal theology by clergy and congregants? What impact might these theological beliefs have on the practice and life of faith in believers? A second Canadian study previously mentioned, *Hemorrhaging Faith*, may help to formulate answers to these questions.

---

<sup>55</sup> Haskell, et. al., 516.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 523-4, 535, 537-8.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 539.

ii) Although the research findings of *Hemorrhaging Faith* focus on the particular conditions under which Canadian young adults are leaving the Church and often leaving faith altogether, research also shows that spiritually-minded Canadian young people want doctrine and deeper theology.<sup>58</sup> Those who are currently part of Christian faith communities or who were raised within a Christian tradition report dissatisfaction with simplistic renderings of the Gospel, surface-level sermons, and platitudes when it comes to their questions around tough (and sometimes uncomfortable) topics like other religions and worldviews, leadership in the church, sexuality, identity formation, and especially living faith authentically as they approach and enter adulthood. As *Hemorrhaging Faith* authors summarize,

Many emerging adults crave depth. They're not interested in maintaining the status quo. They [would] rather take the risk of being in over their heads than settle for comfort and become stagnant. The same is true when it comes to the content of sermons. Many young adults are frustrated by feel-good teaching. They want to be afforded the opportunity to go deep and be challenged.<sup>59</sup>

Church-oriented young people are looking to engage faith with their hands, hearts, *and* minds. They want a faith that is well-thought out and makes sense to them and are not afraid to dig deeply into Scripture and theology. They also want to be prepared to face the demands and challenges of adult life from within a Christian worldview, and “want to be given the tools to apply the teaching to [their lives] immediately.”<sup>60</sup> Notice that the desire is not to be spoon-fed the answers or possible applications, but rather equipped and empowered to faithfully integrate beliefs into demands of everyday living for themselves.

---

<sup>58</sup> *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 68.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

These desires were expressed in the study across the spectrum by faith “Engagers,” “Fence-Sitters,” “Wanderers,” and “Rejecters” alike.<sup>61</sup>

*Hemorrhaging Faith* research also highlights that the method of delivery for spiritual teaching is key. Rather than only sitting passively to lecture-style sermons, Canadian young adults want to be part of a church culture that invites and welcomes theological questions. One interviewee said, “because God is infinite, my questions are endless.”<sup>62</sup> Young people want to feel secure asking questions, heard when offering differing opinions, and taken seriously when expressing doubts. They are eager to engage in deep conversation, to wrestle with tough topics, and even be mentored. The authors of the study write,

According to the majority of the young adults we interviewed, right and wrong are a matter of personal opinion. It makes sense, then, that it’s important for them to have the opportunity to ask questions. They want to wrestle with what’s taught to them and make a judgement for themselves. This is important both at home and in the church... Many times, they’re not even looking to have all of their toughest questions answered on the spot... They want to know that if the person they’re asking doesn’t know the answer, they will get back to them.<sup>63</sup>

These findings are somewhat unsurprising as they highlight the importance of radical autonomy for Canadian young adults, the freedom to choose or create their own “truth.” Yet, while a postmodern denial of absolute truth generates problems for certain expressions of Christian orthodoxy, the outlook of many emerging adults in Canada still indicates a strong desire for critical thinking, digging deeper, and grappling with doctrine.

---

<sup>61</sup> Responses to the primary research data in *Hemorrhaging Faith* revealed four clusters which researchers termed “Engagers,” “Fence-Sitters,” “Wanderers,” and “Rejecters,” to describe their respective relative orientation towards the Christian faith. This orientation was usually indicative of participation in both private and corporate faith activities. See Penner et. al. “Chapter 3: Four Spiritual Types” in *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 27ff.

<sup>62</sup> *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 67.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

To keep and renew religious engagement in both present and future generations of Canadian young people, the Church needs fresh approaches in disciplining younger generations of theologically thirsty Christians.

Good theology engages the mind and is necessary for holistic faith. Whereas weak doctrine leads to weak practice and motivation in the life of faith, strong theology - or to borrow N. T. Wright's phrase, "thinking Christianly" - leads to acting Christianly through the expression of Christian care for others, as well as deeper devotion to God. All three of these aspects are needed for balanced and holistic faith: right practices (orthopraxy) and right feelings and motivations (orthopathy), yes. But these need to be informed by right thinking (orthodoxy). The authors of *Hemorrhaging Faith* observe,

When young adults do not experience the answers to prayer that they are looking for or do not feel they have experienced God, they are left feeling disappointed and may say that they have been failed by God. For many, the level of disappointment they experience is enough to persuade them to leave church and faith.<sup>64</sup>

Perceived unanswered prayer often leads to drifting away from the church and even outright rejection of faith in atheism. For a young person, deciding God does not exist is a means to stop the pain of God not giving them what they want – most often described as healing for a loved one or help in a difficult time.<sup>65</sup> This exemplifies not only the importance of recovering good theology in our churches (especially among young people and the adults who teach and guide them), but the also the relevance and urgency with which a recovery of doctrine must take place to enable mature faith development and faith retention of young people. Mark 12:30 reminds us that the whole person – one's heart, soul, mind, and strength – is desired by God; thus, the whole person must be addressed with the whole gospel. In this context, I wish to suggest that Kevin Vanhoozer's creative reimagining of the theological task in *The Drama of Doctrine*

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 47-51.

provides a fresh and relevant approach to theology - one that is not exclusively experiential, but that engages the believer at a number of levels and that allows for approaches that satisfy some of the conditions for a successful theological framework that studies like *Hemorrhaging Faith* suggest are necessary.

iii) Critiquing the anthropocentrism in Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach to theology, Vanhoozer instead advocates for what he calls a "canonical-linguistic approach" which reestablishes the foundation of Christian Scripture yet still affirms and retains Lindbeck's focus on practical aspects of faith. Thus, he develops a thorough metaphor of drama to demonstrate the important and relevant role of theology for the Christian life of faith.<sup>66</sup> Vanhoozer's premise is that the common dichotomy of theory and practice in theology has resulted in "an atrophying of theological muscle as a result of too many correlations and accommodations to philosophical and cultural trends."<sup>67</sup> His desire is to help make theology come alive to convey its value and be practical, though not pragmatic; and claims that doctrine, when properly understood and applied, should be life changing and as impactful as stage directions for a play:

[Theology] should strive for a shape of life that repeats differently the life of Jesus, a being-toward-resurrection where one's thoughts, feelings, and doings are conditioned not by the ephemeral processes of this world, where rust and moth corrupt, but by the narrative of the triune God, a story that plumbs the heights and the depths and which inserts us into the dramatic flow of evangelical reality.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> In his preface to *The Drama of Doctrine* Vanhoozer writes, "...there is no more urgent task in the church than to demonstrate faith's understanding by living truthfully with others before God. It further argues that doctrine is an indispensable aid to understanding and to truthful living. Doctrine is a vital ingredient in the well-being of the church, a vital aid to its public witness" (xii).

<sup>67</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 3.

<sup>68</sup> Vanhoozer, "Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity," 25. Note that Vanhoozer's use of "evangelical" in this context has do to with evangelism and communicating the Gospel in present postmodern culture, rather than American Evangelicals as a theo-political group or evangelically oriented Christian denominations in general.

In a clear iteration of the dynamic participatory event theme featured so prominently in Barth's theology, Vanhoozer describes the purpose of Christ's Church is to act out the Gospel in everyday life for "the sake of a watching world" where actors (Christians) invite and encourage participation from the audience (unbelievers), drawing them into the theatre company (community of faith) and production (Kingdom of God).<sup>69</sup>

Vanhoozer's metaphor of drama is not fanciful artistic musing; rather, it expresses an important value of Christian faith by demonstrating the importance of doctrine for *all* Christians, not just an elite. It also supports Gunton's concept of personhood as beings-in-relation, as all actors in the company work towards a communal goal together in relation with one another instead of as isolated individuals. The whole is greater than the sum of its individual parts. In contrast to the current culture of neoliberalism, which places value on an individual's temporary economic advantage and immediate societal contributions, the value in Vanhoozer's model is found as actors (persons) participate within and uplift the community. In this view, theological competence involves more than intellectual or academic pursuit; it is profoundly practical because the goal is living out theology – "dramaturgy" – in the "performance" of Christian life. Vanhoozer claims, "No dichotomy is as fatal to the notion of doctrinal theology as that of theory and practice, a mortal fault line that runs through the academy and church alike."<sup>70</sup> Faith cannot be passive; it requires active and ongoing participation. One way for the Church to accomplish this is through the integration of contemporary language for understanding and a fresh approach to theology, like Vanhoozer suggests, for communication.

## 1.5 The Recovery of Doctrine

Recovering theological engagement of the mind is both important and relevant for today's Church in communicating the gospel and challenging the saturating culture of popular North American Christianity. As Ringma argues, a balance between the "head, hands, and heart" of faith is necessary for the development of holistic and mature faith;

---

<sup>69</sup> See "Part Four: The Performance" in Vanhoozer's *Drama of Doctrine*, 363-444.

<sup>70</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 13.

yet, recent research discussed earlier in this Chapter shows a severe lacking in at least the first of these. It ought to be the task of clergy, theologians, and Church leaders to discover and implement fresh ways of engaging believers' minds, so thus to spur believers on in deeper love and service to God.

Beyond method or a system, the question remains: with which doctrine shall we begin? Implicit in the word "doctrine" is already a recognition of its importance. Christian doctrine, by its designation as such, is involved with the primary aspects of Christian belief and faith. Other non-dogmatic, non-doctrinal questions are therefore secondary (or tertiary, etc.) non-essential matters. In some ways, the order in which doctrine is studied or revitalized could be inconsequential; however, I propose that the doctrine of the Trinity is not merely one example of Christian doctrine that needs renewed attention, but that it is the most important. As such, it can serve as an ideal case study for the importance of the rediscovery of doctrine generally. Five particular reasons for giving it this consideration are suggested in what follows.

As with so many aspects of Christian doctrine, two seemingly opposing truths must be held together in tension by faith. American theologian and professor Roger E. Olson urges his students towards adopting a "both-and" theology instead of an "either-or" outlook; the latter of which is often the unfortunate result of drastic pendulum swings as doctrine emerges from defensive, though well-meaning, concerns to protect certain aspects of doctrine from heresy.<sup>71</sup> He writes,

Could it be that God is *both* three *and* one? Could it be that God is both self-limiting and sovereign? [...] Perhaps many of the doctrinal divisions that have arisen are due to unnecessary bifurcations – false alternatives. Either-or thinking becomes a habit. People fail to look for the combinations, the truth in both sides. [...] Instead of focusing obsessively on differences as if they could never be reconciled, what if God's people looked

---

<sup>71</sup> Roger E. Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 22-3.

long and hard for the truth in seemingly irreconcilable but equally biblically supported beliefs and doctrines?<sup>72</sup>

Olson's proposal of "both-and" outlook is applicable and relevant to the long debated knowability of God and has important ramifications to how one approaches the doctrine of the Trinity.

i) Firstly, the doctrine of the Trinity ensures the proper posture of humility when approaching the theological task. Northern Irish theologian and priest, Alister McGrath, describes the concept of "mystery" in the following way: "A mystery is not a flawed concept whose inner contradictions are cruelly exposed by human reason, but something that exceeds human reason's capacity to discern and describe."<sup>73</sup> Simply stated, human reason does not have the capacity to take in all there is to know and understand about God. Thus, the mystery of God holds this unknowability while we search for language to identify and describe God, safeguarding the glory of God from human simplification. McGrath also refers to Swiss theologian Emil Brunner's description of trinitarian doctrine as a theological "security doctrine."<sup>74</sup> For McGrath and Brunner, the incomprehensibility of the Trinity serves as a reminder of the majesty and glory of God and humanity's finitude in comparison. By beginning theological study with the ultimately futile pursuit of fully understanding God, mastery is rendered impossible; so that we are more likely to maintain a position of humility with God – and each other.

It is neither that finite human minds (whether through devoted study or divine self-revelation) have the capacity to comprehend infinite God, nor that God's transcendence is so absolute that human creatures may never know anything about the Creator whose image they bear. Instead, I suggest the careful theologian can *both* affirm the knowability of God through His self-revelation in human history *and* still maintain the mystery of

---

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 23-4.

<sup>73</sup> Alister McGrath, "On the Trinity" in *Winchester Cathedral Lecture Series*, Youtube video 45:44, live streamed June 26, 2018. Accessed July 20, 2019 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DhBPg8M9fyo>. See 8:56ff.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 11:22ff.

God, as complete understanding is not yet possible (1 Corinthians 13:12). American pastor and theologian, Eugene Peterson, beautifully describes a way to faithfully hold the tension of the knowability and mystery of God:

[I]t is commonly said that the Trinity is a mystery. And it certainly is.... But it is not a mystery veiled in darkness in which we can only grope and guess. It is a mystery in which we are given to understand that we will never know all there is of God... It is not a mystery that keeps us in the dark, but a mystery in which we are taken by the hand and gradually led into the light.<sup>75</sup>

Peterson's poetic description is reminiscent of the recurring theme of Immanuel throughout Barth's doctrines of God and the Christian community in *Church Dogmatics*. In Barth's view, God has chosen both Israel and the Gentile Church to be His covenant partner because He wills to be Immanuel – 'God with us.'<sup>76</sup> The significance of Barth's ecclesiology therefore lies in the fact that God does not will to be God without humankind, but rather wills to be God with us in an eternal covenant relationship of love which He, Himself, creates and fulfills on behalf of both partners. In his article, "Barth, The Trinity, and Human Freedom," Gunton highlights Barth's emphasis on the personal nature of God in relationship with humanity. Though God precedes His creation as Creator, He chooses to concretely enter human history as the reconciling Son and offer His continued perfecting presence as Spirit in the "gracious and personal divine accompanying of the creature."<sup>77</sup> Thus in this view, by beginning the theological task with a doctrine to which humankind may never be fully illumed we are reminded of our creaturely status in relationship with our Creator. Mastery of the doctrine of the Trinity – or for any other doctrine – is impossible. Starting with the paradoxical mystery of God

---

<sup>75</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 306.

<sup>76</sup> Barth, *CD IV/1* §57.

<sup>77</sup> Colin E. Gunton, "Barth, The Trinity, and Human Freedom," in *Theology Today* 43 no. 3 (1986), 323. See especially section III (322-5).

revealed as three divine persons in one being, perfect unity in diversity, helps to ensure a posture of humility as one is, indeed, *led* into the light by gracious Immanuel.

ii) The second and third reasons why the doctrine of the Trinity needs renewed attention go hand in hand: trinitarian theology affirms both essential unity among Christian denominations and marks the boundary of essential difference between Christianity and other religions and spiritualities. In the long history of division, radicalization, and violence within the Church, there is a need to focus on shared dogmatic aspects of faith. Affirming common core belief in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as in the creeds provides both a reminder of unity as well as a call to greater ecumenism.

Interestingly, Barth sees the entire basis for ecumenism and Church unity as grounded in the doctrine of the Trinity. Not only can a renewal of trinitarian doctrine and understanding lead to greater unity within the Christian community, but it is the unity of the Church with its many distinct persons that reflects back the triune identity, unity-in-diversity, of its Lord. In viewing the Church as Christ's physical body on earth (as Barth does in his *totus Christus* theology), unity is no longer a chief value or some unattainable goal towards which Christians must continually strive; rather, it is a state of current reality which is quite obviously perceived. According to Barth, the Church possesses "a unity which does not have to be established but is already there ontologically."<sup>78</sup> No one questions the oneness or wholeness of a human body, though distinct parts are easily identified and distinguished; likewise, in the Body of Christ justified humanity is blatantly and indisputably unified with Christ the Head. Regarding denominational distinctions, congregational disputes, and individual disagreements, the focus shifts dramatically: oneness is not a goal, oneness already is. For Barth scholar and theologian Adam Neder, the supreme value in Barth's innovative and extensive view of participation in Christ also lies in the sphere of ecumenism. He writes,

Barth was fond of pointing out that church unity is not created but discovered. If his distinctive understanding of participation

---

<sup>78</sup> Barth, *CD IV/1* §62, 671.

in God could somehow contribute to this ongoing discovery, and to the church's clarification of its witness in the world, that would be a very valuable thing indeed.<sup>79</sup>

Instead of parties approaching differences with the intent of conflict resolution – domination and control at one end of the spectrum and compromise and collaboration at the other – Barth's view of the Body of Christ affects underlying attitudes such that they begin with the affirmation of pre-existing and present unity. Thus, cooperation, interdependence, mutual support and service in *koinonia* can displace separation, independence, ambition, and inward focus as the Church's default impetus.

iii) On the other hand, the concept and doctrine of Trinity is what distinguishes Christianity from related faiths of Judaism and Islam whose adherents also seek to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Development of the doctrine of the Trinity helped the Early Church establish itself apart from its Jewish roots and has been essential in protecting Christian orthodoxy from heresy. Certainly, we can appreciate the impact that trinitarian doctrine has on disciplines of evangelism and apologetics. Beginning by deepening one's understanding of God and ability to articulate God as both unity and diversity of three persons is critical to these missional tasks. Our understanding of God and His redemptive story will at least influence, if not determine, our communication of the gospel.

iv) Fourthly, the doctrine of the Trinity is the keystone to other Christian doctrine. Tertullian is credited in the early third century with being the first to use the Latin term *trinitas* (rather than the older Greek term "triad") to describe the Christian God along with the concept of "one substance, three persons."<sup>80</sup> Using analogies of root-shoot-fruit, and sun-beam-illumination point, he understood God the Father as the divine source of the Godhead as the Son and Holy Spirit were issued forth. This "issuing forth" did not create three Gods but rather one God in three persons which Tertullian described as

---

<sup>79</sup> Adam Neder, *Participation in Christ: An Entry into Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 92.

