

# ECUMENICAL TRINITARIAN REFLECTIONS AND THE 'DE RÉGNON PARADIGM': A PROBE INTO RECOVERING THE SOCIAL-TRINITARIAN EMPHASES OF THE CAPPADOCIAN FATHERS

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DOI: 10.17846/CL.2019.12.1.76-89

**Abstract:** VALČO, Michal – PETRO, Marek – KARDIS, Mária – SHAGIEVA, Rozalina V. – KUZNETSOVA, Maria A. – KRYUKOVA, Nina I. *Ecumenical Trinitarian Reflections and the 'De Régnon Paradigm': A Probe into Recovering the Social-Trinitarian Emphases of the Cappadocian Fathers.* The article examines the so-called «Social model of the Trinity» and its implications for theology, religious anthropology, and ecclesiology in its social dimension. The Trinitarian approach of the Cappadocian Fathers is lifted up as a potential source of inspiration for a more complex and dynamic understanding of the Trinity in the West, urging the West to learn from and integrate critically its valuable emphases. The article is constructively critical to the Latin philosophical-theological approach to the definition of the Trinity, suggesting, however, that the commonly accepted 'de Régnon Paradigm' among most Western scholars does not reflect de Régnon's original intentions and does not do justice to the natural affinity and even overlapping of ideas and emphases between the so-called 'Latin' and 'Greek' approaches to the philosophical-theological question of the Trinity.

**Keywords:** *de Régnon paradigm, Social Trinitarianism, Cappadocian fathers, Latin Trinitarianism, Greek Trinitarianism*

**Abstrakt:** VALČO, Michal – PETRO, Marek – KARDIS, Mária – SHAGIEVA, Rozalina V. – KUZNETSOVA, Maria A. – KRYUKOVA, Nina I. *Ekumenické trinitárne reflexie a „de Régnonova paradigma“: pokus o obnovenie sociálno-trinitárnych dôrazov kapadóckych otcov.* Článok skúma takzvaný „sociálny model Trojice“ a jeho implikácie pre teológiu, náboženskú antropológiu a ekleziológiu v jej sociálnej dimenzii. Trinitárny prístup kapadóckych otcov je vyzdvihnutý ako možný zdroj inšpirácie pre komplexnejšie a dynamickejšie pochopenie Trojice na západe, povzbudzujúc západných mysliteľov, aby sa poučili z ich hodnotných dôrazov a prípadne aby ich integrovali do svojich koncepcií. Článok je konštruktívne kritický k latinskému filozoficko-teologickému prístupu k definícii Trojice, no pritom vyjadruje presvedčenie, že 'de Régnonova paradigma', bežne prijímaná väčšinou západných bádateľov, neodráža de Régnonove pôvodné zámery a nevníma s dostatočnou hĺbkou a presnosťou prirodzenú blízkosť, ba dokonca prelínanie sa myšlienok a dôrazov medzi takzvaným latinským prístupom a gréckym prístupom k filozoficko-teologickému problému Trojice.

**Kľúčové slová:** *de Régnonova paradigma, sociálny trinitarizmus, kapadócki otcovia, latinský trinitarizmus, grécky trinitarizmus*

## Introduction: The Place of the Trinity in the Life and Teachings of Christianity

Ever since the dawn of Christianity as a distinct movement (distinct from first-century Judaism) Christian theologians had to wrestle with the problem how to properly relate God's self-revelation in Jesus of Nazareth from the Jahve of Israel and the Spirit of God who had descended upon the disciples in Jerusalem at Pentecost. Questions regarding the identity of the 'One God' kept resurfacing with relentless constancy: Can we logically explain how it is that numerically distinct consubstantial persons count as one God, one divine being? And even if we can, what real difference does it make theologically, pastorally, ethically? How can the carpenter's son from Nazareth (i.e. Jesus) fully share our humanity and, at the same time, Jahve's full divinity? And again, what difference does this Christological enigma make for the Christian conceptions of salvation?

Questions regarding the Trinity – that is, the triune identity of the one God (conceived in a strict monotheist intellectual and religious setting) – have thus from the very beginning been interrelated with the Christian communities' understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ (Christology), constituting the very basis for all other Christian doctrines and providing all systematic theological thinking its "overarching coherence." As Robert Jenson famously wrote: "It is from Barth that twentieth-century theology has relearned that this doctrine has and must have explanatory and regulatory use in the whole of theology, that it is not a separate puzzle to be solved but the framework within which all theology's puzzles are to be solved" (Jenson 1997, 31). Instead of promoting the so-called 'weak Trinitarian theologies' "in which the doctrine of the triune God tends to be notionally present in one's theological system yet operationally non-functioning" (Vanhoozer 2014, 32), Christian intellectual reflection on the *theologia propria* should rather represent the view of 'strong Trinitarian theologies.' Such approach carries the promise of a more genuine understanding of the ancient *regula fidei*,<sup>1</sup> not only from an ecumenical-theological perspective but also from a general, religious perspective. In addition, such approach can teach Christians to identify and implement the proper kind of relationship between Logos (Word), Pneuma (Spirit), and Ecclesia (the Church).

