Does the Doctrine of the Trinity Hold the Key to a Christian Theology of Religions? An Evaluation of Three Recent Proposals

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Introduction

A remarkable revival of Trinitarian theology emerged in the twentieth century. Karl Rahner, on the Catholic side, and Karl Barth, on the Protestant side, played key roles in the "ecumenical rediscovery" of the Trinity.[1] In addition to rethinking elements of this central doctrine (e.g., nature of divine personhood, *Filioque*, etc.), this resurgence of interest in the Trinity has provided the impetus for a fresh examination of other aspects of Christian theology and practice from a Trinitarian standpoint including divine revelation, human personhood, worship, ecclesiology, missions, marriage, ethics, societal relations, and even political theory.[2] Theologians of every stripe are attempting to relate Trinitarian doctrine to a wide variety of contemporary issues.[3]

In this context, several Christian theologians have suggested that the doctrine of the Trinity holds the key to a Christian theology of religions.[4] According to one theologian,

> God has something to do with the fact that a diversity of independent ways of salvation appears in the history of the world. This diversity reflects the diversity or plurality within the divine life itself, of which the Christian doctrine of the Trinity provides an account. The mystery of the Trinity is for Christians the ultimate foundation for pluralism.[5]

Similarly,

> I believe that the Trinitarian doctrine of God facilitates an authentically Christian response to the world religions because it takes the *particularities* of history seriously as well as the *universality* of God's action. This is so because the doctrine seeks to affirm that God has disclosed himself unreservedly and irreversibly in the contingencies and particularity of the person Jesus. But within Trinitarian thinking, we are also able to affirm, in the action of the third person, that God is constantly revealing himself through history by means of the Holy Spirit. . . . Such a Trinitarian orientation thereby facilitates an openness to the world religions, for the activity of the Spirit cannot be confined to Christianity.[6]

Finally,

> It is impossible to believe in the Trinity *instead* of the distinctive claims of all other religions. If Trinity is real, then many of these *specific* religious claims and ends must be real also. . . . The Trinity is a map that finds room for, indeed requires, concrete truth in other religions.[7]

The purpose of this essay is to evaluate the claim that the doctrine of the Trinity offers the basis for a positive appraisal of non-Christian religions.[8] To this end, I will critically examine the Trinitarian doctrine in three recent proposals in the Christian theology of religions:[9] Amos

Yong's pneumatological theology of religions,[10] Mark Heim's Trinitarian theology of religious ends[11] and Jacques Dupuis's Christian theology of religious pluralism.[12] Several factors shaped my selection of these theologians. First, I wanted to limit my investigation to proposals in which Trinitarian doctrine plays an *explicit* role.[13] Second, I wanted to focus upon proposals that intend to affirm historic Trinitarian orthodoxy. Finally, I wanted to select proposals that would provide a representative cross-section of the kind of appeal to Trinitarian doctrine one encounters in the Christian theology of religions.[14]

Amos Yong has suggested that the adequacy of his proposal should be evaluated with respect to three criteria: "The trinitarianism to be developed should relate the missions of the Word and Spirit without identifying them. It should also be sensitive to the classical Christian concerns regarding the doctrine of the Trinity as well as the contemporary methodological issues that confront transcendental theology."[15] I will argue that the proposals of Yong, Heim, and Dupuis ultimately fail to satisfy Yong's second criterion ("classical Christian concerns regarding the doctrine of the Trinity"). These "classical concerns" are most clearly expressed in the Augustinian Trinitarian tradition. Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity is by far the most influential in the history of the West.[16] Moreover, despite popular portrayals to the contrary, Augustine's Trinitarian doctrine shares much in common with the Greek-speaking theologians of the East (e.g., the Cappadocians).[17] Thus, my evaluation will draw upon what is arguably the most representative version of Trinitarian doctrine in the history of the church (particularly among Protestants and Catholics).[18] I will attempt to demonstrate that these three proposals ultimately fail to satisfy the "classical concerns" of the Augustinian tradition and that this reality undermines the claim that the Trinity represents the key to a new understanding of religious diversity. First, I will outline the proposals of Yong, Heim, and Dupuis paying special attention to the role of Trinitarian doctrine. Next, I will evaluate the Trinitarian "grammar" they each employ from an Augustinian perspective. I will close by reflecting on the implications of my investigation for contemporary Trinitarian theology.

Three Recent Proposals

The Christian theology of religions (which should be distinguished from the "history of religions" and the "philosophy of religion") emerged as a distinct theological discipline following Vatican II.[19] Much of the discussion regarding the relationship of Christianity to other religions has taken place under the rubric of the *exclusivist-inclusivist-pluralist* typology.[20] Although Yong's proposal might safely be characterized as "inclusivist," the proposals of Dupuis and Heim defy easy categorization falling somewhere between "inclusivism" and "pluralism."

Amos Yong's Pneumatological Theology of Religions

In a monograph entitled *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to a Christian Theology of Religions*, Amos Yong, a young Pentecostal theologian, attempts to develop a "Pentecostal-charismatic" theology of religions.[21] While affirming that christological questions will always play an important role in any attempt to formulate a viable theology of religions, Yong suggests that *pneumatology*

may provide the key to moving beyond what he calls the "christological impasse," that is, "the almost irreconcilable axioms of God's universal salvific will and the historical particularity of Jesus of Nazareth as Savior of all persons."[22] The metaphysical basis for Yong's proposal is the universal presence and work of the Holy Spirit.[23] Yong argues that the Holy Spirit is present and active among non-Christian religions and that Christians must learn to discern the Spirit's presence.

The "foundational pneumatology" Yong develops in *Discerning the Spirit(s)* is predicated upon a Trinitarian distinction between the "economy" of the Word and the "economy" of the Spirit: "The entire objective of shifting to a pneumatological framework in order to understand non-Christian faiths is premised upon the recognition that there is a distinction between the economy of the Son and that of the Spirit relative to the redemption of the world."[24] It would not be an overstatement to say that this distinction constitutes the Trinitarian key to his proposal. On the basis of this distinction, Yong affirms the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit among non-Christian religions and justifies the use of non-christological criteria for discerning the Spirit's presence. According to Yong, the economies of the Son and Spirit are, on the one hand, "mutually related, and should not be subordinated either to the other."[25] On the other hand, these economies possess a measure of autonomy inasmuch as they originate in the Father: "the divine missions should also be seen as dimensionally affiliated and thus implying autonomy in relationality and vice versa, and as somehow commonly originating in the mystery of the Father."[26]

Having established this framework, Yong turns to the problem of criteria for discerning this presence of the Spirit. He argues that previous pneumatological approaches floundered because they were unable to identify non-christological criteria for discerning the presence of the Spirit. Although christological criteria are clearly useful in certain contexts, Yong contends that they are not particularly helpful outside the church. Other criteria are needed. Because the Spirit acts in an economy distinct from that of the Son, one should be able to identify aspects of the Spirit's work that are not "constrained" by the Son.[27] To this end Yong proposes a "three-tiered process" for discerning the "religious" activity of the Spirit among adherents of other religions. At the first level ("phenomenological-experiential") one compares the religious experiences of adherents of other religions with Pentecostals looking for phenomenological similarities. On the second level ("moral-ethical") one looks for "concrete signs that follow claims of experiencing the transcendent. The primary norms on this level are moral and ethical in nature."[28] On the third level ("theological-soteriological") one must consider the difficult question of the "reference" of the religious symbols in non-Christian religions: "[T]o what transcendental reality, if any, do religious symbols refer?"[29] In addition to the Holy Spirit ("divine presence"), one must also acknowledge the possibility of the presence of the "demonic" ("divine absence"). While the Holy Spirit "points to the idea of law or legality, rationality, relationality, and processive continuity culminating in the eschaton," the demonic "sets in motion fields or habits of chaos, irrationality, isolation or alienation, and stagnation."[30] Thus, a Pentecostal theology of religions is able to account both for the "transfor-

mative" nature of religious experience as well negative elements. Pentecostals can learn to "discern" the presence of the Spirit (or spirits) in other religions by cultivating a "pneumatological imagination" informed by these three elements. When the Spirit's presence is discerned, one may recognize a non-Christian religion "as salvific in the Christian sense."[31] As a test case for his proposal, Yong investigates the possibility of discerning the presence of the Holy Spirit within "Umbanda" (an Afro-Brazilian tradition).[32] Traditionally Pentecostals have dismissed "Umbanda" as demonically inspired; however, Yong believes that evidence of the Spirit's presence among the Umbanda can be seen in "the movement toward personal authenticity in the lives of individuals and toward social solidarity."[33]

Although there is good reason to believe the Spirit is present and active in other religions, confirmation of the Spirit's presence can come only through concrete engagement. Christians should not merely view non-Christian religions in terms of *praeparatio evangelica*. Although religions can function this way, "to understand indigenous traditions *solely* on these terms leads to the kind of restrictive christological quests that continue to denigrate the Holy Spirit as having less-than-equal status as a trinitarian member."[34] If the Holy Spirit is genuinely at work in other religions, Christians must acknowledge this and be willing to learn from them. Yong claims that none of this undermines the mission of the church but rather invigorates it.