<sup>80</sup> Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 3, 11, 12.

“manifestations of a single indivisible power.”<sup>81</sup> This paradoxical mystery of God as unity in diversity and diversity in unity is encapsulated in the doctrine of the Trinity and is fundamental to other areas of Christian theology. Although sometimes described as a cornerstone or foundational doctrine upon which other doctrines are built, theologian Alister McGrath instead likens the doctrine of the Trinity to a keystone in an arch, by which all other doctrine is supported and held together.<sup>82</sup> Evangelical theologian, Millard J. Erickson, has a similar take. Commenting on the complexity and intricacies of the doctrine of the Trinity, he argues that a deeper understanding of the Trinity is needed before exploring other areas of Christian theology.

The issue is more complex than it may appear at first glance. It is not simply a question of how many persons God is. Rather, the doctrine of the Trinity focuses on the nature of salvation and the means to it. It emphasizes the idea of God himself providing what he requires. This in turn poses the question of the human predicament, which makes this provision necessary. Hence, this doctrine is something of a keystone for a number of other doctrines. Without it, these doctrines collapse, or at least are modified or rendered unnecessary.<sup>83</sup>

Whether one views the doctrine of the Trinity as the foundation of Christian theology or its keystone, it is evident that even an elementary understanding of God (as God has revealed God’s self as three persons in one essential unity of Father, Son, and Spirit) is indispensable to Christian orthodoxy.

Looking at the whole of Christian theology through the lens of the doctrine of the Trinity leads to important developments in other doctrines. For example, defining the triune God as being-in-relationship and viewing communion as the constitutive essence of being

---

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>82</sup> Alister McGrath, “On the Trinity,” 25:18ff.

<sup>83</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 19.

allows for the Holy Spirit to have a greater constitutive role in the ontology of the Church. Greek Orthodox theologian, John Zizioulas, explains,

In a Christological perspective alone we can speak of the Church as *in-stituted* (by Christ), but in a pneumatological perspective we have to speak of it as *con-stituted* (by the Spirit). [...] The “con-stitution” is something that involves us in its very being, something we accept freely, because we take part in its very emergence.<sup>84</sup>

With this renewed vision of *koinonia* of the Spirit, ecumenism is neither collective individualism nor even a collective unity, but rather a “*unity in identity*” or unity in diversity – an organic ontological unity.<sup>85</sup> Other doctrines, such as that of creation, soteriology, Christology, Pneumatology, and even ecclesiology, etc. are best approached when they are first situated within proper context of the Trinity. Gunton takes this a step further, claiming *all* aspects of human life and the very being of the world are affected by the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>86</sup> We will examine some of these effects more closely in section 2.5.

v) Finally, Christians are called to active faith, living lives of worship and service to God, and it follows that to love and serve God one must first have a proper concept of the One to whom one’s life is oriented.<sup>87</sup> Yet, despite its priority in the creeds, trinitarian doctrine has become essentially divorced from Western practice of Christianity in modern times to the detriment of the Church and her witness. Trinitarian theology was one of the first

---

<sup>84</sup> Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1985), 140.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>86</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, Chapters 1, 2, and 8.

<sup>87</sup> Gunton shares a similar view, exemplified in the following excerpt from *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, “The point of all this theology is not that it is the whole of what we need, but that it is an indispensable part. If we do not know who our God is, then we shall not know how we are to grow like him. That was Basil’s point in his discourse on the Spirit. Without the Trinity, we cannot know that God is love, but we do know it, for the doctrine of the Trinity is the teaching that God is love, not only towards us, but in his deepest and eternal being” (18).

major theological issues the early Church faced, yet in recent times it is often approached as a mathematical puzzle to be solved or a logical impossibility in the West: how can God possibly be both one and three? Theologian Bernard Lonergan is credited with saying, tongue in cheek, that the Trinity is a matter of five notions, four relations, three persons, two processions, one substance, and zero understanding. Changing the framework from one of incomprehensible problem to one where God is understood as existing and *only* existing in loving relationship can have significant implications to other Christian doctrine as well as many practical aspects of the Christian life of faith such as worship, evangelism, and discipleship. In this regard, Colin Gunton's theological treatment of the Trinity and his theology of relatedness deserves closer examination and will provide the basis for Chapter 2.

## 1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has identified the eclipse of the mind in the Church as well as in wider North American culture as a significant problem. Yet, despite evidence of doctrinal decline in recent decades, theology remains vitally important for mature, holistic faith as well as for addressing some of life's most fundamental questions. There is a need to recover balance between orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and orthopathy in the Christian life. Recent Canadian studies "Theology Matters" and *Hemorrhaging Faith* have demonstrated that not only is theological engagement key to church growth and retention, but it is also desired by many Canadian young people as they prepare for adult life within a Biblical worldview. Young people value and recognize the need for congruency between how faith is believed and preached, with how it is lived out in all aspects of one's life. With this in view, Kevin Vanhoozer's vision of doctrine as participatory drama was offered as a relevant and enticing means of (re)engaging young people with the task of theology. His creative framework of dramaturgy supports holistic faith, sparks renewed doctrinal interest by breathing new life into theology, helps to bridge the specialized intellectual gap between elite and laypeople, and gives intrinsic purpose and value to all humans as actors.

This chapter argued that the doctrine of the Trinity is the keystone to other doctrine and will, therefore, be used as a case study in the following chapter to explore the impact that

a recovery of doctrine can have on the Christian life of faith in general. Chapter 3, for its part, will focus more specifically on the application of renewed trinitarian doctrine to the faith development of emerging adults in Canada in an attempt to address some of the contemporary concerns raised in *Hemorrhaging Faith*.

## Chapter 2

### 2 Doctrine of the Trinity in the Theology of Colin Gunton

By the final reformation of the Nicene Creed at the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE, the doctrine of the Trinity was firmly established and generally thought to be settled. Though some new developments through the medieval period were contributed by theologians such as Anselm of Canterbury, little innovative scholarship was added to trinitarian thought besides the communal-social model of divine love put forth by Richard of St. Victor and an attempt by Thomas Aquinas to synthesize Richard's approach with Augustine's psychological model. Even the Reformers, while squarely affirming the unity of God in three persons, tended to avoid the doctrine directly by appealing to a "limit of incomprehensibility within God."<sup>88</sup> Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity remained relatively untouched until its resurgence in the twentieth century, a resurgence often associated with the theology of Karl Barth.

There is insufficient scope within this thesis to offer even a cursory treatment of the remarkable developments in trinitarian theology that took place in the last century. It will, however, suffice for our purposes to highlight the contributions of one late twentieth theologian working in this tradition, the British Reformed theologian Colin Gunton. By way of context, we can say simply that Gunton's theology is located in a larger movement and reflects wider trends found in a range of twentieth century trinitarian theologians, not only from Barth (on whom Gunton did his doctoral research and about whom he wrote extensively), but also from scholars such as Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Karl Rahner, Catherine LaCugna, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Thomas F. Torrance, and John Zizioulas — to name but a representative few.<sup>89</sup> Many themes in

---

<sup>88</sup> Olson and Hall, 68.

<sup>89</sup> See Gary D. Badcock, *Light of Truth & Fire of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997) and Roger E. Olson and Christopher A. Hall, *The Trinity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002) for a comprehensive overview of the historical development of trinitarian theology from the Early Church through to the end of the twentieth century.

Gunton are common to all such writers: debates about the “immanent” and the “economic” Trinity, the question of the psychological vs. social analogies of the Trinity and hybrids of the two, the relation of Trinity to Christology, the importance of feminist critique, and so on, can be found in varied threads in many such writers. Gunton, however, makes a range of contributions that will prove important to our argument, and can also serve as a unique representative of the wider movement in the renewal of trinitarian doctrine. This chapter will locate Gunton in the field of trinitarian theology, outline his overall theological approach, identify challenges in the Western tradition of trinitarian theology as well as discuss Gunton’s proposed “solutions” to these problems, and conclude with highlighting some of the potential impact a renewed doctrine of the Trinity can have on the Christian mind and life of faith.

## 2.1 Gunton’s Theological Approach

Although a Protestant Christian, and so in many ways an heir of Augustine, Gunton spends much of his work critiquing Augustine and the trinitarian doctrine inherited by his legacy in the Western church. Heavily influenced by Orthodox theologian, John Zizioulas, in his emphasis on the Church as a community of persons reflecting the image of her Triune Lord, Gunton tends to build on social theological approaches begun by the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus), whom he believes were never completely understood or accurately translated by Augustine.

Like Barth, Gunton’s theology is dynamic, and his relational view of God as Trinity underpins his entire theological outlook. As the person of Christ and Christology are at the heart of Barth’s theology, so the Trinity is central in Gunton’s work and is an important aspect of his overall theological approach.<sup>90</sup> For Gunton, the nature of theology itself is trinitarian and requires awareness and belief in the Triune God. He explains:

---

<sup>90</sup> For an overview of Gunton’s full systematic theology underscored by trinitarian themes, see Colin E. Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002).

[B]ecause we are established in our being in the Trinity, we are enabled to think *from* and, with careful qualification, *about* the triune being of God. (The qualification consists in the fact that we may only speak about God while remaining within the relationship: any purely ‘objectivizing’ approach would be false abstraction.) Theology, on this account, is a trinitarian process, from the being of God through whom we are, to the articulation of the manifold relationships in which we have our created and redeemed being.<sup>91</sup>

Gunton is saying theology itself is, and must be, a trinitarian process as the very concept of theology is only possible with the Trinity: contemplating God the Father and Source from whom we have our being in relationship, through the Son who has assumed our nature, and by the power of Holy Spirit who dwells within. It is only because of our redemption that humans may find themselves in the relational context where theology is made possible. Here again, we see Gunton’s theology is reminiscent of Barth’s – humanity is ‘awakened’ by the power of the Holy Spirit to an already redeemed reality of being in relationship with God in Christ.<sup>92</sup> In Barth’s view, Christ has redeemed all of humanity in His one, glorious redemptive act, but not all yet know or are aware of this justified reality. Explained simply, “The Trinity belongs to the inner life of God, and can be known only by those who share in that life.”<sup>93</sup> Thus, for Gunton, like Barth, theology is only accessible from *within* the context of faith and cannot be conjured by creaturely pursuit outside of a restored relationship with the Triune Creator.

From the start, Gunton’s theology is saturated with Trinitarian themes, and the treatment is so extensive that only a sketch can be offered here. The following excerpt is worth quoting at length to provide an overview of Gunton’s theology and demonstrate the significance of his trinitarian outlook to other aspects of Christian theology and life of faith.

---

<sup>91</sup> Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 6.

<sup>92</sup> See Barth, *CD IV/3* §62, especially pages 647-54 on the role of the Holy Spirit as the awakening agent and constitutive power of the Christian Community.

<sup>93</sup> Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 119.

The Father may be, in the traditional language, the fount of the Trinity, but the Son and the Spirit are equally constitutive of the eternal being of the one God. This further implies that God is not a monad – God is not lonely, as some of the early theologians said – because communion is intrinsic to his being. If we ask how three can be one, the answer is that *this* God is one only by virtue of the way in which Father, Son and Spirit mutually and reciprocally give to and receive from each other everything that they are. The Cappadocian Fathers coined the concept of *perichoresis* to characterize this unique form of being. God *is* ‘a sort of continuous and indivisible community’ says the letter usually attributed to Basil of Caesarea. [...] On this account, the being of God is describable as love, but love of a particular kind. To say that God is love means, first, that God is constituted, made up without remainder, of a personal structure of giving and receiving. Internally, God is a fellowship of *persons* whose orientation is entirely to the other. The notion of there being three persons in God is problematic for us, because we think that person means individual in the modern sense of one whose being is defined *over against*, even in opposition to, other individuals. (Hence, of course, the essentially competitive ideology of much modern social order.) The trinitarian notion of person does incorporate one aspect of the notion of individuality, because it holds that each person is unique and irreplaceable. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and all three of them are essential to God’s being as God. On the other hand, these three are, while distinct from each other, not in competition, as in modern individualism, but entirely for and from one another. There is accordingly an orientation to the other within the eternal structure of God’s being. That is our first account of what it means to say that God is love.

The second is that the orientation of this God, his inner drive, we might say, is not to remain content with his eternal ordering as eternal love, but to move outwards to create a world which he loves and wishes to bring into relation with himself. The ‘immanent’ eternal orientation to the other is the basis of God’s creation, reconciliation and redemption of the other reality that is his world.<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>94</sup> Gunton, *The Christian Faith*, 186-7. Emphasis in original.

Here we see how Gunton's entire theological project flows from the concept of relational personhood, the basis of all human and creaturely life, which he views as originating from the inner relationships between Father, Son, and Spirit constituting the Godhead. *Perichoresis* is a central concept in Gunton's theology, particularly in his understanding of personhood, as it affirms that persons mutually constitute each other. On a human level, it means sharing and participating the being of another and is characterized by other-focused mutual self-giving love. When applied to the divine persons of the Trinity, Gunton describes *perichoresis* as the "total and eternal interanimation of being and energies" where persons mutually constitute each other.<sup>95</sup>

Without dismissing the significance of developing a theology of the immanent Trinity (as he often critiqued contemporaries LaCugna and Rahner of doing), Gunton favoured and built on Irenaeus' image of the Trinity – that of the Son and Spirit as the two hands of the Father – to depict God's ongoing activity in the world and in relation to humanity through the respective mediating and perfecting roles of the Son and Holy Spirit. Rather than being caught up in theorizing about God's inner being, his theology is deeply practical, expressing his concern to understand how God interacts with His creation and how human relationships with God and each other are thus transformed. Gunton's contributions to the development of trinitarian theology in the twentieth century include: his relational framework for understanding God as Trinity; a renewed definition of "person" which differentiates the personal from modern conceptions of the individual; proposed language shifts from typical trinitarian terminology in the Latin tradition; emphasis on the contextual framework of worship for the doctrine of the Trinity; and possible impacts of trinitarian theology on other Christian doctrine - especially doctrines of creation, the Church, divine attributes, and both divine and human freedom.

## 2.2 Challenges in the Western Theological Tradition

In the Preface of his first book on the Trinity, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, Gunton writes, "The fact is that the loss of a trinitarian dimension has gravely

---

<sup>95</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many*, 169-70.

impoverished the Christian tradition over recent decades.”<sup>96</sup> Like so many theologians before him, Gunton’s theological task is sparked by a desire to “correct” what he views as serious weaknesses within current theology and ecclesial practice in the West. One of the challenges faced by contemporary theology is what Gunton describes as the reaction of “hostility, dismissal, or indifference” to the doctrine of the Trinity due to modern Biblical scholasticism and critical studies.<sup>97</sup>

Yet, much of Gunton’s critique of the Western theological approach to the doctrine of the Trinity has far less to do with contemporary challenges, but rather stems for what he claims are flaws stretching back to Augustine. Despite the saint’s legacy and prodigious contributions, Gunton believes that his over-emphasis of the essential unknowability of God and on the oneness of God have damaged generations of Christian thinkers. The following section seeks to highlight three of the most significant weaknesses that Gunton sees in the Augustinian trinitarian tradition.

(i) The first challenge of contemporary theology in the West that Gunton identifies, as already noted, is the emphasis of the essential unknowability of God, exemplified in the typical Western approach to the Trinity where God’s “threeness” is little more than an afterthought tacked on to an *a priori* monotheistic belief. This is not a question of whether the Christian view of God is three *or* one, but rather an issue of weighting, as Gunton argues that Augustine and the Western tradition have gone too far to an extreme. He states, “the unity of God has been stressed at the expense of his triunity”<sup>98</sup> and he is not alone in this observation. Evangelical theologian Gerald Bray notes that in addition to not knowing how to address the question of how God is one yet three, many preachers

---

<sup>96</sup> Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 6.

<sup>97</sup> See Colin E. Gunton, *Enlightenment and Alienation: An Essay Towards a Trinitarian Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1985). Vanhoozer shares Gunton’s concern and explains that the problem of applying secular methodologies to theology is that Biblical scholarship has become anthropocentric rather than trinitarian. In his chapter titled, “Scripture and Tradition” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, he points out a serious consequence of removing all faith from biblical scholarship: “Whose reading counts, and why?” (158).

<sup>98</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, 39.

even “feel embarrassed when the subject is raised. To them it is an aridly intellectual doctrine without practical application to the life of the church and so they ignore it...”<sup>99</sup> Sadly, the doctrine of God and especially the Trinity seem to have fallen by the wayside in the West – sometimes deliberately avoided – as the concept of God’s trinity in unity is viewed as a logical impossibility and an obstacle to rational faith. It is interesting that in all the questions asked of church clergy and congregants in the “Theology Matters” study, none were about the Trinity and only one asked about the divinity of Christ. While this isolated observation is far from conclusive, it does exemplify at least an absence (if not intentional avoidance) of doctrinal thought among the authors and participants of this significant study in Canadian Christianity.