Mark Heim's Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends

In a book entitled *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*, Mark Heim, a Baptist theologian, suggests that the debate over the theology of religions proceeds on "a largely undefended assumption that there is and can only be one religious end, one actual religious fulfillment."[35] This assumption must be rejected. While Christians will experience salvation (i.e., communion with the triune God), adherents of other religions may experience other positive ends that are not salvation:

> As a Christian, it appears to me to make perfectly good sense to say two kinds of things. First, we may say that another religion is a true and valid path to the religious fulfillment it seeks. . . . Second, we may say what the book of Acts says of Jesus Christ, that 'there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12).[36]

Although he offers several arguments in support of his proposal, Heim's notion of multiple religious ends is ultimately rooted in a particular vision of the triune God. In short, the "complex" nature of God as Trinity constitutes the basis for multiple ends.

According to Heim, the divine life of the triune God is "complex" in that it is characterized by three dimensions: (1) "impersonal," (2) "personal," and (3) "communion." The impersonal dimension of the triune God involves the infinite divine life as it circulates among the persons. Divine impersonality can be perceived in two ways. First, the exchange among persons can be experienced as a kind of "flux" which would give rise to the perception that "all is changing and impermanent: all is arising. . . . The only thing that could be more fundamental would be the cessation of such arising: something like what Buddhism calls

nirvana."[37] Second, divine impersonality can be perceived as "self without relation." "If there were but one absolute self, then the flux and impermanence humans perceive as a dimension of the divine presence could be taken as the natural inner reality of the self."[38] One might call this "self-without-another." This would correspond most closely to Advaita Vedanta Hindu thought. A second dimension involves God's personal involvement in the world. Through this dimension humans "seek God's presence, hear God's word, see God's acts, obey or disobey God's commandments, and offer praise or petition."[39] This dimension is characteristic not only of Christianity but also of Islam and Judaism. A third dimension of relation involves "communion," that is, a "mutual indwelling, in which the distinct persons are not confused or identified but are enriched by their participation in each other's inner life."[40]

Corresponding to these three "dimensions" are three types of "relations" with God: (1) "impersonal identity," (2) "iconographic encounter" and (3) "personal communion." Impersonal identity involves a relation with the impersonal dimension of God's nature and exists in two forms. The first variation "is grounded in the emptiness by which each of the divine persons makes space for the others."[41] In terms of God's "economic" interaction with creation, the first variation involves God's withdrawal or transcendence from creation. The second variation, which is unitive, "is grounded in the coinherence or complete immanence of each of the divine persons in the others."[42] In economic terms, the second variation involves God's immanence in the form of his sustaining presence: "This constant divine activity reveals a universal immanence of God in every creature. It reflects the impersonal mutual indwelling of the three triune persons."[43] The "iconographic encounter" is grounded in the interpersonal encounter of the three persons of the Trinity. Each encounters the other as a unique character. In a parallel way, humans encounter God as a "distinct other." As in the first relation, two variations exist. In the first variation one encounters the divine life as a "law, an order or structure."[44] An example of this would be the Buddhist *dharma*. A second variation centers upon God as a personal being. Here one experiences an "I-thou" relation with God. The third relation, "personal communion," derives from the "*perichoresis* or mutual communion of the three divine persons."[45]

When a relation with God is pursued "consistently and exclusively" through one of the three dimensions the result is a "distinctive religious end." Four types of human destiny are possible: (1) salvation (communion with the triune God), (2) alternative religious ends (which represent a response to an economic manifestation of an immanent dimension of the triune life), (3) non-religious human destinies (which result from fixation on some created good), and (4) negation of the created self. Alternative religious ends are rooted in an "authentic revelation *of* the triune God, but not revelation of God *as* triune."[46] Furthermore, they depend upon God's grace: "The triune God is party to the realization of alternate religious ends. They are not simply the actualization of innate human capacities; they are distinct relations with aspects of the triune life. A particular grace of God is operative within them."[47]

Jacques Dupuis's Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism

In his book, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, the late Jacques Dupuis, a Roman Catholic theologian, argues on Trinitarian grounds that non-Christian religions mediate God's saving grace. Before outlining his proposal, it will be helpful to locate Dupuis's work in the context of contemporary Catholic approaches to religious pluralism. Although Vatican II clearly affirmed that non-Christian religions are—in some sense—to be viewed positively and that individuals who have never heard the gospel can experience salvation,[48] the conciliar bishops were silent regarding the means through which salvific grace is mediated apart from the church. Silence on this question has led to two conflicting positions among Catholics that can be summarized as follows: (P1) Although salvation is available outside the Church, it is not mediated through non-Christian religions.[49] (P2) Salvation is not only available outside the Church, but it is also mediated through non-Christian religions in such a way that non-Christian religions are to be viewed as means of salvation.[50] Dupuis embraces a form of P2.

According to Dupuis, the triune God constitutes the ultimate source of all genuine religious experience.[51] Thus, different religions are able to convey differing—yet legitimate—insights into this divine ultimate reality:

> The religious traditions of the world convey different insights into the mystery of Ultimate Reality. Incomplete as these may be, they nevertheless witness to a manifold self-manifestation of God to human beings in diverse faith-communities. They are incomplete "faces" of the Divine Mystery experienced in various ways, to be fulfilled in him who is "the human face of God."[52]

Although Jesus Christ is the "universal" savior of humankind, he is not the "absolute" savior. "Absoluteness" can be attributed only to God the Father. Jesus Christ is savior only in the derivative sense that "the world and humankind find salvation in and through him."[53] Therefore, rather than speaking of Jesus Christ as "absolute" savior, Dupuis maintains that it would be better to speak of Jesus Christ as "constitutive" savior. By insisting that Jesus Christ is "constitutive" savior, Dupuis wants to open the door to other "saviors" who somehow "participate" in the universal mediation of Christ. God's saving action, he insists, is not limited to the Christ-event. On the contrary, the "two hands" of God, the Word and the Spirit, are universally present and active in non-Christian religions: "Yet the action of the Word of God is not constrained by its historically becoming human in Jesus Christ; nor is the Spirit's work in history limited to its outpouring upon the world by the risen and exalted Christ."[54] A "distinct action" of the non-incarnate Logos continues following Christ's resurrection: "While, then, the human action of the Logos *ensarkos* is the universal sacrament of God's saving action, it does not exhaust the action of the Logos. A distinct action of the Logos *asarkos* endures."[55] Furthermore, the Spirit is also universally active following the incarnation. For example, as the result of the Spirit's inspiration, "revelation" can be encountered in the sacred writings of non-Christian religions. On this basis, one may affirm that sacred scriptures, such as the Qu'ran, contain the "word of God" and that the Prophet Muhammad is a "genuine prophet of God."[56]

Moreover, God's saving grace is mediated through other religions in such a

way that they may legitimately be called "channels of salvation." According to Dupuis, salvation does not reach human beings *in spite of* their religious traditions but *in and through* them. For example, the worship of images may represent a means through which God's grace reaches Hindus: "[T]he worship of sacred images can be the sacramental sign in and through which the devotee responds to the offer of divine grace; it can mediate secretly the grace offered by God in Jesus Christ and express the human response to God's gratuitous gift in him."[57]

Finally, Dupuis claims that non-Christian religions share in the reign of God. The universal reign of God must be carefully distinguished from the church. Although they are not members of the church, adherents of other religious traditions are, nevertheless, members of the kingdom: "While the believers of other religious faiths perceive God's call through their own traditions and respond to it in the sincere practice of these traditions, they become in all truth—even without being formally conscious of it—active members of the Kingdom." [58] In light of these and other factors, religious pluralism should not be viewed with suspicion but welcomed with open arms recognizing that "God has manifested himself to humankind in manifold ways."[59]

A Critical Evaluation
Amos Yong's Trinitarian Pneumatology

Inasmuch as Yong's pneumatological theology of religions is rooted in a distinction between the "economy" of the Son and the "economy" of the Spirit, his proposal raises important questions about the relations of the Trinitarian persons both within the divine life of the triune God (*ad intra*) and within the economy of salvation (*ad extra*). I will argue that Yong's proposal ultimately fails to offer an adequate account of the relation of the Spirit to the Father and the Son.[60]

Insufficient Trinitarian Framework

Although Yong acknowledges that the "mission" of the Spirit must ultimately be understood in a Trinitarian context, he offers no comprehensive Trinitarian framework *at the outset* within which to relate the work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. At the economic level, "mission" plays a key role in his proposal. Although he frequently refers to the "missions" of the Son and Spirit, he offers no substantive discussion of the *content* of these missions from a salvation-historical perspective. Echoing several contemporary theologians, he simply asserts that the Spirit operates in an "economy" distinct from that of the Son, brackets the "mission" of the Son and then focuses almost exclusively on the "mission" of the Holy Spirit.

At the level of the immanent Trinity, Yong offers no account of the relations of the Trinitarian persons *ad intra* as ground for his understanding of the divine "missions." Inasmuch as his distinction between the "economy" of the Son and "economy" of the Spirit necessarily depends upon the hypostatic distinction between the Son and Spirit, some discussion of intra-Trinitarian relations seems to be required. The closest he comes to a discussion of intra-Trinitarian relations is a brief discussion of the procession of the Spirit. Yong rejects the traditional Western view, expressed in the *Filioque* clause, that the Spirit proceeds jointly from the Father *and the Son*. What is at stake for Yong in problematizing the *Filioque* is

not an alternative understanding of the immanent Trinity. Rather, it is maintaining a theological basis for an independent "economy" of the Holy Spirit (which is then used to justify the search for non-christological criteria to discern the Spirit's presence).[61] However, inasmuch as compelling reasons exist to affirm the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son,[62] Yong's rejection of the twofold procession of the Spirit is unwarranted. Furthermore, evidence *against* the twofold procession of the Spirit *ad intra* does not count as evidence *for* a distinct economy of the Spirit *ad extra*. Finally, it is possible to affirm the full "equality" of the Spirit to the Son (one of the concerns that drives Eastern rejection of the *Filioque*) without positing two distinct "economies."[63]

Severing the "Two Hands" of the Father

Throughout *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, Yong repeatedly appeals to Irenaeus's image of the Son and Spirit as the "two hands" of God as a way of conceptualizing the Son/Spirit relationship.[64] His use of this image, however, stands in tension with his emphasis upon a distinct "economy" of the Spirit. From an economic standpoint, the "two hands" imagery is not about a left hand doing one activity and the right hand doing another (which seems to be implied by associating a distinct "economy" with each of the hands). It is fundamentally about the *Father* acting through the Son and Spirit to a particular end.[65] It underscores unity of action,[66] combining hypostatic distinction at the intra-Trinitarian level (i.e., Father, Son and Spirit) with unity of action at the economic level. Yong's use of this image causes one to wonder if his proposal implicitly severs the "two hands" of the Father.[67]

Although Augustine would likely have viewed the "two hands" metaphor as subordinationist, he too emphasizes the unity of the divine persons *ad extra*. According to Augustine, Father, Son, and Spirit work together in a single economy of salvation. Although the *missiones* of the Son and Spirit are distinct in such a way that one must speak of *two* "sendings" (Gal 4:4-6), these two sendings have *one* ultimate goal—bringing human beings into communion with the triune God. Yong's Trinitarian pneumatology is deficient not because it affirms differing economic *roles* of the Son and the Spirit (e.g., the fact that the Son alone became incarnate). Rather, it is deficient because it affirms two distinct *economies*—one associated with the Son and other with the Spirit. From two "sendings" (*missiones*) one should not infer two distinct "economies."[68] As Kilian McDonnell rightly notes, "To insist on the equality of the Spirit and the Spirit's mission, it is neither necessary nor advisable to postulate a 'distinct economy of the Spirit' as does Vladimir Lossky. There is one economy from the Father constituted by the missions of the Son and the Spirit, each of the missions being present and active at the interior of the other."[69] The missions issue from the Father and lead back to the Father.[70] By positing two "economies," Yong implicitly severs the "two hands" and undermines the unicity of the economy of salvation.

Further evidence that Yong's Trinitarian pneumatology severs the "two hands" can be seen in the way he relates the work of the Spirit to the Son. Although Yong emphasizes the empowering role of the Spirit in the incarnation and earthly ministry of Christ,[71] he fails to take seriously biblical teaching regarding the Spirit's unique role in bearing witness to and glorifying the risen Christ (e.g., John

15:26-27; 16:7-15; Acts 1:6-9; 4:24-31, etc.).[72] In his discussion of Pentecost (Acts 2), Augustine discerns a special significance in the sign through which the bestowal of the Spirit was manifested (i.e., bearing witness to Christ in multiple languages). It offers a proleptic fulfillment of the goal of the Holy Spirit's work—namely, leading people in every nation to believe in Jesus Christ.[73] It is precisely in this sense that the Spirit "universalizes" the work of Jesus Christ. This universal work of the Spirit constitutes the basis for the evangelistic mission of the church.[74] Commenting on John 16:14, Augustine explains that Christ is glorified when his followers, filled with love, proclaim him and spread his fame around the world.[75] Thus, from a salvation-historical perspective, the work of the Spirit (along with the Father and Son) among adherents of other religions must be understood in terms of *praeparatio evangelica*.[76] No grounds exist for positing a distinct salvation-historical economy of the Spirit leading to some other end. Inasmuch as Yong's proposal attempts to move beyond a *praeparatio evangelica* approach to the Spirit's work in the lives of non-Christians (including adherents of other religions),[77] it severs the "two hands" of the Father and obscures the missionary nature of the economic Trinity.[78]

A final way Yong's Trinitarian pneumatology severs the two hands of the Father is by bracketing christological criteria for discerning God's work: "The value of a pneumatological theology of religions can now be seen in clearer light. I have argued that insofar as Word and Spirit are related but yet distinct as the two hands of the Father, we should be able to identify dimensions of the Spirit's presence and activity that are not constrained by that of the Word."[79] Yong claims that many

earlier pneumatological proposals failed because they were unable to move beyond christological criteria. For example, because of his commitment to the *Filioque*, Karl Rahner was ultimately unable to distinguish the economy of the Son and the Spirit. As a result, Rahner was unable to articulate non-christological criteria for discerning God's presence. Furthermore, even Clark Pinnock, who rejects the *Filioque*, yields too quickly "to the theological pressure exerted by Christology."[80] But the problem with Yong's proposal is that if, as Augustine rightly insists, the Father, Son, and the Spirit are working together in a single economy which exists to draw men and women into the life of the triune God, then any criteria for discerning the Spirit's redemptive work *must* include a christological element.

In a more recent book entitled *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions*, Yong acknowledges, to a greater degree, the inherent relatedness of the Son and the Spirit as the "two hands" of the Father.[81] He also seems more aware of the problems associated with a search for non-christological criteria for discerning the Spirit's presence. Nevertheless, none of these acknowledgements leads to any explicit revision of his earlier proposal. On the contrary, he continues to affirm a distinct "economy" of the Spirit and still wants to maintain the legitimacy of non-christological criteria for discerning the Spirit's presence and activity.[82] Thus, at the end of the day, a significant tension remains. Inasmuch as Yong emphasizes the distinct economy of the Spirit in order to gain traction for his non-christological approach to other religions, he implicitly severs the "two hands" of the Father. However, inasmuch as he acknowledges the intrinsic related-

ness of the "two hands" under pressures of "classical Christian concerns regarding the doctrine of the Trinity," he undermines his quest for non-christological criteria.

Mark Heim's Trinity of Three Dimensions

Since the patristic period, Christian theologians have drawn an important distinction between God *in se* (God in himself) and God *pro nobis* (God for us).[83] The latter denotes God's self-communication through the economy of salvation (the "economic" Trinity) while the former refers to the intra-Trinitarian life of the three divine persons (the "immanent" Trinity).[84] From an *epistemological* perspective, God's self-revelation in the economy of salvation constitutes the foundation for our knowledge of the immanent Trinity. Since we have no independent access to the immanent life of the triune God apart from the economy of salvation, any claims about the immanent Trinity must ultimately be grounded in the *oikonomia* revealed in Scripture. From an *ontological* perspective, the immanent Trinity constitutes the foundation for the economic Trinity.[85]

Regarding the *epistemological* order, David Coffey has proposed that we distinguish three steps in our knowledge of God' triunity.[86] In the first step, we encounter the self-revelation of the triune God in the *oikonomia* recorded in Scripture (the "biblical Trinity"). In the second step, we reflect upon what must be true regarding being and nature of the divine persons in light of God's self-revelation in the *oikonomia*. The outcome of this reflection represents a doctrine of the "immanent Trinity" (God *in se*). In the third step, we articulate a systematic conceptualization

of the triune God in the *oikonomia*—a doctrine of the "economic Trinity."[87] In the discussion that follows, I will argue that the problems in Heim's proposal center on the relationship of the economic and immanent Trinity. More specifically, I will show that the breakdown in Heim's Trinitarian grammar occurs in steps two and three of the epistemic order. In step two, Heim articulates a speculative understanding of the immanent Trinity that has little basis in the "biblical Trinity." Then, in step three, he outlines a conception of the "economic Trinity" that includes "economies" of divine activity that bypass the temporal missions of the Son and the Spirit as revealed in the *oikonomia*.