In contrast to this default emphasis on God’s unity in the West, Gunton bases much of his theological orientation regarding the doctrine of God on Zizioulas’ more Eastern framework which stresses the inner-trinitarian relationships between Father, Son, and Spirit as the essential basis of divine ontology. He writes,

The being of God is a relational being: without the concept of communion it would not be possible to speak of the being of God. [...] It would be unthinkable to speak of the “one God” before speaking of the God who is “communion,” that is to say, of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Trinity is a *primordial* ontological concept and not a notion which is added to the divine substance or rather which follows it, as is the case in the dogmatic manuals of the West and, alas, in those of the East in modern times. The substance of God, “God,” has no ontological content, no true being, apart from communion. In this way, communion becomes an ontological concept in patristic thought. Nothing in existence is conceivable in itself, as an individual... since even God exists thanks to an event of communion.<sup>100</sup>

Thus, the question rises, when and how did this concept of being change? Here, Gunton points to Augustine suggesting that the “problem” of three and one (as it is so often

---

<sup>99</sup> Bray, 125.

<sup>100</sup> Zizioulas, 17. Emphasis in original.

characterized in Western theology) is philosophical and not biblical. He states that these challenges “emerged when all this moved into the Greek world with its far more abstract and restrictive conception of divine unity.”<sup>101</sup> If Gunton is correct in his assessment, he has identified a seismic shift in the theological framework of the West.

Gunton further points to the later influences of Platonism in Augustine’s work as the source of the overemphasis of God’s unity found in Western theological tradition. He observes,

[W]hile theology and worship of Eastern orthodoxy continue to be saturated with trinitarian categories, the doctrine of the Trinity has in the West come into increasing question. [...] there has for long been a tendency to treat the doctrine as a *problem* rather than encapsulating the heart of the Christian gospel.<sup>102</sup>

Here, Gunton expands his critique of Augustine, claiming the latter as the source of what he deems to be the Western approach to trinitarian theology as being a mathematical problem to be solved. Like other theologians working in this field, he has particular hostility to the standard practice in older textbook theologies, Catholic and Protestant alike, for the doctrine of God (unity) to precede the doctrine of the Trinity (diversity). In his essay, “Barth, The Trinity, and Human Freedom,” Gunton argues that widespread cultural atheism and religious Unitarianism at least in part stem from what he deems to be a modalist tendency in the Augustinian theological tradition, which results from its overemphasis on the oneness of God.<sup>103</sup> These are only some of the implicit dangers in focusing first on God’s unity instead of approaching the doctrine of God with the foremost understanding that God is defined as being in relation, for as Gunton and

---

<sup>101</sup> Gunton, *The Christian Faith*, 183. See also Gunton, “Chapter 2: The Disappearing Other,” in *The One, The Three and the Many*, 41-73.

<sup>102</sup> Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 31. Emphasis added.

<sup>103</sup> Gunton, “Barth, The Trinity, and Human Freedom,” 325.

Zizioulas remind us, “The substance of God, ‘God,’ has no ontological content, no true being, apart from communion.”<sup>104</sup>

Another danger of prioritizing God’s unity over diversity is the resulting presumption of an underlying material substance or fourth aspect to God which provides the source for the divine persons rather than viewing the three persons in relationship as constitutive of God’s being. In Gunton’s analysis, Augustine’s analogies of the Trinity lead to a range of challenges, the first being that they point to “an unknown substance *supporting* the three persons rather than *being constituted* by their relatedness.”<sup>105</sup> A primary example is that of a single human mind which forms the basis of Augustine’s famous psychological analogy where Father, Son, and Spirit are represented by memory, understanding, and will. One of the dangers with this image is that the three persons are conceived as subordinated to a fourth “essence,” – i.e. the mind – along with an overemphasis on the unity of God. Gunton accuses Augustine of shifting the source of Christian theology from God’s revelation in Israel and Jesus to the monadic abstractions of Platonic philosophy.

Again, Gunton contrasts Augustine’s theology of the Trinity with that of the Cappadocian Fathers who shaped the development of Eastern theology every bit as much as Augustine shaped that of the Latin West, and who see the interpersonal relations in the Godhead as constituting God’s being. According to Gunton, “The doctrine of the Trinity, as it comes to us from the Cappadocian theologians, teaches us that the first thing to be said about the being of God is that it consists in personal communion. Communion is for Basil an ontological category. The *nature* of God is communion.”<sup>106</sup> By taking a different theological approach, one that emphasizes God existing in relationship instead of as a mathematical impossibility, Gunton’s claim is that we can not only bring increased theological understanding to believers but also impact other areas of doctrine and

---

<sup>104</sup> Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 9. See also Zizioulas, 17.

<sup>105</sup> Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 42-3. Emphasis in original.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 72. Emphasis in original.

Christian life (not only *theoria*, but also *praxis* and *pathos*) – perhaps most importantly the Church’s mission.

On this account, Christians really do have something to say to the world. Is this not the task for which we are commissioned by God Himself? God the Father through Christ the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit has reconciled the world to Himself, drawing the creature into trinitarian communion that constitutes the divine nature, and the world ought to know of its salvation. At the centre of this view is the crucial concept of person, as this more Eastern approach to the doctrine of God for which Gunton advocates “replaces a *logical* conception of the relation between God and the world with a *personal* one”.<sup>107</sup> Gunton suggests this shift in perspective is significant for at least two reasons: it is important for understanding our distinctiveness as persons as the basis of our relationships (with God, with fellow humans, and with the world), and also in understanding the complete dependence of creation on its Creator. This theme of personhood be revisited again in later sections as it plays a significant role in Gunton’s theology, and, as I seek to demonstrate, can also play a key role in the personal identity and faith formation among emerging adults.

The Enlightenment project brought about a complete displacement of God in modern life, shifting the functions of authority and rationality once attributed to the Divine to human consciousness and the mind.<sup>108</sup> With the rise of science, the social order was divorced from any theological context, so that the theological questions of living in relation with the Creator became relegated to individual, private spirituality. Gunton is aware of this dynamic in the modern era, yet he argues that the prominent atheism in the West (atheism in popular sense rather than a proper philosophical position of a-theism or anti-theism) is not a mere product of the Enlightenment, but that it largely stems from a much longer Western theological tradition emphasizing the essential unknowability of God and from

---

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 72. Emphasis in original.

<sup>108</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, 11ff. See especially sections 1.2 and 1.5 on Modernity as disengagement and the displacement of God, respectively.

its failure to engage meaningfully with the theme of trinitarian communion. God can never be fully accessed or known by finite creatures.

(ii) A second weakness in Western theology Gunton sees as inherited from Augustine is the inability to differentiate Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in a meaningful and coherent way. Gunton's claim is that Augustine's focus on the unity of God renders Father, Son, and Spirit near indistinguishable in his theology as each of the divine persons expresses all of the divine attributes. Once again, Gunton critiques Augustine of allowing late antique philosophy too much influence in the development of his theological framework. Referring to Augustine's influential theory of relational predication, Gunton writes,

The chief problem seems to be that his method of treating the concepts [substance-accident-relation] has left Augustine unable to break out of the stranglehold of the dualistic ontology which underlies the logic. [...] In all this, Augustine is taking a clear step back from the teaching of the Cappadocian Fathers. For them, the three persons are what they are in their relations, and therefore the relations qualify them ontologically, in terms of what they are. Because Augustine continues to use relation as a logical rather than an ontological predicate, he is precluded from being able to make claims about the being of the *particular* persons, who, because they lack distinguishable identity, tend to disappear into the all-embracing oneness of God.<sup>109</sup>

Gunton argues that if, as Augustine suggests, all three persons are completely involved in each and every act of divine economy the result is either modalism or a singular God in triplicate instead of a divine Trinity of persons whose very being exists in the interpersonal relationships between Father, Son, and Spirit. In contrast, Gunton's revitalized definition of "person" and his view of relationships as providing the framework for theological ontology are, as he claims, able to address this issue, as the three divine persons remain distinct while being perfectly unified in communion.

---

<sup>109</sup> Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 41-2.

Although a full treatment of this issue is beyond the scope of this thesis, it could well be argued that Gunton exaggerates the issue here and is possibly guilty of misreading Augustine. Certainly Augustine has a vigorous doctrine of trinitarian relations, and even Gunton acknowledges this in speaking of the former's theory of relations as "logical" rather than "ontological" in character. His point could be taken to mean that Augustine's theory of relations does not go far enough, therefore, rather than that he does not have a theory of relations. At this point, however, Gunton is hardly alone in his criticisms of the Augustinian position. Moltmann, for instance, is equally insistent that Augustine's theory lacks meaningful differentiation between the persons, on the grounds that his overall emphasis is very much on the divine unity.<sup>110</sup> However, in defense of Augustine, it is clear that he not only acknowledges distinction between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit but also defines this distinction by virtue of their activity in the world and, in particular, by way of the distinct relationships invoked by the eternal processions.

Augustine's introduction of the category of relationship as a differentiating factor neither undermines God's *ousia* nor *hypostasis*; rather, his imaginative invention and numerous trinitarian analogies have greatly aided in the development and preservation of Christian orthodoxy for centuries.<sup>111</sup> Henry Chadwick, translator of Augustine's *Confessions* and author of a biography on the Saint, offers a summary of the scope of Augustine's influence, which includes medieval theologians, Western mystics, Reformers, Eighteenth century Enlightenment thinkers, and many contemporary theologians as well.<sup>112</sup> This does, however, still leave open the question whether Gunton's contention that the Augustinian theory of trinitarian relations does not go far enough can be sustained. Although a full answer to this question is beyond the scope of this thesis, we will have reason to explore why the question might have significance well beyond what some

---

<sup>110</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 95.

<sup>111</sup> Stephen McKenna, "Introduction" to *De Trinitate* by St. Augustine of Hippo, ed. Hermigild Dressler, et. al., trans. Stephen McKenna, vii-xvii, (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988).

<sup>112</sup> Henry Chadwick, *Augustine*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 1-3.

would judge to be the narrow purview of trinitarian theology as such. At the very least, perhaps this is a place where applying Olson's "both-and" approach to Gunton and Augustine's theological contributions would serve the contemporary theologian well.

(iii) Highlighting a third problem in the Western tradition of trinitarian theology, Gunton discusses the challenges of language in the discipline. He explains that the terms *hypostases* and *ousia*, respectively used to denote God's threeness and oneness and typically interpreted as "persons" and "essence," are "conceptually distinct, but inseparable in thought, because they mutually involve one another."<sup>113</sup> He claims that linguistic difficulties can be traced back at least to Augustine, who admitted that he did not understand the nuanced difference between the crucial Greek trinitarian terms *ousia* and *hypostases*.<sup>114</sup> Gunton does admit Augustine recognizes the need for different words to describe the unity and plurality in God, but also claims Augustine fails to understand the concept of "person" as articulated in Cappadocian ontology as it relates to the Greek terms. Complicating the matter, translations into additional languages and etymological shifts over the centuries have amplified the linguistic obstacles in trinitarian theology. For example, while in the fourth century the word "person" meant a "distinct subsistence," in modern times it also carries the concept of a "rational consciousness" and, in our time in particular, signifies individual subjectivity. Additionally, "essence" can be easily confused or conflated with "substance" in modern languages; "personal" is often used interchangeably with "individual" in common vernacular; while in many ways the former concept has all but been eclipsed by the latter in scholarship and culture alike.

In response to the linguistic challenges in trinitarian theology, several theologians of recent times have proposed various alternatives to the standard vocabulary in the discipline. Instead of the classical terminology in trinitarian theology, Karl Barth uses the phrase 'mode of being' when discussing a particular person of the Trinity. The merits of Barth's phrasing have been long debated by later theologians. While still without

---

<sup>113</sup> Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 39.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

consensus, a significant critique of Barth is that his theology can lead to modalism as he implies a single rational consciousness among the divine persons.<sup>115</sup> Rahner prefers the terms ‘personality,’ ‘subsistence,’ and ‘subsistentiaity’ in his attempt to avoid any implications of an individual rational nature in God.<sup>116</sup> Rahner insists that there is only one consciousness in God (which subsists in a three-fold way), and that there is an awareness of the three ‘distinctiveness’ within the one divine consciousness. Yet, despite the varied attempts to clarify traditional trinitarian language, tensions between theological traditions and potential for misunderstanding persist. Furthermore, the entire discourse around the Trinity also requires a high level of specialized theological study to comprehend and is inaccessible to the average church-goer.

By contrast, Gunton’s proposal to revitalize the word “person” as distinct from the modern “individual” extends beyond a linguistic reiteration of traditional terminology for classical concepts. Instead, he argues for a completely different way of thinking about ourselves as humans. As will be explained more fully in section 2.4, by beginning his theological approach with establishing a relational ontology of the Trinity as persons-in-relation, Gunton addresses this linguistic challenge in a refreshing way.

iv) Related to this challenge of language in the doctrine of the Trinity is the inaccessibility of traditional terminology and concepts to laypeople. This is a fourth obstacle which, I believe, must be addressed for an adequate contemporary doctrine of the Trinity. Trinitarian discourse in general, and Augustine’s psychological analogy specifically, are so complicated and surrounded by technical language that it requires considerable specialized study and intellectual gymnastics to comprehend them. Gunton makes the interesting point that “the tragedy is that Augustine’s work is so brilliant that it blinded generations of theologians to its damaging weaknesses.”<sup>117</sup> In this way, the theory advanced effectively trumped its subject matter. Although there are grounds for

---

<sup>115</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), 108.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>117</sup> Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 39.

thinking that Gunton exaggerates the situation, Augustine's view that God is essentially unknowable as well as his avoidance of the corrupt inferior material world and resultant pursuit of inner intellectual analogies for the Trinity, his overemphasis on divine unity and consequent tendency towards modalism, and his failure to understand the Cappadocians' distinction between *hypostasis* and *ousia* pose significant challenges to the doctrine of the Trinity which cannot be ignored. Unfortunately, Augustine's highly nuanced terminology, philosophical developments, and separation of God's being from the concrete economy of creation and redemption in human history create additional obstacles to theological understanding and render his analogies and contributions to Trinitarian doctrine inaccessible to the average Christian. As was argued in Chapter 1, communication *and* understanding must be present in (good) theology.

Current culture in the West is also, broadly speaking, uninterested in philosophical arguments, proofs, and debates concerning the existence and nature of God. What we see across Western culture now are the overarching themes of self-mastery, individual autonomy, success, obsession with pleasure and consumption, as well as all the downfalls of what Gunton sees as the Enlightenment's emphasis on the individual to the eclipse of the person. What is relevant, valued, and desperately needed now is a recovery of authentic community and depth of relationships to counter the increasing individualization and isolation that has, sadly, become the norm.<sup>118</sup> Through technology, for example, Western society is increasingly and simultaneously both connected and isolated, resulting in a lack of community and inter-personal relationships characterized by true compassion.<sup>119</sup> This has been highlighted in *Hemorrhaging Faith*, and more recently exemplified in responses to the 2020-21 global pandemic, including subsequent

---

<sup>118</sup> See Paul Verhaeghe, *What About Me? The Struggle for Identity in a Market-Based Society*, trans. Jane Hedley-Prôle (Croyden, UK: CPI Group Ltd., 2014) for discussion on the psychological ramifications of increased isolation which stems from neoliberal ideology. This theme will be revisited in Chapter 3.2.

<sup>119</sup> Here I draw a distinction between compassion which includes feelings of empathy and care for the "other," and the popular value of acceptance which can be an action solely based in ideology or cognitive decision-making. Compassion acknowledges persons in relationship, requiring space and freedom between "self" and "other"; whereas acceptance/tolerance risks the dissolution of the individuals for the sake of the collective.

mental health crisis from prolonged social isolation and extreme social distancing measures.<sup>120</sup> In this context, there is huge potential for the doctrine of the Trinity to be relevant *and accessible* (despite the individualistic and anti-intellectual climate in the West), through a renewed sense of the importance of the “person.” In such a theology, one views God and the Church in the context of communion: like the triune God, we are beings-in-relation.

### 2.3 New Definitions: personal vs. individual

Edmund Hill, who among other distinctions has been an English translator of Augustine’s *De Trinitate*, writes in his introduction to that translation about how the doctrine of the Trinity is essentially divorced from Western Christianity in modern times. He asserts, “the mystery [of the Trinity] has come to be regarded as a curious kind of intellectual luxury for the theological highbrows, a subject on which not many priests are eager to preach sermons, no congregations to listen to them.”<sup>121</sup> The widespread lack of understanding and indeed, thinking, about one of the most basic credal elements of Christian faith is a serious problem for the Church today. Millard Erickson summarizes several challenges to the doctrine of the Trinity, among them stating that the traditional language of substance, essence, and person are no longer appropriate in contemporary contexts as these words hold vastly different meanings compared to the third and fourth centuries.<sup>122</sup> Many theologians through the twentieth century have attempted to address challenges with the classical terminology by proposing alternatives. Unfortunately, as was highlighted in the previous section discussing the challenge of language, all of these terms still require careful and specific definition as they carry substantial theological weight and remain largely incomprehensible to the average North American. By

---

<sup>120</sup> Giada Pietrabissa and Susan G. Simpson, “Psychological Consequences of Social Isolation During COVID-19 Outbreak,” in *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 no. 9 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.02201>, accessed March 19, 2021.

<sup>121</sup> Edmund Hill, “Introduction,” to *De Trinitate* by St. Augustine of Hippo, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991), 19.

<sup>122</sup> Erickson, “God in Three Persons,” 20.

contrast, I suggest that Gunton's proposed terminology is much more helpful due to its accessibility and understandability, provided the term "person" is salvaged from its modern synonymy with "individual" and "rational consciousness."