Breakdown #1: From the Biblical to the Immanent Trinity

At the root of Heim's proposal is an assumption that the *immanent* life of the triune God is constituted by three dimensions: "impersonal," "personal," and "communion." These "dimensions" constitute the Trinitarian foundation for multiple ends. For example, through a "relation" with the impersonal dimension of the triune life, Buddhists may experience the Buddhist religious end—*Nirvana*. Inasmuch as the knowledge of the Trinity can be gained only through the "biblical Trinity," one must ask the following question: What constitutes the epistemic basis for Heim's claim that inner life of the triune God is constituted by three "dimensions"? Although Heim would insist that Scripture constitutes the ultimate basis for his understanding of immanent Trinity,[88] there are good reasons to question this claim. The primary source for these "dimensions" is not God's self-revelation in Scripture but Smart and Konstantine's *Christian Systematic Theology in World*

Context (to which Heim acknowledges his indebtedness).[89] Smart and Konstantine simply assert the existence of these three dimensions and then attempt to explain the "economic" activity of the triune God among other religions on this basis of this assumption. Although Smart and Konstantine insist that the "Trinity" is the ultimate divine reality, they are quite skeptical regarding the foundation on which this affirmation ultimately rests (i.e., the biblical Trinity).[90] Inasmuch as Heim's account of the three immanent "dimensions" is consciously dependent upon Smart and Konstantine, it represents a speculative account of the immanent Trinity (step two) that is inadequately rooted in the *oikonomia* revealed in Scripture (step one).[91]

Breakdown #2: From the Immanent to the Economic Trinity

A second Trinitarian problem involves the way in which Heim's proposal moves from the immanent Trinity (step two) to the economic Trinity (step three). To better understand the nature of this problem, we must revisit Heim's description of the economic Trinity. According to Heim, three "relations" characterize the economic activity of the triune God: "impersonal identity," "iconographic encounter" and "personal communion." These "real relations"[92] constitute the economic means through which alternative religious ends (e.g., *moksha, nirvana*, etc.) obtain. To say that other "ends" are part of God's "economy" implies that they are *willed* by God: "The triune God is party to the realization of alternate religious ends. They are not simply the actualization of innate human capacities; they are distinct relations with aspects of the triune life. *A particular grace of God is operative in them.*"[93] It is crucial to recognize the implications of the above affirmation. Alongside God's economy of "salvation" in Christ, other "economies" of divine activity exist: there is an economy of salvation (the Christian end), an "economy" of *nirvana* (the Buddhist end), an "economy" of *moksha* (the Hindu end), etc.[94] No epistemic warrant exists for these alternative economies. In book four of *De Trinitate* Augustine explains that the "sendings" (*missiones*) of the Son and Spirit have as their goal restoring fallen humans into a relationship of communion with the triune God. *Missio* constitutes a central link between the divine persons (immanent Trinity) and the economy of salvation (economic Trinity). By positing "economies" of divine activity that effectively bypass the work of Christ, Heim implicitly severs this link. No epistemic warrant exists for positing additional "economies" of divine activity that bypass (or constitute an alternative) to this one economy of salvation effected in Christ.[95] On the basis of a speculative understanding of the immanent Trinity (step two), Heim outlines a deficient account of the economic Trinity (step three) that ultimately undermines the divine *oikonomia* revealed in Scripture (step one).

A Trinity of "Dimensions" Replaces the Trinity of Persons

At the level of the immanent Trinity, Heim's proposal ultimately employs two trinities. The first Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is the Trinity of Christian confession; however, this Trinity is not the one that does the real work in Heim's project. Heim subtly substitutes his three "dimensions" for the Trinitarian "persons" effectively creating an alternate "trinity." The term "complex" plays a key role in this substitution. When Heim first

introduces the term "complex," it denotes the fact that God's being is constituted by a multiplicity of persons; however, as his argument unfolds, "complex" shifts to denote his three "dimensions." His substitution of "dimensions" for "persons" can be seen most clearly in the application of language, reserved for the Trinitarian "persons," to these "dimensions." For example, Heim claims that only "three" dimensions exist. Why three? Why not two, four, or even ten? Is it merely coincidental that there also happen to be three divine persons? Moreover, Heim suggests that "each of the dimensions is granted co-equality with the others."[96] Here Heim applies the language of co-equality to the dimensions; yet co-equality applies only to the Trinitarian persons. Finally, he claims that individuals experience "relations" with these "dimensions" in such a way that the "dimensions" effectively replace the Trinitarian persons.[97] Heim's immanent "trinity of dimensions" has subtly replaced the triune God of Christian confession.

Jacques Dupuis's Trinitarian Christology

There is no question that the Trinity plays a central role in Dupuis's proposal for he claims that the "Christian vision of the Triune God" paves the way for a "positive evaluation of other religious traditions."[98] Although, at first glance, Dupuis appears to be faithful to the Catholic Trinitarian tradition, I will attempt to demonstrate that a close reading reveals that his proposal gains traction only by introducing subordinationism into the Father/Son relationship, undermining the unicity of the economy of salvation and severing the economic and the immanent Trinity.[99]

Subordinationism in the Father/Son Relationship

In order to make space for other "saviors" and "mediators," Dupuis appeals to a "trinitarian Christology" in which Christ is recognized not as "absolute" savior but merely as "constitutive" savior. According to Dupuis, only "God" (i.e., the Father) is the "absolute" savior in the sense of being the primary and ultimate source of salvation. Jesus Christ is savior only in a secondary and derivative sense. That Jesus Christ is "constitutive" savior means, among other things, that he is not the *goal* of salvation but merely the constitutive *means* of salvation: "[Christocentrism] never places Jesus Christ in the place of God; it merely affirms that God has placed him at the center of his saving plan for humankind, not as the end but as the way, not as the goal of every human quest for God but as the universal 'mediator' (cf. I Tim 2:5) of God's saving action toward people."[100] What is troubling about the preceding statement is not his claim that Jesus Christ is the *means* of salvation but rather the obvious attempt to distinguish the salvific role of incarnate Son (constitutive savior) from that of the Father (absolute savior) by limiting the Son to an *instrumental* role in salvation. To suggest that the salvific role of Jesus Christ is *merely* instrumental sounds suspiciously subordinationist. One of the fundamental axioms of Augustine's theology—an assumption he shares with the Cappadocians—is that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit act with *one will* in the economy of salvation.[101] Of particular relevance is Augustine's discussion of the Passion. In contrast to Dupuis, Augustine argues that the decision leading to the Passion involved not only the Father but also the Son.[102] Inasmuch as Jesus Christ

is Savior as God-incarnate (*homoousios* with the Father), one must affirm that the Son also willed salvation along with the Father. If one instead maintains that Jesus Christ is merely a *constitutive means* of salvation and did not also will it (along with the Father and the Spirit), then it would seem that some from of subordinationism is unavoidable.

Dupuis is not unaware of this problem. In order to avoid positing subordinationism in the immanent life of the triune God, he appeals to the distinction between human and divine natures of Jesus Christ as the basis for his claim that Jesus Christ is "constitutive" savior.[103] Although this move may solve the problem of subordinationism, it does so only by undermining the unity of the two natures in *one* person. It was not a nature that the Father sent to save the world but a person. It was not a nature that died on the cross but a person. That person was the Son of God. To speak of Jesus Christ as "constitutive Savior" is to speak of the *person* of the Son as "constitutive Savior" and it is precisely at this point that subordination arises. The only way Dupuis can avoid subordinationism is by sharply distinguishing the two natures of Jesus Christ in a way that undermines their unity. At the end of the day Dupuis faces a serious dilemma. He cannot continue to affirm that Jesus Christ is merely "constitutive" savior and uphold an orthodox "Trinitarian Christology." If, on the one hand, he suggests that Jesus Christ is merely the constitutive *means* of salvation and did not will it along with the Father, he necessarily introduces subordinationism into the immanent life of the triune God. If, on the other hand, he attempts to overcome this problem by emphasizing the "unbridgeable distance" between God the Father and Jesus Christ

in his human nature, he undermines the unity of the two natures.

Undermining the Unicity of the Economy of Salvation

Central to Dupuis's proposal is a distinction between the work of the Logos *ensarkos* (the incarnate Logos) and the work of the Logos *asarkos* (the non-incarnate Logos).[104] On the basis of this distinction, he claims that an enduring work of the Logos *asarkos* (distinct from the Logos *ensarkos*) continues following the incarnation: "[T]here is a salvific working of the Word as such, distinct from that of the Word operating through his human being in Jesus Christ, risen and glorified, though in 'union' with it."[105] The distinction Dupuis draws between the economic activity of Logos *ensarkos* and economic activity of the Logos *asarkos* prompts a crucial question from an Augustinian standpoint: Does the work of the Logos *asarkos* constitute a *second* economy of salvation existing in parallel with the first? Although Dupuis would insist it does not, the way he employs the Logos *ensarkos* / Logos *asarkos* distinction seems to require two parallel economies of salvation.[106] This can be seen by comparing the economic activity of the Logos *asarkos* with that of the Logos *ensarkos*. Through the work of the Logos *ensarkos* (and the Spirit),[107] the Christian Scriptures contain the Word of God. Through the work of the Logos *asarkos* (and the Spirit),[108] the Qu'ran and other non-Christian scriptures contain the Word of God.[109] Through the work of the Logos *ensarkos*, there is one mediator between humans and God. Though the work of the Logos *asarkos*, other mediators exist between humans and God (although these "mediators" somehow participate in the mediation of Jesus Christ). Through

the work of the Logos *ensarkos*, the Church mediates salvific grace. Though the work of the Logos *asarkos*, the worship of Hindu images mediates salvific grace.[110] Through the work of the Logos *ensarkos*, men and women are reconciled to God and incorporated into Christ's Church. Though the work of the Logos *asarkos*, men and women are not incorporated into the Church but become members of "the kingdom of God." Moving beyond Karl Rahner, Dupuis no longer wants to talk about "anonymous Christians."[111] However, following Christ's resurrection, how can one be savingly related to the Father without concomitantly being included in Christ's Church? The latter contrast seems to suggest a second parallel economy.[112]

From an Augustinian perspective, no epistemic warrant exists for positing a second economy of salvation in parallel with that of the incarnate Word. Augustine is quite clear that the sending of the Son and the sending of the Spirit have one goal: bringing men and women into fellowship with the triune God by leading people in every nation to confess Jesus as Savior and Lord.[113] Inasmuch as Dupuis implicitly posits two economies, he undermines the unicity of the economy of salvation.

Moreover, if it is true that Dupuis distinguishes the work of the Logos *asarkos* and Logos *ensarkos* in a way that undermines the unicity of the economy of salvation, this also suggests a further deficiency in his Christology (inasmuch as the distinction between the work of the Logos *asarkos* and Logos *ensarkos* is grounded in the distinction of the divine and human natures). When one combines Dupuis's emphasis on the "unbridgeable gap" between "God" and Jesus Christ in his human nature as the basis for his "constitutive" Christology along with his

insistence upon the distinction between the divine and human natures as the basis for a distinct and continuing action of the Logos *asarkos*, it appears that his "Trinitarian Christology" may implicitly undermine the unity of the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ in a "Nestorian" fashion.

Severing the Unity of the Economic and Immanent Trinity

One final Trinitarian problem should be noted. On the one hand, Dupuis claims that "the mystery of the Triune God—Father, Son, Spirit—corresponds objectively to the inner reality of God, even though only analogically."[114] On the other hand, Dupuis also insists that *authentic* economic manifestations of the triune God can be found in other religious communities. Obviously a number of these economic "manifestations" of the triune God are conflicting, and in some cases, even contradictory. Buddhists, for example, envision the triune God as emptiness while Muslims, according to Dupuis, conceive of the triune God as a personal absolute. This leads to a problem. Inasmuch as these conflicting economic manifestations of the triune God are to be viewed as *authentic*, one seems to encounter a situation in which a kind of "God-above-God" must be posited with the result that the identity of the economic Trinity with the immanent Trinity is implicitly undermined. Dupuis's answer to this dilemma is found in his analysis of religious experience. While adherents of other religions have authentic "experiences" of the triune God, they do not possess adequate "formulations." The "economic" faces they posit are—objectively speaking—false. To the extent Dupuis emphasizes that these economic

faces are *false* (ostensibly to protect his Trinitarian grammar), he undercuts their authenticity. To the extent Dupuis emphasizes the *authenticity* of these alternative economic manifestations, he implicitly severs the unity of the economic and the immanent Trinity. At the end of the day, his proposal rests upon a deficient Trinitarianism.

Conclusion

The purpose of this essay was to evaluate the claim that a proper understanding of "the Trinity" provides the basis for a new understanding of religious diversity. To this end I critically examined the Trinitarian doctrine in three recent proposals in the Christian theology of religions. We saw that Yong's Trinitarian pneumatology severs the "two hands" of the Father, Heim's Trinitarian theology of religious ends effectively replaces the Trinity of persons with a trinity of "dimensions" that bears little resemblance to the God of Christian confession, and that Dupuis's Trinitarian Christology posits subordination in the Father/Son relationship and undermines the unicity of the economy of salvation. Inasmuch as the proposals of Yong, Heim, and Dupuis are representative of current appeal to Trinitarian doctrine in the Christian theology of religions, there is good reason to question the claim that "the Trinity" offers the key to a new theology of religions. On the contrary, it appears that current use of Trinitarian theology in the Christian theology of religions is having a deleterious effect upon the doctrine.

Immanuel Kant once asserted that the doctrine of the Trinity has no practical value whatsoever.[115] Kant would be hard-pressed to make this criticism stick today. Contemporary theology, Protestant and Catholic, is driven by a quest to make the Trinity "relevant."[116] One is told that the Trinity provides the basis for a proper understanding of human personhood,[117] that the Trinity represents the model for the proper form of church government,[118] that the Trinity provides the model for societal relations,[119] that the Trinity offers the model for an egalitarian political democracy,[120] that the Trinity provides the basis for affirming same-sex marriage,[121] that the Trinity offers the model for relating theology and science,[122] and so on.

On the one hand, this contemporary flowering of Trinitarian reflection is a welcome development. Since the triune God is the central premise of all orthodox theology, Christians must think in "Trinitarian" terms about every aspect of theology. Consider evangelism. The missionary nature of the church is rooted not in an outdated form of cultural imperialism but in the very life of the triune God.[123] The *missio* (sending) of the church is rooted in the dual *missiones* of the Son and the Spirit (Gal 4:4-6).[124] Just as the Father sent the Son into the world, so the Son sends his followers into the world (John 20:21). The Spirit, who is sent into the world by the Father and the Son, bears witness to the Son by preparing the way for and empowering the witness of Christ's disciples (John 15:26-27; Acts 1:8). Consider ecclesiology. There is a sense in which the unity of the church is to mirror—albeit analogically—the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (John 17:21). Finally, consider redemption. Unless the one who died on the cross was fully God (yet also hypostatically distinct from the Father), there could be no salvation in a Christian sense.[125] Our preaching should underscore these Trinitarian connections.[126]

On the other hand, to the extent that

appeal to Trinitarian doctrine in the theology of religions is representative of broader trends in contemporary theology, there may be cause for concern. I will briefly register two concerns. First, problems arise when one attempts to draw a straight line from a speculative construal of the immanent Trinity to some perceived good in a way that bypasses (or, in some cases, even undermines) the economy of salvation revealed in Scripture. Heim's proposal exemplifies the latter problem: he draws a straight line from a speculative understanding of the immanent Trinity (i.e., three "dimensions") to multiple religious ends. Similarly, a number of contemporary proposals draw a straight line from a speculative understanding of the immanent life of the triune God (e.g., "perichoresis") to some beneficial practice (e.g., egalitarian human relations, countering individualism, etc.).[127] Not only do we lack experiential access to the immanent life of the triune God to know what "perichoresis" might mean for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit *in se*, but Scripture ultimately directs us to imitate the redemptive work of the triune God *in the economy of salvation* (i.e., the economic Trinity): "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph 5:1-2, ESV).