Gunton warns his readers about Enlightenment philosophical concepts of "the individual" and "the collective" and the threat they present to the theology of the Trinity. He claims the dangers of the "individual" are isolation, self-mastery, and pride, where "we don't need our neighbours to be human."<sup>123</sup> Emergence of the individual as the dominant ideal over personhood in the West ultimately leads to idolization of the self, which, for Christians, entails a complete reversal of faith and denial of one's being, not only as a neighbour, but as a creature-in-relation-with-Creator. On the other hand, the danger of the concept of any collective is suppression of the particular person. Gunton explains, "Wherever we look, the many – particular people with all their differences – are depersonalized by being swallowed up into the one, the mass, where individuality is suppressed in the interests of efficiency, economics, and homogeneity."<sup>124</sup> In both cases it is the concept of the "other" which seems to be feared and avoided, sadly at the cost of relationships and the value of personhood. Gunton's proposed remedy is to reclaim the value of person and personhood from the ravages of modern individualism. He suggests that in the Trinity – i.e., in the trinitarian persons and perichoretic relationships – we find the basis of all life, which can then be applied to created life in the world. Roland Chia points out that it is precisely this concept of *perichoresis* in Gunton's theology which allows for his development of personhood, as "...the notion of *perichoresis* enables us to address both individualism and collectivism because it presents an understanding of relationality which does not negate particularity."<sup>125</sup>

---

<sup>123</sup> Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 12.

<sup>124</sup> Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Essays Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 15.

<sup>125</sup> Roland Chia, "Trinity and Ontology: Colin Gunton's Ecclesiology," in *The International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9 no. 4 (2007), 465.

Similarly, Vanhoozer also argues a case for how the modern concepts of individual autonomy, rationality, and self-mastery have displaced a relational view of personhood, as well identifying the subsequent problem posed for theology when these modernist concepts are then projected back onto theology.<sup>126</sup> He maintains that in modern philosophy, the “other” is forgotten, feared, or marginalized; whereas from a postmodern viewpoint, the “other” lacks concrete definition and knowability as individuals are homogenized into the whole of collective society. Vanhoozer elaborates,

In modernity, the other (the weak, the foreign, the marginalized) was repressed, forced inside totalizing systems. [...] Postmodern thinkers typically view the other as so different from anything our categories can name, so resistant to categorization, as to be unable to say anything positive about it. The other virtually dissolves. Lacking substance, the other, once again, becomes easy to ignore. For how can one care for or love that whose nature is unknown to us?<sup>127</sup>

Yet, instead of viewing postmodernity as a threat to Christianity, Vanhoozer claims that theology has a “mission” to postmodern culture and sees hope in the fact that, like postmodernity, incarnational Christianity sees the “other” as the object of ethical concern, seeking to love and protect in tangible ways. But, as Vanhoozer crucially states, “[Christianity] does this by *naming* the other: ‘neighbor.’”<sup>128</sup> Rather than opting for a simple reclamation of “personhood” as Gunton advocates, Vanhoozer amplifies the point by suggesting that an alternative framework is needed for theology itself – one where, in contrast to modern science or philosophy, theology is viewed as a theo-drama that situates humanity within the biblical narrative of God’s ongoing redemptive and transformative work in the world. Despite not overtly describing or defining the Trinity, Vanhoozer is clear in his advocacy that our human communal dimensions of being are

---

<sup>126</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity: A Report on Knowledge (of God),” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 3-25. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.

correctly lived out when they reflect the mutually submissive perichoretic trinitarian relationships.

At another level, however, it is possible to argue that the challenge of appropriately defining God's being is neither a problem unique to Postmodernism nor was it born of the Enlightenment – it can be traced back to the early church and surrounding cultural influences of Neoplatonism which referred to God impersonally as “that which is,” instead of maintaining a properly Judeo-Christian perspective and speaking of “he who is.”<sup>129</sup> This slight linguistic difference carries tremendous theological weight. From the first Jewish and Gentile Christians, God was conceived as *Person*: living, animate, and in relationship with humanity. Yet, this vital concept of person (understood by Gunton as “being-in-relation”) is too often absent in the Western tradition.<sup>130</sup> In Gunton's view, much of the problem can be traced back to the Latin tradition's appropriation of Augustine. It is simply not possible to imagine perichoretic relationships as the basis for Divine or human personhood within Augustine's framework of psychological analogy of a *single* mind. Rather than communicating the threeness of persons in God, the Western theological tradition has a tendency to convey the Trinity as a relation between thirds.

Gunton's central focus on God's being-in-relation is not limited to the doctrine of the Trinity, for it has interesting applications to other areas of theology as well. This is a clear adaptation of Zizioulas' definition of “person” and his exploration of its theological significance to the inner relationships of both the Trinity as well as the ecclesial community. There are profound benefits that the renewed sense of personhood found in Zizioulas' and Gunton's trinitarian theology can have on subsequent ecclesiology as the church reflects the being of God in its unity in plurality. Gunton explains, “The Church is therefore called to be a being of persons-in-relation which receives its character as communion by virtue of its relation to God, and so is enabled to reflect something of that

---

<sup>129</sup> Bray, 34.

<sup>130</sup> This is a view powerfully echoed by the philosopher Paul Moser in *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), with particular emphasis on early modern philosophy.

being in the world.”<sup>131</sup> The question, then, turns to the challenge of identifying that which is being reflected. Is the Church accurately reflecting God in the world? How can Christians best reflect God? In response to this inquiry one can look at Gunton’s presentation of the theology of the Trinity. Like Zizioulas, Gunton views God’s being as the basis of the Church’s being: equal persons-in-relation where the “other” is required for one’s own personhood, and the particularity of each person is neither eclipsed nor amalgamated by the whole. Gunton argues that this space in the being of God is what allows for human space in relationship with God, freedom, election, and I would add identity formation (more correctly described as identity *discovery*). These discussions of personhood and freedom, as well as personhood and identity, will be taken up again in sections 2.5 and Chapter 3, respectively.

## 2.4 The Context of Trinitarian Theology

As with Barth’s approach to other doctrines, Christology grounded in the event of God’s self-revelation is also, unsurprisingly, the basis for his doctrine of God. For Barth, everything begins with Christ. Rowan Williams’ opening sentence to his chapter “Barth on the Triune God” in *Karl Barth: Studies of his Theological Method* reads, “That man should hear the Word of God is an impossibility; but it is an impossibility revealed to man by that very Word.”<sup>132</sup> Williams explains that the fact God reveals Himself in the world in a threefold way – Incarnate Word in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, recollection of the Word in Scripture, and in the Church’s preaching of the Word – says “something which is of substantial importance for our answer to the question, ‘*Who* is the God who speaks in revelation?’”<sup>133</sup> For Barth, the context of the theology of the Trinity is first a Christology grounded in God’s self-revelation, “the pure fact that God speaks to

---

<sup>131</sup> Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 12.

<sup>132</sup> Rowan D. Williams, “Barth on the Triune God” in *Karl Barth: Studies of his Theological Method*, ed. S. W. Sykes, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 147.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 149-50. Emphasis in original.

man [... and] the actuality of God's speaking and being heard."<sup>134</sup> The first thing we must learn in a quest to understand God is that the Revealer is the Revealed and Continuous Revealing.<sup>135</sup>

Williams' assessment of Barth's approach to the doctrine of the Trinity is that it comes less from an Augustinian tradition and stems more from God's chosen self-revelatory nature. He explains,

[I]n revealing himself under an alien form, 'something He is not', [God] shows himself to be capable of self-differentiation. He is thus Lord as 'Word' or 'Son,' in the differentiated form of revelation (*CD I/1*, 320); he remains by nature hidden and free, and so is Lord as 'Father' (*CD I/1*, 324); and he causes men to see the identity of his veiling and unveiling, which otherwise no man would see, and thus is Lord as 'Spirit' (*CD I/1*, 331-2). God is identity-in-distinction. [...] God's unity is such that it must be threefold; we cannot conceive it on the model of any other kind of unity.<sup>136</sup>

I think the beauty of Barth's trinitarian theology is also its challenge: the cyclical notion that understanding God in the trifold way of Revealer-Revealed-Revealing (or Cause of Revealing) can only happen from *within* the context of faith. The theological task is only made possible because the theologian has first been "awakened" to faith. However, Barth's approach does have a downfall: there is little or no apologetic value to understanding or communicating God in this framework because to know God in this Triune way requires one to first be subject to the Revealer's Revealing. While this could be a useful approach in furthering Christian discipleship, it remains "foolishness" to the unbeliever (1 Corinthians 1:18). It has also served to perpetuate the challenge of Western theological tradition of beginning with the unity of God who can only then be further understood as a Trinity of persons.

---

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 158-9.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 160.

Perhaps a better approach would be to revisit themes from section 1.3 about theology's purpose, including: understanding and communication of the gospel (Williams); to aid the flourishing human life (Volf); drawing humans into active participation with Christ (Barth and Vanhoozer<sup>137</sup>); and to fuel the orthopraxy and orthopathy of faith (Ringma). Whereas the context of Barth's trinitarian theology (and all theology) is the Christ event, for Gunton, the context of theology is in the worship relationship between creature and Creator. Although Gunton affirms Barth's assertion that God reveals Himself in a threefold way, the nuance of his departure is significant. For Gunton, "theology does not... begin in abstract observation, but in the work of those who stand in a particular relation to God."<sup>138</sup> Worship is intrinsically relational: to use Gunton's language, it is an activity which takes place between *persons*. God's act of covenantal grace restoring the relationship between Himself and humanity is what allows worship to take place. In this view, worship is both the context and purpose of theology: it is our active response as a community to understanding God's grace, and it is the context of this love relationship in communion with God (worship) that makes the intellectual pursuit of God (theology) possible.

In contrast to Barth's emphasis on God's self-revelation and on worship in Gunton's approach, the context of Augustine's theology is, according to Gunton, Aristotelian subject-predicate logic. Gunton critiques, "It is, moreover, a gross simplification to say that [Augustine's] analogies are merely illustrative of the church's dogma, a penetration into its inner logic. What we find in Augustine is one distinctive reading of the church's dogma [... that] is distinctly different from that developed by the Cappadocians."<sup>139</sup> In his theology of the Trinity, Augustine operates within a framework of Aristotelian logic and seeks to explain the seemingly logical inconsistencies of God's threeness and oneness. The only way out of this binary substance-accident alternative Augustine sees is

---

<sup>137</sup> Though Barth and Vanhoozer use the phrase in different ways. See sections 1.3 and 1.4 in this thesis.

<sup>138</sup> Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 5.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

to create a third category which he calls “relation.” This ingenious development credited to Augustine is certainly among his most significant theological contributions, especially in definition and defence of Christianity against the threat of Arianism in his time. However, in Gunton’s view, Augustine’s development of the category of relations entirely undermines the Cappadocian approach and theological understanding that God’s being is necessarily defined as persons in relationship. He argues that the relationships of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the *essence* of God’s being, they are not generated by or predicated of an underlying essence which constitutes God’s unity or “oneness” is in question (the analog of the one human mind in Augustine’s psychological analogy). Rather, God is who God is in the relational community of the divine persons.

John Zizioulas makes the interesting observation in *Being as Communion* that during the patristic period one of the biggest challenges to Christian orthodoxy was articulating and presenting an ontological alternative to the dichotomy of the ‘unbreakable unity’ between God and the world in Greek ontology and the ‘gulf’ between God and world in gnostic systems.<sup>140</sup> Summarizing the Church’s response to these threats, Zizioulas writes,

[T]he bishops of this period, pastoral theologians such as St. Ignatius of Antioch and above all St. Irenaeus and later St. Athanasius, approached the being of God through the experience of the ecclesial community, of ecclesial being. This experience revealed something very important: the being of God could be known only through personal relationships and personal love. Being means life, and life means *community*.<sup>141</sup>

This certainly illustrates why the virtue of love was so important in Augustine’s theology (an aspect which is surprisingly neglected in Gunton’s work). Augustine tells his readers that one of his main purposes in *De Trinitate* is to produce an intellectually sound explanation for both the threeness and oneness of God.<sup>142</sup> To this end, I believe

---

<sup>140</sup> Zizioulas, 16.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> See Augustine’s *De Trinitate* 1.2.4 – 1.3.5.

Augustine achieved his goal despite the weaknesses Gunton identifies in his work. In a biography on this influential saint, theologian Henry Chadwick asserts, “[Augustine’s] analogies crushingly answered the critics who thought ‘three in one’ ludicrous nonsense.”<sup>143</sup> It is also important to understand that the biggest threat to Christian orthodoxy in Augustine’s time was Arianism which denied that Christ the Son was consubstantial with the God the Father. Thus, one must read Augustine’s doctrine of the Trinity in this defensive context, for it seems his focus may have been more apologetic than systematic as he sought to protect the divinity, equality, and unity among the divine persons against the heresies of his time. Current trinitarian theologies must first discern today’s greatest threats to Christian orthodoxy in general and the doctrine of the Trinity in particular: Atheism? Pantheism? Postmodern ideology? Eclipse of the personal with the ascendancy of the modern individual? Subjectivity in identity formation? Broken relationships and theodicy? The North American climate of anti-intellectualism? Perhaps all of these in some measure? Unlike Gunton, I am not so quick to dismiss Augustine or lay sole (or primary) blame at his feet for all current challenges within the Western theological tradition regarding the doctrine of the Trinity. Particularly for the scholar, Augustine has tremendous contributions to the Church’s theological tradition and orthodoxy. I do, however, suggest that Gunton’s trinitarian outlook of viewing God as existing and only existing in divine interpersonal relationships provides a stronger framework to address many, if not all, of these current issues in contemporary theology.

## 2.5 The Impact of a Renewed Doctrine of the Trinity

Gunton’s thesis is that the doctrine of the Trinity is absolutely important and relevant to the Church and the world. Building on the work of his doctoral supervisor and mentor, Robert Jenson, Gunton emphasizes the need to recover trinitarian theology both within the Christian community to articulate faith, and, surprisingly, outside the Church to appeal to the unbeliever:

---

<sup>143</sup> Chadwick, 92.

It is part of the pathos of Western theology that [trinitarian theology...] is an unfortunate barrier to belief which must therefore be facilitated by some non-trinitarian apologetic. [...] My belief is the reverse: that because the theology of the Trinity has so much to teach about the nature of our world and life within it, it is or could be the centre of Christianity's appeal to the unbeliever, as the good news of a God who enters into free relations of creation and redemption with his world. In light of the theology of the Trinity, everything looks different.<sup>144</sup>

Reclaiming trinitarian doctrine in both thought and discourse of contemporary Christians has huge missional potential. In our world full of broken relationships, a renewed focus on this doctrine can shine hope and light as a promise of perfect self-donating love in mutual perichoretic relationships. As Western culture is increasingly obsessed with the discovery and development of "personal identity," presenting a worldview that situates human ontology in relational communion as patterned after our triune Creator can be a valuable and compelling alternative to self-declarative individuality. Because the doctrine of the Trinity serves as a foundation or keystone to other Christian doctrines, it follows that all areas of Christian theology and life will be affected by a renewed trinitarian approach leading to theological orthodoxy, missional orthopraxy, and faithful orthopathy. I will begin this exploration with a brief overview of two of the most prominent areas of doctrine thus impacted in Gunton's work to illustrate the potential of a renewed trinitarian theology in the life of the mind.

(i) Gunton's insistence on understanding the Trinity in perichoretic personhood instead of, for example, Barth's Christological focus, allows for a much greater pneumatological dimension throughout his theology. This is especially evident in Gunton's treatment of the doctrine of creation. He asserts that the entire way in which God creates, redeems, and perfects His creation in and through time is trinitarian, and that this is demonstrated by the activities of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit both in their immanent relation within the Godhead and in continual relation and interaction with creation. Several important features of Gunton's doctrine of creation are accentuated by his trinitarian framework.

---

<sup>144</sup> Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 7.

By creating out of nothing, Gunton explains that God affirms His self-sufficiency as He does not require anything outside of Himself to create. Creating *ex nihilo*, thus, demonstrates an important ontological distinction between creation and Creator as the world as its creatures did not come from the being of God, but are the result of His intentional loving action.<sup>145</sup> Anizor explains, “Gunton sought to emphasize that the Creator, who is essentially relational, brings into being a good world that is relational at its core.” If God is three persons-in-relation, and God creates the world *ex nihilo* and humankind from the dust of that creation, then the only ontological distinction of any consequence is that of Creator and creation. Thus, we can see how, in Gunton’s view, the trinitarian theme of *perichoresis* emerges as the basis for all life: creation, while distinct, obtains its particularity by way of inherent relation with the Creator.

Building on Irenaeus’ trinitarian image where the Son and Spirit are described as the two hands of the Father, Gunton further describes creation as a trinitarian process, “God’s transcendence as the maker of all things is not of such a kind that he is unable also to be immanent in it through his ‘two hands.’”<sup>146</sup> In conjunction with God the Father as Creative Source, Gunton identifies the Son and Spirit as creative agents who respectively redeem and perfect creation. Again, he applies the concept of *perichoresis* to the creation itself as well as God’s ongoing creative activity in relation to it, this time by connecting the Son with the activity of *unifying* creation and the Holy Spirit with the activity of maintaining *particularity*:

[T]rinitarian love has as much to do with respecting and constituting otherness as with unifying. [...] it is the Son who is the unifier of creation, the one in whom all things hold together. By contrast, but not in contradiction, we can understand the Spirit’s distinctive mode of action as the one who maintains the

---

<sup>145</sup> Gunton, *The Christian Faith*, 18.