My other concern centers on the *end* to which Trinitarian doctrine is currently being used. One cannot help but wonder if the recent "usefulness" of Trinitarian doctrine is driven more by Jamesian pragmatism[128] rather than a compelling vision of the triune God as the ultimate good.[129] Here contemporary theologians can learn an important lesson from Augustine. His Trinitarian reflection in *De Trinitate* is driven by a quest to know and enjoy the triune God.[130] He wants to draw his readers more deeply into the life of the triune God.[131] Augustine challenges contemporary theologians to consider whether their "functionalizing" of Trinitarian doctrine leads their readers "to know and enjoy, and not merely use, the strong Name of the Holy Trinity."[132]

ENDNOTES

[1]Geoffrey Wainwright, "The Ecumenical Rediscovery of the Trinity," *One in Christ* 34 (1998): 95-124. See also Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

[2]A survey of these developments can be found in John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[3]One notable example among evangelicals would be the gender debate between "Egalitarian" and "Complementarian" theologians regarding the Father/Son relationship in the immanent Trinity and its implications for male/female roles in marriage.

[4]For an overview of Trinitarian proposals in the theology of religions see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004).

[5]Peter C. Hodgson, "The Spirit and Religious Pluralism," in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005), 136.

[6]"Gavin D'Costa, "Toward a Trinitarian Theology of Religions," in *A Universal Faith? Peoples, Cultures, Religions and the Christ: Essays in Honor of Prof Dr. Frank De Graeve* (ed. Catherine Cornille and

Valeer Neckebrouck; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 147.

[7]Mark Heim, "The Depth of the Riches: Trinity and Religious Ends," *Modern Theology* 17 (2001): 22 (italics original).

[8]By referring to "the" doctrine of the Trinity I am not implying that there is one particular systematic understanding of the triune God upon which all Christians agree. In this sense it might be more accurate to speak about "a" doctrine of the Trinity. By speaking of "the" doctrine of the Trinity I have in mind Trinitarian doctrine in contrast to other categories of Christian doctrine (e.g., soteriology, anthropology, etc.).

[9]Inasmuch as the claims in the previous paragraph regarding the validity of non-Christian religions are rooted in a doctrine of the Trinity, their truthfulness depends, in part, upon the adequacy of the Trinitarian theology on which they are based. Orthodox Trinitarian doctrine represents a *necessary* (but not *sufficient*) condition for the truthfulness of these claims.

[10]Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to a Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000).

[11]Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

[12]Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997).

[13]Obviously Trinitarian assumptions play an *implicit* role in every proposal in the Christian theology of religions. These proposals are unique because of the explicit and constitutive role that Trinitarian doctrine plays.

[14]I also attempted to select theologians that would represent diverse ecclesial affiliations. Yong is Pentecostal, Heim is Baptist, and Dupuis is Roman Catholic.

[15]Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 95.

[16]Not everyone views Augustine's influence as positive. Augustine's Trinitarian theology has come under heavy attack in the twentieth century. According to these critics, Augustine's theology "begins" with a unity of divine substance (which he allegedly "prioritizes" over the divine persons), his Trinitarian reflection is over-determined by neo-Platonic philosophy, his psychological analogy of the Trinity tends toward modalism, and he severs the life of the triune God from the economy of salvation by focusing on the immanent Trinity. These criticisms can be found in Colin E. Gunton, "Augustine, the Trinity and the Theological Crisis of the West," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43 (1990): 33-58; and Catherine M. LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991). Lewis Ayres and Michel Barnes, however, have convincingly demonstrated that these criticisms are based on a misreading of Augustine's Trinitarian theology. See Lewis Ayres, "The Fundamental Grammar of Augustine's Trinitarian Theology," in *Augustine and his Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner* (ed. Dodaro and George Lawless; New York: Routledge, 2000) 51-76; Michel R. Barnes, "Rereading Augustine's theology of the Trinity," in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, Gerald O'Collins; New York: Oxford, 1999), 145-176.

[17]This is not to say that no differences exist between the Trinitarian theology of Augustine and the Cappadocians. My claim regarding the unity of Augustine and the Cappadocians is directed at the unwarranted assumption that significant differences exist between early "Western" approaches (which emphasize divine unity) and "Eastern" approaches (which emphasize a trinity of divine persons). This assumption can be traced to the work of a nineteenth-century Jesuit, Théodore de Régnon. Trenchant criticisms of this polarizing paradigm can be found in Michel R. Barnes, "De Régnon Reconsidered," *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995): 51-79; idem, "Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology," *Theological Studies* 56 (1995): 237-50; David B. Hart, "The Mirror of the Infinite: Gregory of Nyssa on the *Vestigia Trinitatis*," *Modern Theology* 18 (2002): 541-61; and Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford, 2004), 273-383.

[18]My evaluation of these proposals will draw implicitly and explicitly upon Augustine's most significant Trinitarian work—*De Trinitate*. All citations of *De Trinitate* will be taken from Hill's translation: Saint Augustine, *The Trinity* (trans.

Edmund Hill; vol. 5 of *The Works of St. Augustine*; Brooklyn: New City, 1991).

[19]Questions discussed under the rubric of the theology of religions include the following: Under what circumstances, if any, may individuals experience salvation apart from the witness of the church? To what extent, and on what basis, can one recognize elements of truth and goodness in non-Christian religions? What role, if any, do non-Christian religions *qua* religions play in salvation-history? To what end, and on what basis, should Christians enter into dialogue with adherents of other religions? Finally, to what extent can one incorporate non-Christian religious practices into the development of indigenous churches in missionary contexts? For a helpful introduction to the theology of religions, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003).

[20]Not only is the explanatory power of this typology quite limited (focusing exclusively on soteriology), but this typology also veils the fact that every interpretation of religion is "exclusive" inasmuch as it offers a "tradition-specific" account of other religions that claims to be ontologically and epistemologically correct. Gavin D'Costa cogently argues this point as the basis for a trenchant critique of a pluralist theology of religions in *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000).

[21]*Discerning the Spirit(s)* is a revised version of Yong's dissertation which he completed at Boston University under Robert Cummings Neville in 1998.

[22]Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 94.

[23]Readers who are familiar with the work of Clark Pinnock will immediately note the similarities between Pinnock and Yong.

[24]Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 61. In arguing for a "distinct economy" of the Spirit, Yong builds upon the work of Georges Khodr. See Georges Khodr, "Christianity and the Pluralistic World—The Economy of the Holy Spirit" *Ecumenical Review* 23 (1971): 118-28. Although in the immediate context (p. 61) Yong is describing the proposal of Georges Khodr, it is clear that he embraces this assumption as well.

[25]Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 69.

[26]Ibid., 69.

[27]Ibid., 136.

[28]Ibid., 251.

[29]Ibid., 254.

[30]Ibid., 131.

[31]Ibid., 312.

[32]Ibid., 256-309.

[33]Ibid., 279.

[34]Ibid., 320 (italics original).

[35]Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 17.

[36]Ibid., 31-32.

[37]Ibid., 187.

[38]Ibid., 189.

[39]Ibid., 92-93.

[40]Ibid., 196.

[41]Ibid., 210.

[42]Ibid.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Ibid., 211.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Ibid., 275 (italics original).

[47]Ibid.

[48]See Miikka Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions According to the Second Vatican Council* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1992).

[49]Catholic proponents of P1 would include Gavin D'Costa and Joseph DiNoia.

[50]Catholic proponents of P2 would include Karl Rahner, Paul Knitter, Hans Küng and Raimundo Panikkar.

[51]Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 277.

[52]Ibid., 279.

[53]Ibid., 293.

[54]Ibid., 316.

[55]Ibid., 299.

[56]Ibid., 245.

[57]Ibid., 303.

[58]Ibid., 345.

[59]Ibid., 386.

[60]My critique will focus upon Yong's proposal as outlined in *Discerning the Spirit(s)*. At the end of my analysis I will briefly discuss a more recent book entitled *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003). At this point I would simply note that Yong does not make any revisions to the substance of his proposal in the latter book. On the contrary, he continues to affirm a distinct "economy" of the Spirit as well the legitimacy of non-christological criteria for discerning the Spirit's presence.

[61]Inasmuch as the *Filioque* ostensibly "subordinates" the work of the Spirit to the Son, it ostensibly undermines his project.

[62]The question regarding the formal legitimacy of the insertion of the

Filioque clause into the creed must be distinguished from the substantive theological question of whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*. One can affirm the latter while denying the propriety of the former.

[63]See Kilian McDonnell, *The Other Hand of God: The Holy Spirit as the Universal Touch and Goal* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2003), 86-97, 196-201, 228-29.

[64]Yong refers to the Son and Spirit as the "two hands" of God on at least sixteen different occasions in *Discerning the Spirit(s)*. Notice how he acknowledges his indebtedness to Khodr, Knitter, and others: "Khodr's suggestion, echoed by Samartha, Dupuis and Knitter, is that a retrieval of Irenaeus's theological metaphor allows us to recognize the different economies of the Word and the Spirit" (Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 62).