<sup>146</sup> Colin E. Gunton, “The Doctrine of Creation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. by Colin E. Gunton, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 142.

particularity, distinctiveness, uniqueness, through the Son, of each within the unity.<sup>147</sup>

Although Gunton draws on the gospel of John rather than Paul's epistles, one can see a clear biblical influence and reiteration of Colossians 1:15-23 and 1 Corinthians 12 in his explanation.<sup>148</sup> Because of the previously established *perichoretic* relationship between the Divine Persons in his doctrine of the Trinity, Gunton is enabled to develop a distinctly trinitarian and eschatological view of creation as a continual dynamic of "becoming" by the Spirit's perfecting power instead of a completed and isolated past event of genesis.

The doctrines of election and freedom are also affected by Gunton's trinitarian perspective. In his view, freedom requires space for relationships to take place, because true freedom is personal freedom within a community of relations and not freedom *from* others; thus, while freedom in this view is about particularity, it is also fundamentally relational.<sup>149</sup> Gunton's approach to the doctrine of the Trinity allows for this space as persons are defined as beings-in-relation. Rather than experiencing freedom, separation from the "other" is actually a sentence of isolation as personhood is stripped away leaving an autonomous individual. A doctrine of the Trinity – the very being of God existing in the perichoretic relationships of the three divine persons – is foundational to Gunton's concept of freedom, from which the doctrine of election can be developed, understood, and communicated (as it was for Barth). Gunton writes, "There is a distance within the innertrinitarian relations, a kind of living space in which God is freely God..."

---

<sup>147</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, 205-6.

<sup>148</sup> Colossians 1:15-23, especially verses 16-17: "For in him [God the Son] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." In 1 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul discusses how God the Spirit dispenses unique gifts to each member of Christ's 'body.'

<sup>149</sup> Colin E. Gunton, "God, Grace and Freedom," in *God and Freedom: Essays in Historical and Systematic Theology*, ed. by Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 130-1.

God's freedom is not that of an arbitrary willing machine, but that of the triune God, and takes shape in the mysterious life of Father, Son, and Spirit."<sup>150</sup>

As with Barth, Gunton's concept of freedom is not Enlightenment autonomy, but freedom that is given or bestowed to humanity in the context of the Creator-creature relationship. Human freedom is not freedom *from*, but rather freedom *for* relationships.<sup>151</sup> This definition of freedom carries with it the idea that true freedom is the ability to be one's true self, "the freedom to be what we truly are."<sup>152</sup> In a Christian worldview this includes the awareness of one's creaturely existence, (pre)determined to live in relationship with the Creator.

A renewed doctrine of the Trinity thus has the potential to positively affect other areas of doctrine. Yet, the impact of trinitarian theology is more far-reaching than what might be described as an "improved orthodoxy." Communication of the gospel takes place horizontally in Christian discipleship and two-fold Christian mission as well as vertically in worship and communion with God. An improved orthodoxy, or right theological thinking, cannot exist in isolation, but needs to come to focus in the *praxis* and *pathos* of faith.

ii) One of the purposes of theology is to inform a complete transformation of the Christian life of faith. As was argued in Chapter 1, engagement of the mind is thus essential to Christian Mission – both in aspects of practical activities such as social work and social justice (feeding the poor, advocating for the marginalized and oppressed, etc., cf. Matthew 25:31-40) as well as evangelism and apologetics (sharing the gospel, defending the faith, differentiating Christianity from other religions and worldviews, etc., cf. Matthew 28:19-20). Wanting to draw attention to what he believes is an overlooked purpose in Augustine's work, Edmund Hill asserts that in writing *De Trinitate*,

---

<sup>150</sup> Gunton, "Barth, The Trinity, and Human Freedom," 318.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 319-20.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

“Augustine is proposing the quest for, or the exploration of, the mystery of the Trinity a complete program for the Christian spiritual life.”<sup>153</sup> Despite Gunton’s harsh critiques of Augustine, there is a strong similarity in their application of theology: both are deeply concerned with how faith is lived out in both the personal lives of believers and the Christian community as a whole.

Echoing Augustine, Alister McGrath also advocates for theology’s transformative power in the life of the believer and cites Thomas à Kempis, a theologian of the Middle Ages. Kempis rhetorically questions, “What good does it do to dispute loftily about the Trinity, but lack humility and therefore displease the Trinity? It is not lofty words that make a person righteous or holy or dear to God, but a virtuous life.”<sup>154</sup> Without mindful participation, the Church’s outward activities, as with the inner activity of worship, disintegrate into empty ritual or the vain pursuit of self-elevating feel-good experiences.

The participatory nature of the Body of Christ is a recurring theme in Barth’s theology – a theme which Gunton also weaves throughout his theology of the Church. In Barth’s view, evangelism and conversion are not human tasks; rather, ecclesial mission is Christ’s work.<sup>155</sup> Likewise, an unbeliever’s conversion or “salvation experience” is not an individual human responsibility, Christians merely join Christ in His prophetic work as His physical body on earth – to borrow Barth’s phrase, Christ’s “earthly-historical presence.” Awakening others to this justified reality of new life in Christ is accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit. This Barthian approach to Christian mission provides a compelling alternative to the popular Protestant Evangelical emphasis on evangelism with its tendency towards self-absorption, and the typical Catholic and Mainline focus on social justice. While this latter focus is a valuable and commendable expression of divine love and compassion, preoccupation with providing physical care

---

<sup>153</sup> Hill, 19.

<sup>154</sup> Thomas à Kempis quoted by Alister McGrath in “The Doctrine of the Trinity: An Evangelical Reflection,” in *God the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice*, ed. Timothy George, 17-36, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 35.

<sup>155</sup> Barth, *CD IV/3*.

should not usurp the spiritual dimension of Christian mission to bear witness to our Triune God's gospel of grace. Greater theological focus can help orient the activities and practice of a Christian life of faith. As *Hemorrhaging Faith* and *Renegotiating Faith* demonstrate, Canadian emerging adults are seeking transparency and authenticity of faith as it is lived out in "real life." Thus, a holistic faith informed by renewed doctrine must pay more than mere lip service to the activities of faith in Christian mission.

iii) While both orthodoxy and orthopraxy can be evaluated by objective and external standards, orthopathy is subjective and qualitative. Orthopathy, sometimes referred to as pietism, can be described as "relational rightness," having to do with one's emotions, passions, and sympathies. Or, as Evangelical theologians Steve Wilkens and Don Thorson describe it, orthopathy is "the righteous internal orientation in our relationship to a responsive and personal God."<sup>156</sup> Just as faith without works is dead (James 2:14-26), a greater intellectual knowledge of the Trinity is also lifeless if it does not also impact the practical and emotional aspects of the life of faith. Chapter 1 critiqued the emphasis on personal feelings and experiences of faith in popular American evangelicalism as a symptom of the declining mind in North American Christianity. This critique, of course, was set within the wider cultural context of anti-intellectualism and individual autonomy. Nevertheless, the emotional expressions of faith (orthopathy) do matter, but as situated firmly in the context of informed and reformed thinking (orthodoxy) which includes Gunton's definition of person as beings-in-relation. In this view, the feelings, motivations, and attitudes of faith have been redeemed and reoriented so that one's focus shifts from the individualized autonomous self to the Triune God, whose very being is a relational community of persons.

In the context of Gunton's trinitarian theology, increased understanding of God leads to increased love of God as relationships between humans and God are restored in addition to transformation of the relationships between human persons.<sup>157</sup> Understanding the self-

---

<sup>156</sup> Steve Wilkens and Don Thorson, *Everything You Know About Evangelicals is Wrong (Well, Almost Everything): An Insider's Look at Myths & Realities*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 19-20.

<sup>157</sup> Gunton, "Barth, The Trinity, and Human Freedom," 323.

donating perichoretic love of God can inspire us not just toward the *praxis* of faith but can transform distant sympathies into engaged empathy for and with others. Describing orthopathy as the “missing link” between the Church’s theological formation and missional activity, Ringma advocates thoughtful and reflective engagement with the emotions that arise from our Christian experience(s).<sup>158</sup> This leads to the question of how to determine if one’s inner emotions, passions, and sympathies are, in fact, orthopathic? Ringma answers by suggesting that the Christian must be “moved by what moves God. And this means that an interior shaping and re-shaping needs to take place within our being so that the ‘heart of God’ becomes our heart and the ‘passion of Jesus’ becomes our passion and thus our *modus operandi*.”<sup>159</sup>

## 2.6 Conclusion

Despite resurgence of trinitarian theology in the academy in recent decades, there remains widespread general ignorance – often avoidance, dismissal, and hostility – of what and who the Trinity is, even within devout Christian communities. This chapter reviewed some of the significant weaknesses seen in the Western tradition of trinitarian theology and demonstrated how Gunton’s theology of “personhood” and emphasis on beings-in-relation can address or circumvent many of these critiques. Humans are not merely created objects; rather, we are relational beings because we are created in the context of relationship to our Creator. It is up to us as theologians and Church leaders to communicate this relational context to others: first, for the sake of Christian discipleship and maturity so that believers may grow in their understanding of the fullness of their relationship with God and the world; and second, with the hope that non-believers may, to borrow Barth’s phrasing, be “awakened” to faith and come to the realization of the redeemed relationship in which they (already) have their being. Theology is important and must be able to communicate the understanding it aims to offer. Thus, a theology informed by a greater trinitarian dimension can, indeed, propel the head, hands, and heart

---

<sup>158</sup> Ringma, 5.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

of faith leading to a more holistic and fully integrated Christian life in relationship with God Creator and His creation.

The next chapter will bring Gunton's theology into conversation with urgent contemporary challenges faced by the Church in Canada. Such an approach is especially important and relevant for addressing some concerning trends regarding the spiritual development of young people. I propose that both identity formation and all dimensions of faith formation could be greatly enriched by a strengthened trinitarian theology focusing on the divine perichoretic relationships, and by a life of church membership, faith, and witness grounded in it.

## Chapter 3

### 3 The Trinity and Emergent Adult Faith

Chapter 1 argued that doctrine, and the doctrine of the Trinity specifically, is both important and relevant to the theological task in today's world. There is a need to recover and focus on theology's purpose which, though described differently among various theologians, is concerned with the inner and outer transformation of human life and a (re)orientation towards God's mission in the world. Recovery of doctrine is necessary for a holistic life of faith and is especially relevant to the ongoing development of that faith in Christian discipleship. Integrating some of Gunton's contributions to trinitarian theology, as discussed in Chapter 2, with the pressing pastoral concern of waning religious involvement and sometimes outright rejection of faith among Canadian young people, this final chapter examines common barriers to identity formation and explores some of the possible effects that a renewed doctrine of the Trinity might have if applied to personal identity formation and faith formation of emerging adults as well as to the problem of retention of this demographic by local church congregations.

The term "emerging adulthood" is relatively new in developmental theory, but was first coined by American cultural psychologist Jeffrey Arnett in an article for *The American Psychologist* journal in 2000.<sup>160</sup> Combining the concept of "developmental moratorium" in Erik Erikson's eight-stage theory of human development with his own clinical observations of a growing delay between adolescence and adulthood in contemporary culture, Arnett proposed a new category describing the increasing post-adolescent yet pre-young adulthood period: emerging adulthood. Rather than a ninth developmental stage or sub-step of Erikson's fifth stage of psychosocial development theory, the period of emerging adulthood as defined by Arnett should be understood as a *suspension or hiatus from* development. While this moratorium exists as a period between developmental stages and thus is not restricted to a specific chronological age range, it

---

<sup>160</sup> Jeffrey Jensen Arnett and Raymond D. Fowler, "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens Through the Twenties," in *The American Psychologist* 55, no. 5 (2000): 469-480.

appears that Canadian young adults themselves tend to identify the late twenties as the upper limit of the moratorium before a “forced entry” to full-fledged adulthood is socially expected by age 30.<sup>161</sup> Crucially, this category of “emerging adults” covers the demographic of young Canadians surveyed and studied in both the *Hemorrhaging Faith* and *Renegotiating Faith* research and it will be the primary term used in this chapter to describe Canadian young people ages 18 to 29.

### 3.1 Identity Crisis

In 2015, follow-up research was commissioned by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) and other partners behind the *Hemorrhaging Faith* document in hopes of finding answers to some of the questions raised in their original research from 2011-12. The Young Adult Transition Research committee (YATR) began in summer 2016 which included primary research surveys and interviews of a main sample group of 1998 Canadian young adults from across the country, paying attention to Catholic, Mainline Protestant, and Evangelical Christian communities; as well as to over 1500 frontline church ministry workers and experts who work with youth and young adults in Canada.<sup>162</sup> Faced with the sobering findings of the *Hemorrhaging Faith* research, the YATR sought to answer the question, “How can [church ministry leaders] help young adults who are transitioning from high school to the next phase in life, wherever they are headed, stay connected to church and faith?”<sup>163</sup> Grounded in the developmental theory of American child psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik Erikson, the results and analysis of YATR are presented in *Renegotiating Faith: The Delay in Young Adult Identity*

---

<sup>161</sup> *Renegotiating Faith*, 13, 101. Arnett notes that the period of emerging adulthood is highly variable and defends the legitimacy of using anywhere from 25 to 29 as the upper age limit for emerging adults before transitioning into established young adulthood in *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties*, second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 7.

<sup>162</sup> The following note appears several times, in varied form, throughout *Renegotiating Faith*: “This study looks at young adults between the ages of 18 and 28 who had a Christian religious affiliation as a teen and who attended religious services at least monthly at some point during their teen years. We intentionally chose a young adult population whose teenage religious engagement was more than nominal. It is important to remember this as you read this report” (10). See also pages 15, 103-4, and 175.

<sup>163</sup> *Renegotiating Faith*, 8.

*Formation and What it Means for the Church in Canada.* This report provides invaluable insight for those seeking to revitalize belief and practice of Christian faith among emergent adults in Canada.

Though a complete account of Erikson's developmental theory and its interpretation is beyond the scope of this thesis, a brief introduction may be helpful, particularly as background to the *Renegotiating Faith* conclusions.<sup>164</sup> Influenced greatly by child developmental theories of Sigmund Freud and his time working as a student of Freud's daughter, Anna Freud, Erikson moved beyond the Freuds' focus on childhood development and established his own theory of psychosocial development depicting the entire human life cycle from birth to old age. Erikson posited that at each development stage, acquisition of a new "virtue" emerges after successful navigation of a respective "crisis." Developmental crisis, in Erikson's context, does not mean impending doom or unavoidable catastrophe, but rather a crucial turning point or the opportunity to choose a direction.<sup>165</sup> Although Erikson's theory encompasses eight distinct stages, each virtue is "vitaly integrated to other segments of human development."<sup>166</sup> To an extent, the stages are codependent and are not necessarily attained in a perfectly linear fashion; however, the first four stages are associated with childhood, stage five corresponds with the adolescent period, and the final three stages cover adulthood. At the time of Erikson's writing in the 1960s, adolescence was generally associated with the teenage years, followed by a brief moratorium before most young people transitioned into young adulthood by their early twenties. In contrast, Arnett argues that in current times this

---

<sup>164</sup> For a full account of Erikson's psychosocial developmental theory, see Erik Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1968). Alternatively, a sufficient summary of the eight stages can be found in *The Erik Erikson Reader*, Robert Coles, ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2000), 192-206.

<sup>165</sup> Erikson, *Identity*, 16.

<sup>166</sup> Erikson, "Human Strength and the Cycle of Generations" in *The Erik Erikson Reader*, ed. Robert Coles (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2000), 191. In his biography of Erikson titled, *Erikson: Identity & Religion* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1982), Eugene Wright Jr. warns readers against the tendency to view the stages in Erikson's theory as an "achievement chart," explaining that there is a degree of overlapping which occurs in the revisiting of crises and stages, as well as times when regression may be possible and even advisable (41).

developmental moratorium does not reach resolution until well into the twenties; thus, further investigation of Erikson's fifth and sixth development stages will be particularly relevant to our discussion as they directly pertain to the challenges of adult identity formation during the period of emergent adulthood.

Following attainment of the virtues hope, will, purpose, and competence in the first four stages of childhood we see Erikson's fifth stage summarized in the crisis of identity and role confusions with the emerging virtue of fidelity to be obtained for healthy psychosocial development. Erikson defines fidelity as "*the ability to sustain loyalties freely pledged in spite of inevitable contradictions of value systems,*" and stresses that "it is the cornerstone of identity."<sup>167</sup> In writing "youth needs, above all, confirming adults and affirming peers," Erikson conveys the vital importance of community and the "other" in personal identity formation. Thus, stage 5 marks a crucial turning point where identity and fidelity, autonomy and community, independence and interdependence, must be understood and valued as two sides of the same proverbial coin of identity. This idea will be taken up again in section 3.3 as I seek to integrate Gunton's contributions to the doctrine of the Trinity with the present discussion of identity formation in the developmental moratorium of emergent adulthood.

The degree to which mutuality is required in personal identity formation becomes clearer in Erikson's sixth stage of development as he describes love as the emerging virtue resulting from successful navigation of the crisis of intimacy vs. isolation. It is essential to recognize that unlike Freud, Erikson viewed the virtue of intimacy as much more than sexual intimacy, but rather as the "fusing of identities" including the full range and depth of emotional and social aspects of relationships.<sup>168</sup> Elsewhere, Erikson describes the self-giving virtue of love in stage six as "the mutuality of mates and partners in a shared identity, for the mutual verification through an experience of finding oneself, as one loses

---

<sup>167</sup> Erikson, "Human Strength," reprinted in *The Erik Erikson Reader*, 191.

<sup>168</sup> Erikson, *Identity*, 131ff.

oneself, in another.”<sup>169</sup> As Eugene Wright Jr. describes the matter in his biography of Erikson, “Intimacy means giving oneself to another while at the same time finding oneself in a new dimension in the process of shared intimacy.”<sup>170</sup> In contrast, the opposite of Erikson’s vision of intimacy is perpetual isolation, what he terms “distantiation.”<sup>171</sup> It seems that even from a psychological perspective, personal identity is meant to be developed and expressed in the context of relationships with others lest it become increasingly isolated, competitive, and combative in fortified solitude.<sup>172</sup>

Applied to the doctrine of the Trinity, a different theological question emerges in contrast to the typical mathematical conundrum of three and one in the West: how could God, who is perfect love, be conceived as anything less than or different from a diversity of persons bonded in the mutuality of relationship?

The fullness of intimacy (stage five) and love (stage six) in relationships cannot be experienced until personal identity is firmly established. Wright Jr. explains that the transitional process from childhood to young adulthood, as envisioned by Erikson, “can only be done when trust in the process is secure.”<sup>173</sup> Both the understanding of connectedness between past and future (childhood and adulthood) and the relationship between personal distinction and connectedness with society must be present for the successful attainment of Erikson’s sixth virtue of love. He explains that love, in this context of development, involves a “transformation of the love received throughout the preadolescent stage of life into the care given to others during adult life.”<sup>174</sup> Again we see the outward focus of relationships with others as a key component of identity

---

<sup>169</sup> Erikson, “Human Strength,” reprinted in *The Erik Erikson Reader*, 201.

<sup>170</sup> Wright Jr., *Erikson*, 53.

<sup>171</sup> Erikson, *Identity*, 136.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> Wright Jr., *Erikson*, 73

<sup>174</sup> Erikson, “Human Strength,” reprinted in *The Erik Erikson Reader*, 201.

formation of the distinct person. In Chapter V “Coming of Age: Identity and Fidelity,” Wright Jr. describes Erikson as viewing identity as a truly *psychosocial* crisis, recognizing the personal and social elements involved in identity formation exemplified by the various social responsibilities and roles distinct persons will explore during the process of forming their adult identities.<sup>175</sup>

According to Arnett, emerging adulthood is characterized by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and unparalleled possibilities.<sup>176</sup> In previous generations, faith communities such as extended family units and one’s local church or parish played a much stronger role in a young person’s identity formation as youths generally sought to distinguish themselves as adults by claiming or, more rarely, inventing a role within their existing community. However, with the onset of the digital age and globalization, participating in communities outside one’s familial and geographical loci has exacerbated the complexities of identity formation. Erikson writes about the paradox of increased options which can generate a sense of freedom and excitement while at the same time be experienced as a paralyzing force as one is overwhelmed with countless possibilities. He concludes that a person’s “sense of identity, then, becomes more necessary (and more problematical) wherever a wide range of possible identities is envisaged.”<sup>177</sup> This theme of numerous options causing a barrier to identity formation is taken up by Arnett in several of his publications on emerging adulthood and is also demonstrated in *Renegotiating Faith* research. Even more than during Erikson’s time, today’s emerging adults are faced with seemingly limitless options to explore, evaluate, and with which to experiment. In addition, traditional differentiating markers – such as moving out of the parental home, first career, marriage, and child rearing – are being significantly delayed when compared to previous generations. However, the vital need for differentiation in adult identity formation persists.

---

<sup>175</sup> Wright Jr., *Erikson*, 81.

<sup>176</sup> Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 8-20.

<sup>177</sup> Erikson, *Identity*, 245

The resulting trend seen in the YATR and *Renegotiating Faith* is that religious beliefs and faith practices, or their rejection, are now more often used as differentiating markers by Canadian emergent adults to fill the void left by the delay or absence of traditional markers.<sup>178</sup> The authors of *Renegotiating Faith* conclude that there is still a “need for young adults to form an identity apart from their families of origin. In many cases young adults are choosing to quietly and non-confrontationally reject their parents’ faith as a way to set out differentiating markers.”<sup>179</sup> Without undermining the lasting impact that strong and healthy familial relationships can have on emerging adults, *Renegotiating Faith* shines a spotlight on the indispensable role churches and ministries within the faith community must fill in the lives of emerging adults for the benefit of faith retention and faith formation during the often decade-long developmental hiatus between waning adolescence and early adulthood.<sup>180</sup> I will argue that one of the key ways faith communities can assist emerging adults in their identity and faith formation is through intentional mentorship, which is a subject that will be discussed in section 3.4.

Arnett identifies several additional barriers to psychosocial development of emerging adults which have subsequently been corroborated by the research findings documented in both *Hemorrhaging Faith* and *Renegotiating Faith* and discussed thoroughly in the latter.<sup>181</sup> Broadly speaking, these barriers can be grouped as pertaining to personal identity formation (such as lack of traditional differentiation markers, lack of community, instability, seemingly limitless options, social fears, and perceived social pressures) or faith formation and growth (including: general business, conflict with social values, feeling unwelcome in a faith community, lack or perceived lack of authenticity, and observing hypocrisy by adults within the faith community). Several of these obstacles

---

<sup>178</sup> *Renegotiating Faith*, 31.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>181</sup> See, for example, Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 8-29, 67ff; Penner, et. al. *Hemorrhaging Faith*, Part III (39-73) especially Chapter 4 “Faith Drivers and Barriers”; and Hiemstra, et. al., *Renegotiating Faith*, Chapter 3 “Differentiation” (31-42), Chapter 8 “Social Media and Mental Health” (75-87), and Chapter 9 “Identity Formation” (88-101).

will be revisited later in this chapter in sections 3.3 and 3.4, along with some proposed solutions to enhance personal identity and faith development. In addition to the barriers listed above, the central question of identity – identity crisis in Erikson’s model – is further complicated by wider cultural phenomena. Chapter 2 examined the challenge of salvaging the concept of “person” from the ravages of modern and postmodern individualism through a theological lens; the following section will revisit this theme from a psychological perspective.

### 3.2 The Challenge of Neoliberalism

An interesting perspective on this wider cultural context in which emerging adults find themselves in today’s world is provided by Belgian theoretical and clinical psychologist, Paul Verhaeghe. In his book, *What About Me? The Struggle for Identity in a Market-Based Society*, he offers an account of the widespread psychological damage inflicted by the dominant economic and political culture of recent decades and argues that Neoliberalism is no longer merely an economic theory, but that it has become a much broader ideology saturating Western society.<sup>182</sup>

Verhaeghe notes that while classical liberalism advocates “a strict division between state and society,” neoliberalism “seeks to subordinate the state to the supposedly free market.”<sup>183</sup> This point is well supported by the arguments laid out in Milton Friedman’s *Capitalism and Freedom*.<sup>184</sup> Friedman identifies “competitive capitalism” as the basis for his economic and political theory which supports the ultimate goal of preserving individual freedom within society.<sup>185</sup> As Verhaeghe explains it, this merit-based approach assumes “equal opportunities for all, the greatest rewards for those who make

---

<sup>182</sup> Verhaeghe, 114.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, Fortieth anniversary edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). See especially Chapter 2 “The Role of Government in a Free Society,” 22-36.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 4.

the greatest effort.”<sup>186</sup> The greatest psychological damage of a meritocratic system is, in Verhaeghe’s view, neoliberalism’s false assertion that, with enough effort, the individual can be perfected. He claims this idea of attainable perfection has conflated economic and social relationships resulting in a dangerous implication for the psyche: “To fail is to be guilty.”<sup>187</sup>

While recognizing some of the initial benefits of a meritocratic system where the best are rewarded (such as increased ingenuity, loyalty, morale, and cooperation), Verhaeghe explains how these positive aspects are short lived, as over time, such an approach inevitably dissolves into a competitive climate of fear, suspicion, and uncertainty. Drawing on his clinical experience, the myth of the perfectible individual and extreme meritocratic ideology in the West have, according to Verhaeghe, contributed to a tidal wave of psychological symptoms and a plethora of new psychological disorders. These include: a dramatic rise in clinical narcissism, increased loneliness, isolation, and fear of abandonment; prevalent hopelessness and depression; increased performance anxiety; damage to self-respect along with increased feelings of humiliation, guilt, shame and fear; slowing and stagnation of psychological development; a relapse to infancy in the case of moral development; increases in displaced aggression (which adds to hostile work and domestic environments); and a surge of new clinical social disorders amounting to fear and mistrust of the “other” as competitor, evaluator, or both.<sup>188</sup>

Exploring the impact of neoliberalism in the area of education, Verhaeghe describes how in as little as 15 years, what began as meritocracy within universities and education systems shifted into neoliberalism where emphasis is now almost entirely on efficient quantitative production with the ultimate purpose of increasing one’s own market

---

<sup>186</sup> Verhaeghe, 118.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>188</sup> See Verhaeghe, Chapter Six “Identity: Powerless Perfectibility” (145-180), and Chapter 7 “The New Disorders: Rank and Yank” (181-218).

value.<sup>189</sup> This fusion of educational and economic meritocracy means that achievements – and knowledge – without direct or immediate economic value are deemed worthless. Verhaeghe asserts that meritocratic thinking is not limited to economics, politics, or education, but that neoliberal ideology “now shapes almost every aspect of life and with it, our identity.”<sup>190</sup> Such a mode of experience is conducive to consumerism, less so to conservatism. An important question emerges: how can a culture wherein goods are disposable and services are instantaneous preserve anything of value?

From a Christian perspective, however, the meritocracy of neoliberalism could not be further from the Kingdom of God! Wherein the former, only the best and most productive are rewarded the assurance of retaining their top positions in a limited power structure, in the Kingdom of God, God is the sole immutable power at the top – *and yet* His power is available to all through the Holy Spirit. The Christian is free because (s)he does not have to cling to power or be enslaved to perpetual pursuit of accumulation of power, position, or materials achieved through greatest productivity – salvation is already graciously given.

An additional challenge is the neoliberal concept of freedom. Freedom, in this view, is conceived as an individual freedom *from* all potential constraints (i.e. total autonomy).<sup>191</sup> Yet, as Verhaeghe critiques, this perpetuates a distinctively self-centered view of success where “pleasure is life’s main goal, to be achieved through consumption.”<sup>192</sup> This narrow view of freedom excludes the notion of freedom *for* purposes beyond the limits imposed by an ideology which idealizes (and idolizes) the autonomous individual. Verhaeghe notes, and I agree, “The freedom to choose another form of self-realization

---

<sup>189</sup> Verhaeghe, 126, 161-6.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 123. Verhaeghe uses the “20/70/10 rule” and “Rank and Yank” to illustrate the extent of neoliberal permeation in Western society.

<sup>191</sup> Friedman, 12.

<sup>192</sup> Verhaeghe, 155.

outside the success narrative is very limited”<sup>193</sup>; though, I would add, it is not impossible. Verhaeghe’s final chapter suggests a way forward, depicting a healthy society with developmentally healthy people. In a declaration of hope he states that we must become citizens, not consumers, in the way we conduct our lives.<sup>194</sup> Interestingly, what Verhaeghe proposes from the viewpoint of developmental psychology is, in theological terms, something akin to what has been described in this thesis as participation in the Body of Christ in keeping with Gunton’s trinitarian view of personhood.

### 3.3 Trinity and Identity Formation

Earlier in this Chapter we have discussed several barriers to emergent adult identity and faith development as identified by Erikson and Arnett. These barriers have additionally been confirmed as permeating our Canadian context by the research findings documented in both *Hemorrhaging Faith* and *Renegotiating Faith*. This discussion was followed by a section outlining the wider problem of personal identity formation amidst reigning neoliberal and meritocratic ideology in the West. We now turn to explore four areas where, I suggest, the application of Gunton’s trinitarian theology can help to mitigate said barriers and aid in the identity formation and faith development of emerging adults in Canada. Along with Gunton, I argue that there is tremendous potential for Christian discipleship and the communication of faith when approached with a robust trinitarian theology.

The first area of application of Gunton’s trinitarian theology to the challenges of emergent adulthood deals directly with personal identity formation of the particular person and will be the basis for the remainder of this section. The second area explores the communal aspect of identity formation, but due to the ecclesial context its discussion will instead be included in the following section. Thus, section 3.4 “Trinity and Faith Formation” will examine three areas where a renewed doctrine of the Trinity can be applied: communal identity as the Body of Christ, theological study of trinitarian doctrine

---

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 236.

to meet the expressed desire of emerging adults for theological depth, and the role of mentorship in faith development and retention.

### **i) Personal Identity Formation**

Trinitarian theology in Gunton's model allows for the development (or redevelopment) of an ontology of the personal which places value on the specific person as well as the "other," thus including the recognition of positional identity. Such a recognition goes beyond affirming a purely pragmatic functional identity where humans are reduced to their temporary economic value. Relationships in this light would not be mere social interactions that are instruments of something else, or something that sovereign individuals "choose," but would be recognized and re-prioritized as the essential basis of personhood itself. Reclaiming personhood from individualism is crucial to navigate the crises of identity and intimacy in Erikson's fifth and sixth developmental stages – essential steps emerging adults must take to successfully transition to established adulthood. I suggest that the underlying desire for restoring personhood in identity formation is present among emerging adults, but that theologically the point needs to be more clearly identified, articulated, and strategized. Gunton's doctrine of the Trinity coupled with Vanhoozer's model of doctrine as participatory drama provides, I suggest, a strong framework for this kind of shift in theological thinking.

A Christian view of human identity based in Gunton's theology of the Trinity also provides hope, meaning, and purpose for one's life – all of which is desperately needed to address the overarching depression, loneliness, and fears which seem to characterize the period of emerging adulthood. These can be summarized as: Fear of Not Being Amazing (FNBA), Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), and Fear of Passionless Monotony (FOPM).<sup>195</sup> While these fears around social acceptance/rejection have, to varying extents, been present in previous generations, the unrealistic expectations and comparative effects perpetuated by social media combined with seemingly limitless options in life, along with

---

<sup>195</sup> See *Renegotiating Faith*, 81-95 for more on these crippling fears (rooted in an overarching fear of social rejection) experienced by many emerging adults who participated in the study, as well as the necessity of "safe spaces."

the pervasive emphasis on competition in the culture generally, have so amplified the anxiety and sense of hopelessness entangled with identity formation that it has become near impossible for some young people to navigate. Erikson states, “[Psychology] Clinicians know that an adult who has lost all hope, regresses into as lifeless a state as a living organism can sustain.”<sup>196</sup> Here, he refers to the virtue of hope attained in Stage 1 of development with successful navigation of the crisis of trust vs. mistrust. In the context of psychosocial development, hope is “the enduring predisposition to believe in the attainability of primal wishes in spite of the anarchic urges and rages of dependency.”<sup>197</sup> During infancy, this hope primarily relates to the need for food and parentally provided care but can easily be applied to additional needs (“primal wishes”) of purpose, competence, intimacy, and the like, in future stages of development.

It is important to note that “the possibility of meaninglessness too, and not just multiple offers of visions of true and meaningful life, keeps us searching and choosing.”<sup>198</sup> While Volf makes this claim in the context of religious or spiritual identity, the same can be said regarding psychosocial identity formation. Arnett describes the social-emotional complexities of identity exploration and development in the following terms:

Emerging adulthood is a time of high hopes, but it is also a time of struggle for most people. It can be exciting to be grappling with identity questions about who you are and what you want to do with your life, but it can be confusing and overwhelming, too, especially if you have trouble coming up with any answers. It can be fun and fulfilling to try out a wide range of experiences... but it can also be exhausting. Often the freedom of emerging adulthood is exhilarating – no one can tell you what to do and when to do it – but along with that freedom can come a sense of isolation, the chill of realizing you are on your own and have to swim constantly in order not to sink. The result of these contradictory forces is this paradox of mental heath during the emerging adult years: overall, self-esteem and life

---

<sup>196</sup> Erikson, “Human Strength,” reprinted in *The Erik Erikson Reader*, 192.

<sup>197</sup> Erikson, *Identity*, 106.

<sup>198</sup> Volf and Croasmun, 23.

satisfaction are high, but rates of depression and anxiety are high, too.<sup>199</sup>

With the opportunity of unparalleled choice comes unparalleled pressure to choose well in addition to unparalleled risk of judgement for those choices. Paraphrasing French sociologist Émile Durkheim, Arnett notes that “the more individualistic a society becomes, and the less people feel they have meaningful roles in a stable social system, the more they find themselves ‘unable to escape the exasperating and agonizing question: to what purpose?’”<sup>200</sup>

This question circles back to the discussion of the purpose of doctrine in Chapter 1 and the various suggestions of several contemporary theologians. Volf and Croasmun state that theology should address the most basic and ultimate questions of human life - those of identity and purpose - and that the current theological crisis in the West results from failure to both adequately and confidently address these questions. They assert that the ultimate purpose of one’s life (i.e. “the flourishing life”) is one which, rather than being inwardly focused on self-fulfillment, is a life which points towards the kingdom of God. This eschatological focus can only be lived out in relationship with others from within the context of the Christian community, the Body of Christ.