[65]In the original context of Irenaeus's trinitarian theology, the "two hands" metaphor served to highlight the "direct" nature of God's involvement in the world over and against Gnostics who posited a chain of intermediaries between God and the world.

[66]"A striking way of expressing the divine unity and its embrace is through the description of the word and spirit as the hands of God" (Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001], 91).

[67]In fairness to Yong, it should be noted that in many places where he employs the "two hands" metaphor, he explicitly acknowledges that the Son and Spirit work together. For example, commenting on the Son and Spirit as the "two hands," Yong explains, "As such, they are both present universally and particularly in creation, and, in the words of Congar, they 'do God's work together'" (Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 116).

[68]Yong makes the mistake of equating "mission" and "economy." Notice how he uses these terms interchangeably in the following statement: "Preliminarily then, a pneumatological theology of religions that validates the distinction between the *economy* of the Word and Spirit holds the christological problem in abeyance. For now, it is sufficient to grant that there is a relationship-in-autonomy between the two divine *missions*" (Ibid., 70 [italics mine]).

[69]McDonnell, *The Other Hand of God*, 198. "While insisting on the 'real' distinction between the two missions of the Word and Spirit, there is a danger of conceiving of them as two foci at the ends of an ellipse . . . . Such a conception, although not necessarily heretical, would be dangerous and might lead to a kind of economic tritheism" (Ibid., 200). Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that positing two economies could lead to economic "bitheism."

[70]This highlights another problem with Yong's proposal. Yong not only brackets a christological perspective but he also brackets what might be called a "patrological" perspective. If the Spirit represents divine *presence* in Yong's proposal,

one might rightly say with McDonnell that the Father symbolizes divine *purpose*: "The Father is the origin of the downward (outward) movement and the goal of ascending (returning) movement" (Ibid., 94). By bracketing the Father, Yong effectively obscures the goal of the economy of salvation.

[71]At several points Yong highlights the biblical basis for and benefits of a "Spirit-Christology" for a pneumatological theology of religions. See Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 118-120. "Spirit-Christology" is attractive because it emphasizes the dependence of Jesus upon the Spirit in his earthly life and ministry in a way that undermines "subordinationist" understandings of the Spirit's ministry. Yong's appeal to Spirit-Christology, however, raises an important question: If there is no "Christ without Spirit" (as advocates of Spirit-Christology insist), then how can there be "Spirit without Christ" as Yong's proposal seems to imply? Inasmuch as Spirit-Christology emphasizes the intrinsic economic *relatedness* of the Son and Spirit, it stands in tension with Yong's "distinct economy" of the Spirit.

[72]In the Pauline epistles we see further evidence that the Holy Spirit bears witness to, and glorifies the Son. The Spirit glorifies Christ by witnessing to the "sonship" of the redeemed (Rom 8:1-17), empowering the preaching of the gospel (1 Cor 2:2-5; Rom 15:14-21), enabling believers to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (1 Cor 12:2-3), removing the "veil" so that men and women

can see the glory of Christ who is the image of God (2 Cor 3:7-4:6), enabling believers to become conformed to the image of the Son (Rom 8:26-30), and enabling believers to know and experience the love of Christ (Eph 3:14-21).

[73] According to Augustine, The Holy Spirit's "coming needed to be demonstrated by perceptible signs, to show that the whole world and all nations with their variety of language was going to believe in Christ by the gift of the Holy Spirit." *De Trin*. IV.29, 175.

[74] As Lesslie Newbigin rightly notes, "The Spirit who thus bears witness in the life of the Church to the purpose of the Father is not confined within the limits the Church. It is the clear teaching of the Acts of the Apostles, as it is the experience of missionaries, that the Spirit goes, so to speak, ahead of the Church. Like Cornelius, men of every age and nation have been miraculously prepared beforehand to receive the message of Christ. But—because the Spirit and the Father are one—this work of the Spirit is not in any sense an alternative way to God apart from the Church; it is the preparation for the coming of the Church, which means that the Church must be ever ready to follow where the Spirit leads." Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Themes for Today's Mission* (London: Paternoster, 1998), 53-54.

[75] "For his words, 'He will glorify me,' can be understood in this way: by pouring out love in the hearts of believers and by making them spiritual, he revealed to them how the Son, whom they only knew before according to the flesh and, as men, thought him a man, was equal to the Father. Or at least in this way: filled with confidence by love itself, and with fear driven out, they announced Christ to men, and thus his fame was spread out in all the world." Saint Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John, 55-111* (Fathers of the Church; vol. 90; trans. by John W. Rettig; Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 229.

[76] Adopting this view does not require one to deny the presence of truth and goodness in the lives of adherents of other religions. On the contrary, I would argue that elements of truth and goodness in the lives of non-Christians can be accounted for in terms of a Christian anthropology informed by the doctrines of creation and fall. For example, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* John Calvin argues that inside each person there resides an "awareness of divinity" (*sensus divinitatis*). All religion—even pagan religion—can be viewed as a response to this awareness of divinity. For a helpful discussion of the implications of Christian anthropology for an evangelical theology of religions, see Harold A. Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 308-48.

[77] On the one hand, Yong acknowledges the legitimacy of *praeparatio evangelica* approach. On the other hand, it appears that Yong wants to move beyond this approach. He claims that viewing religions solely in terms of *praeparatio evangelica* "leads to the kind of restrictive christological quests that continue to denigrate the Holy Spirit as having less-than-equal status as a trinitarian member" (Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 320).

[78] I am not merely offering a pragmatic critique (i.e., that Yong's proposal undermines an important "motivation" for evangelism). I am making a substantive theological claim about how his proposal obscures the missionary nature of the economic Trinity. If anything, rigorous Trinitarian reflection should lead one to take more seriously the missionary nature of the church: "The *ultimate basis* of mission is the triune God—the Father who created the world and sent his Son by the Holy Spirit to be our salvation. The *proximate basis* of mission is the redemption of the Son by his life, death and resurrection, and the *immediate power* of mission the Holy Spirit. It is, in trinitarian terms, a *missio Dei*. Thus mission is based on the will, movement, and action of the grace and love of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives*, 72 [italics original]).

[79] Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 136.
[80] Ibid., 201.
[81] This shift can be seen in his reading of Khodr. In *Discerning the Spirit(s)* Yong reads Khodr almost solely as emphasizing an independent economy of the Holy Spirit; he effectively brackets Khodr's discussion of how this distinct economy of the Spirit inherently points to Christ. See Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 60-64. In *Beyond the Impasse*, he acknowl-

edges the *christological* dimension of Khodr's proposal (which he seems to view as somewhat problematic): "Khodr's presentation is nevertheless not free from tension. Theologizing as he does from within the framework of Orthodox trinitarianism, he sees the missions of the Son and Spirit as much more connected than not. While the religions may be the working of the economy of the Spirit, yet they are at the same time in a very real sense connected to the economy of the Son" (Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 89).

[82]Perhaps the best way to summarize the difference between *Discerning the Spirit(s)* and *Beyond the Impasse* would be to say that the latter book, while articulating the same proposal, is marked by much greater reserve. *Beyond the Impasse*, for example, contains no bold assertions regarding the salvific work of the Holy Spirit among the Umbanda in Brazil.

[83]Augustine, for example, carefully distinguished "procession" (immanent Trinity) from "mission" (economic Trinity). See *De Trin*. II-IV.

[84]Karl Rahner's famous axiom that "[t]he 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity," constitutes the point of departure for much contemporary Trinitarian reflection. Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (trans. Joseph Donceel; New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 22. Broadly speaking Rahner's axiom has evoked two responses. One group of theologians follows Rahner in emphasizing the "identity" of the economic and the immanent Trinity (in some cases pushing this "identity" to the point that the latter is collapsed into the former). A second group claims that Rahner's axiom does not maintain an adequate distinction between the economic and the immanent Trinity. These theologians are willing to affirm, at least in a qualified way, the first half of Rahner's axiom ("the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity") but often reject, or significantly qualify, the second half ("the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity") in order to protect the freedom and transcendence of God. For a helpful discussion of the relationship of the economic and immanent Trinity, see Fred Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity: Rahner's Rule and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Issues in Systematic Theology Series; vol. 12; New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

[85]If the triune God does not exist apart from the economy, there can be no economic revelation in the first place.