### 3.4 Trinity and Faith Formation

As Christians, there is, of course, a spiritual component of identity formation which is an inherited identity, an identity with both personal and communal aspects. Human identity is not relegated to a mere negotiated role within a community but is instead something understood in relation to membership in the Body of Christ, so that it is in relation to Christ that a person has an intrinsic value and established purpose. As such, human identity in Christian terms is something graciously established by God, not obtained through a process of individual self-realization. Part of the good news of the gospel is

---

<sup>199</sup> Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 276.

<sup>200</sup> Émile Durkheim, *Suicide*, (New York: Free Press, 1897/1951), 212 as quoted in Jeffrey Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 290.

that human identity formation does not begin in a vacuum or *ex nihilo*. Rather, in a Christian worldview, our identity is a covenantal identity, a gracious gift of the Father received through Christ's salvific work. Such is the truest identity to which one is awakened and transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, as created beings – created in relationship with our Creator whose ontological definition is being-in-relation and whose image we bear – personal relationships are intrinsic to human identity. Thus, identity formation is intimately personal and distinct, though not “individualistic” in the sense identified pejoratively in this thesis. What is found in Gunton's Trinitarian theology is a vision of community and belonging where each differentiated ‘part’ of the Body is imbued value and significance through Christ *and is also* an integrated and essential component of the whole. This communal identity as a member of the Body of Christ, with an ensuing purpose in the world, provides the basis for the ongoing process of faith formation and spiritual development.

## ii) **The Gift of Communal Identity**

The trinitarian framework of the Body of Christ can provide a balm for the lack of community, isolation, and systemic abandonment<sup>201</sup> so many youth and emerging adults experience. While the Trinity and Body of Christ are not the same and, thus, one cannot draw a direct parallel, there is, overlap between them as the “body” in question shares in the relation of the “Head” to the Father by adoption. Furthermore, there is a similarity between the two – perhaps more akin to familial resemblance – as each has their being in plurality and relationship of persons. Understanding the Trinity as existing and only existing in a community of relationships, in short, has the advantage of grounding an

---

<sup>201</sup> Dr. Chap Clark, former professor of Theology and Youth, Family, and Culture at Fuller Theological Seminary, has researched and written extensively on the experiences of isolation and systemic abandonment of youth and young adults in North American culture, including the dangers of basing one's identity on external expectations and/or perceptions of performance, conformity, or image instead of from within one's self or, in the Christian context, from within the Body of Christ. For further reading on challenges of systemic abandonment as well as Clark's biblically and sociologically based suggestions to counter these issues, see: Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011) and *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, Chap Clark, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016). Additionally, Andrew Root's book, *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry: From a Strategy of Influence to a Theology of Incarnation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), includes a greater theological framework from which to practically address the pastoral concerns of systemic abandonment faith engagement and discipleship of young people.

approach to Christian faith and life in which relationships are likewise essential as the basis of human life. This trinitarian framework situates both psychosocial development as well as faith development within the context of Christian community (i.e. the Body of Christ). There is far greater potential for healthy identity development when one seeks personal awareness from *within* this context of relational community instead of from the starting point of as abstractly isolated, autonomous individual of modernity. An ecclesiology informed by Gunton's trinitarian conceptions of person provides both the space and relationships among persons that are necessary for communal identity formation and participation within that community.

Communal identity could be viewed as an extension of personal identity formation; and, in a way it is, though it is not a matter of linear cause-and-effect. In Christian theology the communal identity of the Church is more than the sum of the individuals comprising it, but is an integrated whole, and indeed, an integrated whole with the risen Christ. The image of a body that Paul uses in his letters really is an apt metaphor to communicate and emphasize the unity of the Christian community, coming from a context where diversity and distinction was more obvious.<sup>202</sup> Yet to balance the idea of unity in the Christian community (for emergent adults who may be concerned about forfeiting their individuality) I suggest another image in conjunction with the Body of Christ metaphor – one that retains particularity, depicting interconnected distinction *between* parts of the Body – for a “both-and” theological framework, one drawn from music.

With the picture of an orchestra, musical ensemble, or choir, immediately themes of equality, cooperation, common purpose, and unity-in-diversity (or, rather, diversity-in-unity) come to mind. Different from a group of singers, the term “choir” takes on the singular form of the noun, conveying singularity rather than plurality; and yet, by its very

---

<sup>202</sup> See 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Romans 12:3-8, and Ephesians 4:1-16. Although beyond the scope of the present discussion, it should be noted that there are some, like Barth, who consider the “Body of Christ” as much more than a metaphor but rather the physical form of Christ's presence on earth, His literal, “earthly-historical form of existence.” See Barth, *CD IV/1* §62 “The Gathering of the Christian Community” for further investigation into the doctrine of *totus Christus*; and Geddes MacGreggor, *Corpus Christi* (London: MacMillan and Company, Ltd., 1959) for a thorough treatment of the various conceptions of the “Body of Christ” within Catholic and Protestant theology.

definition a choir expresses a multiplicity of persons within the whole, its membership fluctuating and sometimes being very fluid. While developing one's skill and technique remains a personal responsibility that requires personal effort and accountability, the concept of individual autonomy is absent within a choir, for there is no 'lead singer' as in a pop band and no choral equivalent of athletic MVP (despite an individual player's participation as part of a team). Particularity among persons - the presence of physical and musical space between voices - is quite obvious as a distinct voice's identity within the choral sound is defined in its relation to others despite singing from the same musical score. Even when singing in unison, vocal distinctions are impossible to eliminate entirely. Singers are defined by their vocal relationship to the conductor, others in their section, and the choir as a whole. For example, while singing acapella a choir may shift a quarter, half, or even full tone up or down from the original key, yet the integrity of the music is preserved as the pitches of each vocal section remain steady in their relation to the other voices. In cases of dissonance, voices-in-relation to others, and voices-in-*dependence* on others, is even more important.

Today's emerging adults are increasingly isolated. As with the analogy of a choir, the gift of belonging, of being an integral part of the Body of Christ can be powerfully formative and transformative for an emerging adult seeking to define his or her personal identity. And yet, as Gunton and Barth remind us, the purpose of participation in the communal identity of the Church is not for personal fulfilment. Rather, this divinely appointed ecclesial element of identity sets the believer's focus outward to God, the Christian community, and the world – "Thy Kingdom come."

### iii) **Engaging the Mind in Faith Formation**

Exploring the doctrine of the Trinity provides an opportunity for authentic reengagement of young people who have questions and desire deep and relevant interactions with faith from within the safety and nurture of a faith community. As discussed in section 1.4, the *Hemorrhaging Faith* research demonstrates that emerging adults in Canada crave deeper theology and want to grapple with difficult questions of faith and life. They are deeply unsatisfied and uninterested in shallow sermons, religious rituals based solely on tradition, and platitudes when asking the most important questions of life. Yet in the

majority of Canadian parishes and churches sampled in the *Hemorrhaging Faith* and *Renegotiating Faith* research, this desire for deep, mindful engagement with faith is, sadly, not being met.

Firstly, I suggest that delving deeper into doctrine and theological questions can help reverse the trend of ‘mindless Christianity’ in North America. The speed at which we receive information these days leaves little to no time for careful reflection. As Verhaeghe notes, it is ironic that in a society where autonomy and individualism is so emphasized, there is no room for critical thinking or innovation beyond the “norm.”<sup>203</sup> Exploring Christian doctrine as differentiated from other spiritualities – both established religions such as Islam and Buddhism, as well as spiritualities such as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD)<sup>204</sup> and Universal Gnostic Religious Ethic (UGRE)<sup>205</sup> – may help to fill this emergent adult desire for faith exploration in general. Here is an opportunity, brimming with potential, for churches and faith communities to (re)engage a younger generation of Canadians who are eager to apply and grow their minds in the life of faith. Furthermore, a renewal of the mind of faith (and of the mind in faith) can fuel the hands and heart of faith in relationship with God, one’s faith community, and the world leading to a more holistic life of faith – in other words, spiritual authenticity.

---

<sup>203</sup> See the subsection titled “Information, technology, and the fallacy that to measure is to know” in Verhaeghe, 228ff.

<sup>204</sup> According to Arnett, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is a belief system based on “loose collection of sentiments about religious issues... [It] is *moralistic* in the sense that it emphasized being a good person; it is *therapeutic* in the sense that it emphasizes that God wants you to feel good about yourself; and it is *deism* in the sense that it is a general belief in God, not tied to any specific doctrine” (*Emerging Adults*, 218). In efforts to address some of the questions and disturbing trends presented in *Hemorrhaging Faith*, youth ministry experts Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin offer hope and practical advice in their co-authored book, *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016). See especially chapter 4 which addresses prolific MTD among youth and emerging adults in North America.

<sup>205</sup> Whereas adherents of MTD are at least agnostic in some sense, UGRE, by contrast, is a-theological and does not require a belief in God or a higher power to fulfill its moral function of providing a set of principles by which one can become a “good person.” In the six years between research of *Hemorrhaging Faith* and *Renegotiating Faith*, authors of the latter study suggest UGRE has succeeded MTD as the predominant religious view in Canada among emerging adults. See Chapter 11, “Universal Gnostic Religious Ethic” in *Renegotiating Faith*, 107-17.

It is important to note that today's emergent adults want to grapple with and make decisions regarding faith and life themselves. Typically, it is not information itself which is lacking, but rather the safe environments to discuss and wrestle with the application of information to the Christian life of faith. More than previous generations, today's emerging adults value authenticity and are quickly disillusioned with the slightest hint of hypocrisy.<sup>206</sup> This means they are hesitant to accept any part of religious dogma or worldview when perceiving inconsistencies between belief, profession, and actions by those modeling the faith. Emergent adults are full of hopes, doubts, questions, and failures in the process of renegotiating roles within communities of faith and integrating spirituality as they form their adult identities; yet, recent research from *Hemorrhaging Faith* and *Renegotiating Faith* show a widespread lack (or perceived lack) of the appropriate models, relationships, and safe spaces required for this kind of spiritual metamorphosis.

This leads to a second suggestion, which is that reclaiming the mind and reengaging our adult minds in the process of faith development may prove to serve a crucial role in both modelling faith and nurturing spiritual formation in emerging adults. This process can be time consuming and difficult, particularly in a North American culture which presently lacks theological depth in thinking.

Thirdly, I suggest that exploring theology of the Trinity with Gunton's emphasis on personhood and relationships can address this emergent adult desire more specifically and deeply. Sadly, the doctrine of the Trinity is often neglected and avoided because of controversy and difficulty in linguistic accessibility and comprehension. However, in contrast to UGRE and MTD which emphasize general morality in being a 'good person' and may or may not acknowledge some kind of distant deity, Christian theology grounded in the doctrine of the Trinity can provide intrinsic value, relational community, hope, meaning, and purpose to one's life due to a renewed understanding of personhood as a being-in-relation. A refocus on faith informed and structured by trinitarian theology

---

<sup>206</sup> See section on "Skepticism of Religious Institutions" in Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 218ff.

ought to bring with it a much less self-centered view of the world and of life as one would find reason to be open to and engages with ideas of others, and as one's focus shifts from the created finite self to the infinite triune Creator. This brings us back to Gunton who states Christianity has something important to say to the world, and to Volf who claims we need theology to address life's most fundamental questions. A worldview in this eschatological framework points forward with hope and purpose for the particular person, the community of faith, and the world, and has much greater potential than any that seeks fulfilment through solitary individual self-realization.

A final observation worth highlighting is the typical age at which first sacraments and public declarations of faith take place. Churches typically design programming and events around specific age or grade ranges rather than psychosocial developmental stages. For example, many churches run a nursery for infants, confirmation or baptismal classes for preteens, youth retreats for high schoolers, perhaps a "college and careers" study or social group which targets recent secondary school graduates, etc. Researchers of *Renegotiating Faith* acknowledge that in previous generations, age targeted programming "worked well when age ranges could function as aliases for developmental stages."<sup>207</sup> However, the developmental moratorium of emerging adulthood "means there is a new gap between college and marriage that most congregations ignore,"<sup>208</sup> or, I would say by way of an important correction, to which they are mainly *oblivious*. If, as Arnett argues, adult identity formation typically occurs well after high school graduation, are there better ways to engage young people in spiritual discipleship that can help bridge the gap between adolescence and established adulthood? Authors of *Renegotiating Faith* suggest this is the case, and conclude section 3.6 "Rites of Passage" with the observation that public faith commitments typically come too early – that is, *before* the identity development process characteristic of emerging adulthood.

---

<sup>207</sup> *Renegotiating Faith*, 30.

<sup>208</sup> *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 121.

Confirmation, Profession of Faith, and teenage Adult Believer Baptism usually occur prior to emerging adulthood. If Arnett is correct in hypothesizing that identity formation and worldview formation occur primary during emerging adulthood, then these sacraments or ceremonies come to early, and their influence on identity formation is likely to be supplanted during emerging adulthood.<sup>209</sup>

In short, intentionality is needed during the intervening years between youthful faith commitments and subsequent adult sacraments and declarations of faith such as marriage and the infant baptism or dedication of first children. This is another area where a stronger, more developed theology drawing on the doctrine of the Trinity and a more nuanced ecclesiology could serve young people well as they transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood through to young adulthood and beyond. I suggest emerging adults would benefit from church leaders examining how to acknowledge, encourage, and celebrate faith commitments made in adulthood – distinct from, yet in addition to, traditionally established rituals surrounding marriage and family.

#### iv) **The Importance of Mentorship in Faith Formation**

Reclaiming the mind in community can also provide an important opportunity for spiritual mentorship and engagement within the security of a faith community for emerging adults. According to Erikson, intergenerational relationships are a necessary component to healthy identity formation of both individuals and society at large. He writes,

For man's psychosocial survival is safeguarded only by vital virtues which develop in the interplay of successive and overlapping generations, living together in organized settings. Here, living together means more than incidental proximity. It means that the individual's life-stages are "interliving," cogwheeling with the stages of others which move him along as he moves them.<sup>210</sup>

---

<sup>209</sup> *Renegotiating Faith*, 42.

<sup>210</sup> Erikson, "Human Strength," reprinted in *The Erik Erikson Reader*, 191.

Erikson explains further, describing childhood and adulthood as a “system of generation and regeneration” which provides the very structure of society.<sup>211</sup> Several decades later, Verhaeghe argues that with the dissolution of authority in neoliberal ideology we no longer have any remnants of a society in the West. However, it is surely important – and indeed, salutary, – to note in this context that current Canadian research points to the need for a recovery of Erikson’s “interliving” intergenerational involvement (in the form of mentorship) as essential to contemporary Christianity in the faith development and retention of young people.

Authors of the *Hemorrhaging Faith* study observe that “the vast majority of those we interviewed reported that relationship with people in the congregation was far more instrumental to their spiritual growth than the sermons. When it comes to growing in Christ, mentorship is key.”<sup>212</sup> In the years following this important study, research continues to identify mentorship as one of the most significant factors in church growth, faith retention, emergent adult identity formation, and spiritual growth.<sup>213</sup> Yet this is no small task, as the type of personal mentorship required must be intentional in making a long term commitment bridging the developmental moratorium from teen years and high school through the transitions to young adulthood which now typically occurs during the late twenties to early thirties for young people in Canada.

Attempting to provide clarity and definition to the scope of the mentoring relationship, *Renegotiating Faith* states that within the context of faith community, “the mentor’s role is to assist the young adult in negotiating a new relationship with the church that is different from the one they had as a child.”<sup>214</sup> Thus, a mentor’s goal is twofold and

---

<sup>211</sup> Erikson, “Human Strength,” reprinted in *The Erik Erikson Reader*, 221ff.

<sup>212</sup> *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 52.

<sup>213</sup> See especially *Renegotiating Faith*, Chapters 5 and 13; and “Theology Matters,” 538-9 which references an additional study on Canadian churches in its conclusion: S. Reimer and Matt Wilkinson, *A Culture of Faith: Evangelical Congregations in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015).

<sup>214</sup> *Renegotiating Faith*, 55.

serves as a mediator of sorts in helping an emergent adult create a new role for themselves in the community - one that provides differentiation from their parents or family of origin - as well as helping the community view and accept the emergent adult as their own self instead of as their parents' child or as a mere extension of their family's community involvement. Both *Hemorrhaging Faith* and *Renegotiating Faith* show that intergenerational engagement and providing opportunities for leadership development are key for emerging adults to retain and grow the faith of their youth into adulthood.<sup>215</sup> Understanding one's personal identity as beings-in-relation can enhance the mentor-mentee relationship as inter-personal relationships are viewed as a positive extension and expression of one's self rather than a task or challenge to form a connection with a distant "other".

*Hemorrhaging Faith* research shows "Emerging Adults have an affinity to churches that show: Cross-generational support, Authenticity, Inclusivity."<sup>216</sup> In examining personal responses to open-ended questions about values for a faith community in the *Hemorrhaging Faith* study, we see the repetition of several key words and phrases: "genuine," "sincere," "safe," "supportive," "integrity," "transparency," "acceptance," and "actually practice faith." These positive characteristics can be best understood in contrast to the common causes the same emerging adults listed as reasons they have, or would, leave a faith community: "superficial," "fake," "hypocrites," "going through the motions," "double life," and subjection to a poor theology of "works and perfection." Authors of this study summarize that acceptance, inclusion, and authenticity are the most significant factors for emerging adults who seek to join a faith community.<sup>217</sup>

While on the surface this sounds positive, closer examination of the research shows that emerging adults are, indeed, products of the current culture. It seems in many cases, their

---

<sup>215</sup> See especially, "Chapter 11: Opportunities to Participate and Lead" in *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 86-92; and "Chapter 5: Religious Transmission" in *Renegotiating Faith*, 43-50.

<sup>216</sup> *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 58-65.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

desire is for the positive aspects of community pertaining to the individual (such as acceptance, sense of belonging, and personal identity affirmation) without the personal responsibilities or accountability associated with being a committed member of a community. A philosophy which values individual equity above all and promotes blanket tolerance and inclusion of all except those with dissimilar values is not really a free society at all; and, ironically, promotes conformity rather than uniqueness. Indeed, our churches are crucial faith communities where we could benefit from a recovery of personhood, the idea of beings-in-relation as an alternative to the current cultural emphasis on competitive individualism.

Learning alongside adults in a safe relationship of authenticity, however, in a relationship involving trust, curiosity, and non-judgement can serve to meet emerging adult needs and desires for identity formation, community, and faith development. Endeavouring to study something as intellectually rigorous as the doctrine of the Trinity would certainly provide a wonderful medium for renewal of the mind! Yet, the mentorship relationship need not necessarily follow a prescribed structure like a Bible Study, formal theological training, or leadership course; nor must it be restricted to religious activities. Especially for current emerging adults, the *Renegotiating Faith* research demonstrated that “religious identity is not neatly separated from other aspects of identity.”<sup>218</sup> This study highlights the integral role mentors can play in the process of an emergent adult’s overall identity development and well as faith development and retention through adulthood by suggesting that mentors can fulfil a variety of roles. They can: help a young adult identify and understand their gifts and talents; provide “perpetual encouragement” through successes and failures; reintroduce young people as adults to their church or faith community; assist mentees in their role negotiations and transitions in the church; make connections to other communities and networks; make timely introductions to a new church, campus group, or faith community when an emergent adult makes a geographical move; and so on.<sup>219</sup> As Rick Hiemstra (lead researcher of the YATR and *Renegotiating*

---

<sup>218</sup> *Renegotiating Faith*, 55.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-2, 161-3.

*Faith* study, and Director of Research at EFC) reminds Christian communities, “Being mentors and making simple, thoughtful introductions are within our reach, and these things have huge, eternal significance.”<sup>220</sup>

Faith formation (or spiritual discipleship) cannot be compartmentalized from other aspects of a young adult’s process of personal identity discovery and formation. In most cases of Canadian emergent adults studied, new adult roles and relationships within a faith community were successfully negotiated or developed due to pre-existing roles and relationships within the same or similar faith community one had before entering emergent adulthood. *Re-negotiating* roles and relationships is often easier than negotiating novel ones. Strong mentorship relationships – especially ones that bridge periods of social and developmental transitions – characterized by authenticity and a holistic approach to faith grounded within a church community can influence emerging adults to retain the values of faith and faith community as they form their adult identities.<sup>221</sup> This type of committed, ongoing, mentor-mentee relationship is enriched and strengthened when informed by a robust theology of the person. Such a theology is provided by Gunton’s trinitarian framework.

### 3.5 Conclusion

Research shows that current generations of young people are experiencing significantly longer gaps between adolescence and adulthood than even a few decades ago. Identity development during this stage of emerging adulthood is a difficult process complicated by lack of traditional identification markers, general instability, isolation, overwhelming possibilities, and other barriers in surrounding culture. Highlighting some of the pressing concerns in the *Hemorrhaging Faith* and *Renegotiating Faith* studies, I have attempted to bring these significant Canadian research documents into dialogue with the trinitarian theologies of Gunton, Barth, and others, to discern the value theology has to contemporary Christianity. This chapter has looked at the identity crisis faced by

---

<sup>220</sup> Rick Hiemstra, “Renegotiating Faith” in *Salvationist* 14 no.4 (2019), 13.

<sup>221</sup> *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 54-8.

Canadian emerging adults as well as the wider cultural problem of neoliberalism and its influence on identity and faith formation. In summary, I have argued that a renewed doctrine of the Trinity can help to carve a path forward in both the spiritual development of emerging adults and faith retention of young people in local churches and communities.

## Conclusion

I have argued in this thesis that, despite the decline of the mind in Western practice of Christianity, doctrine remains important and relevant. A recovery of doctrine and theology is essential for holistic and mature faith, what Volf calls “the flourishing life” and what Barth and Gunton define as true freedom. Recovery of theological depth has also been shown as a significant growth factor among churches in Ontario. Furthermore, deeper theology is desired by emerging adults in Canada – an area of spiritual development too often neglected by local churches. The doctrine of the Trinity has served as a case study in this respect, and the claim has been that a vital trinitarian theology can help increase faith reengagement with current and future generations of emerging adults in Canada as well as address many contemporary questions of faith.

What value does theology have to contemporary Christianity? As Gunton and McGrath have shown, trinitarian doctrine re-orientates and re-prioritizes our focus on God instead of self; and, in addition, provides the context for the entirety of the Christian life of faith in worship and mission. Without a recovery of trinitarian theology, and theology in general, Western Christianity will continue its disintegration into shallow, mindless, narcissistic, self-help idolatry. The framework of relationships, furthermore, as Gunton suggests, makes the concept of God as Trinity more understandable and therefore accessible to laypeople, as well as relevant to a generation desiring theological depth and the eagerness to wrestle with how to live authentic faith. Gunton writes, “To be a human being is to be related to the Father through the Son and in the Spirit, and it is the character of Christian experience to realize that relationship.”<sup>222</sup> As we grow in understanding of God as relationship, we come to see ourselves in relationship with God, each other, and the world, both in terms of personal identity and purpose for our own life. Through the doctrine of the Trinity, Christians can be enabled to address some of the most fundamental questions of human life in current times.

---

<sup>222</sup> Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 5.

Christianity offers a world view that values personal human life in relation with others; and gives hope, purpose, and direction to one's life. Regarding identity formation and faith development specifically among young Canadians, a trinitarian theology of personhood such as Gunton's can serve to enrich and guide emergent adults as they transition to adulthood and negotiate meaningful adult roles in communities of faith.

Indeed, one of Gunton's greatest hopes for what he describes as a "righted" vision of the Trinity is its impact on other areas of Christian doctrine and life. He writes,

We may say, then, that because the Trinity has been divorced from other doctrines, it has fallen into disrepute, except as the recipient of lip service. But because it has been neglected, the church has appropriated only a part of its rich store of possibilities for nourishing a genuine theology of community.<sup>223</sup>

My hope, which reflects Gunton's, is that with a revived and robust doctrine of the Trinity, all areas of Christian doctrine and the life of faith can be strengthened, in such a way that we will see the fruit of faith in a Church with a renewed life of the mind (orthodoxy), living out that faith in our orthopraxy and orthopathy as we are spurred on to better serve and love God, each other, and the world (Matthew 22:36-40).

---

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 59.

## Bibliography

- Anizor, Uche. *Trinity and Humanity: An Introduction to the Theology of Colin Gunton*. Bletchley: Paternoster Press, 2016.
- Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. "Does Emerging Adulthood Theory Apply Across Social Classes? National Data on a Persistent Question." In *Emerging Adulthood* 4 no. 4 (2016): 227-235.
- "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens Through the Twenties." In *American Psychologist* 55 no. 5 (2000): 469-480.
- *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties*. Second Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Augustine of Hippo. *De Trinitate*. Edited by John E. Rotelle. Translated by Edmund Hill. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991.
- Badcock, Gary D. *Light of Truth & Fire of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997.
- Barclay, William. *The Letter to the Romans*. Second Edition, fifth impression. Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1963.
- Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics IV*. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956.
- Bray, Gerald. *The Doctrine of God*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Chadwick, Henry. *Augustine* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Chia, Roland. "Trinity and Ontology: Colin Gunton's Ecclesiology." In *The International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9 no. 4 (2007): 452-468.
- Clark, Chap. *Adoptive Church: Creating an Environment Where Emerging Generations Belong*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016.

- Editor. *Adoptive Youth Ministry: Integrating Emerging Generations into the Family of Faith*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016.
- *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011.
- Coles, Robert, Editor. *The Erik Erikson Reader*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2000.
- Erickson, Millard J. *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995.
- Erikson, Erik. *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1968.
- George, Timothy. Editor. *God the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.
- Gunton, Colin E. *Act & Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002.
- "Barth, Trinity, and Human Freedom" in *Theology Today* 43 no.3 (1986): 316-330.
- *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002.
- "The Doctrine of Creation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, Edited by Colin E. Gunton, 141-157. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- *Enlightenment and Alienation: An Essay Towards a Trinitarian Theology*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1985.
- *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*. London: T&T Clark Ltd., 2003.

----- “The Indispensability of Theological Understanding: Theology in the University.” In *Essentials of Christian Community: Essays for Daniel W. Hardy*. Edited by David F. Ford and Dennis L. Stamps, 266-277. Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1996.

----- *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity: The Bampton Lectures 1992*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

----- *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991.

----- *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998.

----- “The Triune God and the Freedom of the Creature.” In *Karl Barth: Centenary Essays*. Edited by S. W. Sykes, 46-68. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Haskell, David Millard, Kevin N. Flatt, and Stephanie Burgoyne. “Theology Matters: Comparing the Traits of Growing and Declining Mainline Protestant Church Attendees and Clergy.” In *Review of Religious Research* 58 no. 4 (2016): 515-541.

Hiemstra, Rick. “Renegotiating Faith.” In *Salvationist* 14 no. 4 (2019): 12-13.

----- Lorianne Dueck, and Matthew Blackaby. *Renegotiating Faith: The Delay in Young Adult Identity Formation and What It Means for the Church in Canada*. Toronto: Faith Today Publications, 2018. 182pp.

Hill, Edmund. “Introduction” to *De Trinitate* by St. Augustine of Hippo. Edited by John E. Rotelle. Trans. Edmund Hill, 18-59. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991.

Hunsinger, George. “The Mediator of Communion: Karl Barth’s Doctrine of the Holy Spirit.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*. Edited by John Webster. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

- Hunt, Anne. "Psychological Analogy and Paschal Mystery in Trinitarian Theology." In *Theological Studies* 59 (1998): 197-218.
- LaCugna, Catherine Mowry. Review of *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, by Colin E. Gunton. *Modern Theology* 9 (1993): 307-309.
- *God for Us: The Trinity and the Christian Life*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991.
- Lindbeck, George. *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984.
- MacGreggor, Geddes. *Corpus Christi: The Nature of the Church According to the Reformed Tradition*. London: MacMillan and Company, Ltd., 1959.
- MacIntyre, Alisdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Second Edition. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.
- Mascall, E. L. *Whatever Happened to the Human Mind? Essays in Christian Orthodoxy*. London: SPCK Publishing, 1980.
- McGrath, Alister. "The Doctrine of the Trinity: An Evangelical Reflection." In *God the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice*. Edited by Timothy George, 17-36. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.
- "On the Trinity." *Winchester Cathedral Lecture Series*. Youtube video 45:44, live streamed June 26, 2018. Accessed July 20, 2019 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DhBPg8M9fyo>.
- *The Passionate Intellect: Christian Faith and the Discipleship of the Mind*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010.
- McKenna, Stephen. "Introduction" to *De Trinitate* by St. Augustine of Hippo. Edited by Hermigild Dressler et. al. Translated by Stephen McKenna, vii-xvii. Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988.

- Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Trinity and the Kingdom*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981.
- Moser, Paul. *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Mutter, Kelvin F. "Book Review: Hemorrhaging Faith: Why and when Canadian young adults are leaving, staying, and returning to Church." In *Christian Education Journal* 12 no. 1 (2015): 204-207.
- Nausner, Bernhard. "The Failure of a Laudable Project: Gunton, the Trinity and Human Self-Understanding" in *The Scottish Journal of Theology* 62 no.4 (2009): 403-420.
- Neder, Adam. *Participation in Christ: An Entry into Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.
- Nimmo, Paul T. *Barth: A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017.
- Noll, Mark. *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994.
- Olson, Roger E. *The Mosaic of Christian Belief*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002.
- and Christopher A. Hall. *The Trinity*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002.
- Penner, James, Rachel Harder, Erika Anderson, Bruno Désorcy, and Rick Hiemstra. *Hemorrhaging Faith: Why and When Canadian Young Adults Are Leaving, Staying and Returning to Church*. Richmond Hill: Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, 2012.

- Peterson, Eugene. *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008.
- Pietrabissa, Giada, and Susan G. Simpson. "Psychological Consequences of Social Isolation During COVID-19 Outbreak" in *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 no. 9 (2020): 1-4. Doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.02201. Accessed March 19, 2021.
- Plachard, William C. *The Triune God: An Essay in Postliberal Theology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.
- Powell, Kara E., and Chap Clark. *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.
- Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin. *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016.
- Rahner, Karl. *The Trinity*. New York: The Seabury Press, 1974.
- Richard of St. Victor. "On the Trinity." Translated by Christopher P. Evans. In *Trinity and Creation: A Selection of Works of Hugh, Richard, and Adam of St. Victor*, edited by Boyd Taylor Coolman and Dale M. Coulter, 195-382. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2011.
- Ringma, Charles. "The Church's Calling in a Troubled World: The Grand Design and Fragile Engagement." In *Zadok Papers* S225 (2017): 2-8.
- Root, Andrew. *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry: From a Strategy of Influence to a Theology of Incarnation*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007.
- Smith, James D., III. "Ancient Christian Trinitarian Metaphors and a Contemporary Analogy from Music." In *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 33 no. 3 (1990): 353-357.

- Stott, John R. W. *Your Mind Matters: The Place of the Mind in the Christian Life*. London: InterVarsity Press, 1972.
- Tertullian. *Against Praxeas*. Translated by Alexander Souter. London: SPCK Publishing, 1919.
- Torrance, James B. *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*. Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996.
- Vanhoozer, Kevin J. Editor. *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.
- “Scripture and Tradition” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*. Edited by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 149-169. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- “Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity: A Report on Knowledge (of God).” In *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*. Edited by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 3-25. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Verhaeghe, Paul. *What About Me? The Struggle for Identity in a Market-Based Society*. Translated by Jane Hedley-Prôle. Croyden, UK: CPI Group Ltd., 2014.
- Volf, Miroslav. *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.
- “‘The Trinity is Our Social Program’: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement” in *Modern Theology* 14 no.3 (1998): 403-423.

- and David Brooks. “Character, Flourishing & The Good Life: A Conversation with David Brooks and Miroslav Volf.” Filmed February 22, 2016 at Yale Center for Faith and Culture, New Haven, CT. Video, 1:21:15. Accessed March 10, 2021 at <https://faith.yale.edu/media/character-flourishing-the-good-life-a-conversation-with-david-brooks-and-miroslav-volf>.
- and Matthew Croasmun. *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2019.
- Webster, John. “Introducing Barth.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*. Edited by John Webster, 1-16. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Williams, Rowan D. “Barth on the Triune God.” In *Karl Barth: Studies of his Theological Method*. Edited by S. W. Sykes, 147-193. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979.
- *On Christian Theology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000.
- Wilkins, Steve and Don Thorson. *Everything You Know About Evangelicals is Wrong (Well, Almost Everything): An Insider’s Look at Myths & Realities*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010.
- Wilson, Jonathan R. *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: Lessons for the Church from MacIntyre’s After Virtue*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997.
- Wolfe, Alan. *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003.
- Wright, J. Eugene, Jr. *Erikson: Identity & Religion*. New York: The Seabury Press, 1982.
- Wright, N. T. “The Challenge of Pauline Theology.” *R. T. Orr Lecture*. YouTube video. Live streamed November 25, 2015 at Huron College, London, ON. Accessed March 24, 2020 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kc9Pvlo-YoM>.

Youth and Young Adult Ministry Roundtable. *Transfusing Life: Practical Responses to the Hemorrhaging Faith Report*. Toronto, 2012. Accessed March 29, 2021 at <https://hemorrhagingfaith.com>.

Yuen, Tanya and Alvin Lau. *Faith Formation in Children and Youth: Big Picture and the Shifts In Between*. Etobicoke: CBOQ Youth and Family, 2013. Accessed April 28, 2020 at [https://cboqyouth.ca/sdm\\_downloads/faithformation](https://cboqyouth.ca/sdm_downloads/faithformation).

Zent, Evelyn S. "Effective Use of Language," course materials for TBGEN 490 A Writer's Workshop. Tacoma: University of Washington Tacoma, 2001. Accessed March 13, 2021 at <https://faculty.washington.edu/ezent/imelu.htm>.

Zizioulas, John D. *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1985.

## Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Tabitha P. Edgar

**Post-secondary Education and Degrees:** The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada  
2019-2021 M.A. (cand.)

Emmanuel Bible College  
Kitchener, Ontario, Canada  
2005-2009 B.Th

**Honours and Awards:** Dean's Honour List, Emmanuel Bible College  
2006, 2007, 2008, 2009

Cam Howie Leadership Award  
2008

**Related Work Experience**

Youth Ministry & Worship Leader  
Highland Baptist Church, Kitchener, ON  
2010-2018

Member Ministries Director  
Christian Camping International/Canada, Kitchener, ON  
2010-2011

Chaplain and Ministry Team Coordinator  
Emmanuel Bible College, Kitchener, ON  
2009-2010

Student Development Internship  
Emmanuel Bible College, Kitchener, ON  
2008-2009

**Publications:**  
Edgar, Tabitha. "The Amaryllis Way Devotionals." In *Growing Teams: The Amaryllis Way* by Derrick Mueller, 23-39. Kitchener: CCI/Canada, 2010.