[86]David Coffey, *Deus Trinitas: The Doctrine of the Triune God*. (New York: Oxford, 1999), 16-17. Coffey notes that one of the weaknesses of Karl Rahner's axiom is that it "does not tell us which perspective [economic or immanent] is the more fundamental, nor does it throw light on the order of our knowledge of the Trinity" (Ibid., 14-15). Coffey addresses this lacuna by distinguishing "epistemological" and "ontological" orders.

[87]Coffey's typology rightly challenges the tendency to identify the "economic Trinity" with the teaching of Scripture. As a systematic conceptualization of the triune God in the economy of salvation, the "economic Trinity" is no less speculative than the "immanent Trinity" inasmuch as it incorporates (either explicitly or implicitly) assumptions regarding the immanent Trinity.

[88]Heim argues that an "impersonal" dimension can be seen in Old Testament theophanies (e.g., the "fire" through which God appears to Moses). See Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 185-86. There are at least two problems with his argument. First, these apparently "impersonal" manifestations represent one aspect of a fundamentally "personal" self-revelation: it is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who "speaks" to Moses from the "burning bush." To sever an "impersonal" aspect (e.g., "fire") from the "personal" and make it stand alone is highly problematic. Second, no epistemic warrant exists for assuming that a particular *created* form (e.g., fire) necessarily reveals something about the immanent nature of the triune God.

[89]See Ninian Smart and Stephen Konstantine, *Christian Systematic Theology in World Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 174.

[90]The following encapsulates their view of Scripture: "It therefore seems nonsense to pretend that the Bible has doctrinal or narrative authority" (Ibid., 47). By rejecting the authority of Scripture, they reject the epistemic basis for a Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

[91]Moreover, it is without support in the Christian tradition.

92"It is important to make the point that relations with God in *all* three dimensions we have described are real relations with God. They are not relations with something else (idols) or with false gods. What humans find in such relations is truly there" (Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 199).

93Ibid., 275 (italics mine).

94One cannot call these "economies of salvation" because Christian salvation does not represent their goal.

95For Augustine (just as for the New Testament), all divine activity is focused on the one divine economy effected in Christ by the Holy Spirit.

96Heim, *Depth of the Riches*, 213.

97Heim's equivocation on this point is quite revealing. On one hand, he insists that individuals relate to the triune God. See ibid., 199. On the other hand, he also claims that individuals experience a relation with an "aspect" of God's nature. Multiple religious ends result from an "intensification of a particular kind of relation with an *aspect of divine life*" (Ibid., 289 [italics mine]). Thus, it is unclear whether the "relation" exists with the triune God or merely with an "aspect" of God.

98Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 313.

99In addition to *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, I will also draw upon a more recent work: *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (trans. by Phillip Berryman; Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2002).

100Dupuis, *From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 88.

101See *De Trin*. IV.30, 175. The unity of action of the divine persons is a fundamental axiom of Trinitarian theology. It represents a point on which Augustine and the Cappadocians were in clear agreement. For a discussion of unity of action in Gregory of Nyssa, see Lewis Ayres, "On Not Three People: The Fundamental Themes of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology as seen in 'To Ablabius: On Not Three Gods'," *Modern Theology* 18 (2002): 445-474.

102Augustine notes that while Rom 8:32 attributes the giving of the Son to the Father, Gal 2:20 attributes the Son's death to his own decision.

103"The unique closeness that exists between God and Jesus by virtue of the mystery of the incarnation may never be forgotten, but neither can the *unbridgeable distance* that remains between the Father and Jesus in his human existence. . . . While it is true that Jesus the man is uniquely the Son of God, it is equally true that God (the Father) stands beyond Jesus" (Dupuis, *From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 92 [italics mine]).

104His distinction between the work of the Logos *ensarkos* and Logos *asarkos* following the incarnation is grounded, to a significant degree, in the distinction between the two natures of Christ: "Admittedly, in the mystery of Jesus-the-Christ, the Word cannot be separated from the flesh it has assumed. But, inseparable as the divine Word and Jesus' human existence may be, they nevertheless remain distinct. While, then, the human action of the Logos *ensarkos* is the universal sacrament of God's saving action, it does not exhaust the action of the Logos" (Dupuis, *Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 299).

105Dupuis, *From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 139.

106I am not suggesting that any kind of distinction between the Logos *ensarkos* and Logos *asarkos* necessarily implies two economies of salvation; rather I am arguing that the specific way Dupuis employs this distinction implies this.

107Although I am focusing on the work of the Logos, Dupuis is careful not to sever the action of the Logos from the action of the Spirit. It will become clear that Dupuis does not sever the unicity of the economy of salvation by severing the Word from the Spirit but rather by severing the work of the Logos *ensarkos* from the work of the Logos *asarkos*.

108See previous endnote. In the rest of this paragraph, it should be understood that the Spirit is included when I speak of the work of the Logos *ensarkos* or the Logos *asarkos*.

109See Dupuis, *From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 115-37. Dupuis suggests that while Jesus Christ represents the "qualitative fullness" of revelation, he does not represent the "quantitative fullness" of revelation. It is precisely in this sense that the revelation of the incarnate Christ is not "absolute." On this basis, Dupuis claims that one may recognize that other religious scriptures contain the "word of God."

110Dupuis, *Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 303.

[111]Karl Rahner coined the phrase the "anonymous Christian" to describe individuals who experienced Christian salvation without knowing it.

[112]The net result is two parallel economies that converge only eschatologically; in the present stage of salvation-history, they exist more or less in parallel.

[113]See *De Trin*. IV.29, 174-75.

[114]Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 259.

[115]Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties* (trans. Mary J. Gregor; New York: Abaris Books, 1979), 65-67.

[116]This is the driving force behind Catherine M. LaCugna's controversial book *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991).

[117]John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1985).

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

[119]Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988); Thomas J. Scirghi, "The Trinity: A Model for Belonging in Contemporary Society," *Ecumenical Review* 54 (2002): 333-42.

[120]Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

[121]Eugene F. Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

[122]Reich, K. Helmut, "The Doctrine of the Trinity as a Model for Structuring the Relations Between Science and Theology," *Zygon* 30 (1995): 383-405.

[123]"The sending of the church to the world is a continuation of the Father's sending of the Son and the Spirit. It is the aim of these sending operations to awaken faith, to baptize, and to start new communities of discipleship. The Holy Spirit leads the church to open new fields of mission, continuing the apostolic history that began at Pentecost in Jerusalem. . . . Should the church today continue to evangelize the nations in the name of the triune God? That is basically the same question as: Should the church continue to be the church? The church is constituted by the structure of the trinitarian mission of God in the history of salvation. The church is the eschatological creation of God's Word serving to unite all humankind." Carl E. Braaten, "The Triune God: the Source and Model of Christian Unity and Mission," *Missiology* 18 (1990): 425.

[124]From an Augustinian perspective, the *missiones* of the Son and Spirit represent a temporal extension of their eternal *processiones*.

[125]It is helpful to remember that the early Trinitarian debates were driven by soteriology.

[126]"Trinitarian" preaching should not be construed as an alternative to "Christocentric" preaching. Our preaching is Christocentric because Jesus Christ represents the focal point of the Trinitarian economy of salvation. At the same time, Christocentric preaching must be Trinitarian in order to accurately present the identity of Jesus Christ.

[127]Karen Kilby has argued that problematic appeals to "perichoresis" frequently involve three steps. First, "perichoresis" is named as that which constitutes the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Next, "perichoresis" is defined by projecting some aspect of human relatedness into God's immanent life. Finally, "perichoresis" is commended as an important resource Christians have to offer the broader world. Karen Kilby, "Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity," *New Blackfriars* 81 (2000): 442.

[128]For a discussion of the influence of William James's philosophy upon contemporary Trinitarian theology, see Matthew W. Levering, "Beyond the Jamesian Impasse in Trinitarian Theology," *Thomist* 66 (2002): 395-420.

[129]This is not to say that doctrines should have no practical value. Kevin Vanhoozer rightly argues that the ultimate purpose of Christian doctrine is not merely to lead us to correct understanding but to guide us in fitting participation on the drama of redemption. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

[130]One of the biblical texts that frames Augustine's quest is Ps 105:4, "Seek his face." Augustine cites this text as several key points in *De Trinitate*. John Cooper has argued that one of the most basic notions in Augustine's thought is that of a spiritual quest. See John Cooper, "The Basic Philosophical and Theological Notions of Saint Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 15 (1984): 93-113.

[131]See A. N. Williams, "Contemplation: Knowledge of God in Augustine's *De Trinitate*," in *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church* (ed. James J. Buckley and David S. Yeago; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 121-46.

[132]C. C. Pecknold, "How Augustine Used the Trinity: Functionalism and the Development of Doctrine," *Anglican Theological Review* 85 (2003): 141.