A unique importance among the Nicene and early post-Nicene theologians for the development of the doctrine of the Trinity is rightly attributed to the Cappadocian Fathers – Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa,<sup>2</sup> and Gregory of Nazianzus. They were the first ones to formulate with acceptable clarity the distinctions between Father, Son, and Spirit, as defined by Christian orthodoxy. This was a crucial development, given the ominous threat of two sister-forms of Monarchianism,<sup>3</sup> a theological movement considered heretical in the early patristic period. The danger was to lose the distinctiveness and co-existence of the three persons in the Godhead in the attempt to preserve the unity of divine being – either by speaking of chronologically distinct manifestations of God's beings in three consecutive modes as the Father, Son, and Spirit; or to relegate the Son to an 'adopted' son of God (ontologically different from the Father)<sup>4</sup> and the Spirit to an impersonal

<sup>1</sup> The Christian *rule of faith*, dating back to the early 2nd century AD.

<sup>2</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, more than others, developed a robust Trinitarian teaching, focusing on the logical coherence of the 'triune' mystery and the distinction inherent in the fourth century questions *quid tres* (three what?) and *quis unus* (one who?) (Plantinga 1986, 328).

<sup>3</sup> We are referring here to (1) dynamic Monarchianism, also known as 'Adoptionism'; and (2) Modalistic Monarchianism, also known as 'Sabellianism' based on the name of its original proponent, presbyter Sabellius from Rome (early 3rd century).

<sup>4</sup> Such was the case of various forms of 'Adoptionism,' the most famous of which was Arianism.

force.<sup>5</sup> What follows is an attempt by Gregory of Nazianzus to offer a way of distinguishing ‘the three’ while maintaining the ‘One;’ a narrow pathway of orthodoxy between the abyss of tritheism and the precipice of Monarchianism: “... the very fact of being Unbegotten or Begotten, or Proceeding has given the name of Father to the First, of the Son to the Second, and [to] the Third ... of the Holy Ghost, that the distinction of the Three Persons may be preserved in the one nature and dignity of the Godhead. ... The Three are One in Godhead, and the One three in properties...” (Nazianzus 2012, 121). Gregory of Nyssa goes a step further with his human analogy applied in a strictly qualified (i.e., in a Platonic-theological manner) when he compares the inner life of the Trinity with three human persons sharing the one, indivisible human nature: “Their nature is one, at union in itself, and an absolutely indivisible unit, not capable of increase by addition or of diminution by subtraction, but in its essence being and continually remaining one, inseparable even though it appear in plurality, continuous, complete, and not divided with the individuals who participate in it” (Nyssa 2017, 232).

After three centuries of prayerful deliberation, cultic practice (in light of the ancient *lex orandi – lex credendi* rule), and zealous debates, the Nicene and post-Nicene fathers (with a substantial help from the Cappadocians) have come up with formulations that, though not qualified as ‘definitions’ of God, attempt to delineate orthodox boundaries of theological discourse on the question of: who is the God of the Christian Gospel? What follows are excerpts from the Athanasian Creed (recognized by the ecumenical Church but used mainly in the West) and the complete text of the Nicene Creed as it was complemented at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

<p><b>Nicene Creed, 325/381 AD</b>  <i>Area of origin: EAST</i></p> <p>We believe in <b>one God</b>, the <b>Father almighty</b>, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible; And in <b>one Lord</b> Jesus Christ, the <b>only-begotten Son</b> of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance (homoousion) with the Father...</p> <p>And in the <b>Holy Spirit</b>, the <b>Lord and life-giver</b>, Who <b>proceeds from the Father</b>, Who with the Father and the Son is together worshipped and together glorified, Who spoke through the prophets.</p>	<p><b>Athanasian Creed, cca. 500 AD</b>  <i>Area of origin: WEST</i></p> <p>... we worship <b>one God in trinity</b>, and the <b>trinity in unity</b>, neither blending their persons nor dividing their essence.</p> <p>For the person of the <b>Father is a distinct person</b>, the <b>person of the Son is another</b>, and <b>that of the Holy Spirit still another</b>.</p> <p>But the <b>divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one</b>, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal. What quality the Father has, the Son has, and the Holy Spirit has. ...</p> <p>Thus the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Yet there are <b>not three gods; there is but one God</b>. ...</p>
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As mentioned above, these creedal ‘definitions’ are not true definitions in the proper sense of the word, as it is impossible (and, indeed, blasphemous) to try to reduce the mystery of an eternal ontological entity who boasts with properties, such as omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence, to sentences based on human logic and experience (or creative imagination). The creedal ‘dogmas,’ i.e. officially formulated teachings have been meant to delineate a ‘safe space’ of orthodoxy where further theological debates were to take place. In the camp of the Church representatives and theologians, systematic theological reflections on the mystery of the Trinity have since spoken of the ‘threeness-oneness problem of the Trinity.’ Philosophers and philosophically

<sup>5</sup> This unorthodox teaching was promoted by bishop Macedonius of Constantinople in the second half of the fourth century.

inclined theologians (the so-called 'analytic theologians') have since the last decades of 20th century tended to talk about the 'logical problem of the Trinity.'

Regardless of the label we decide to put on this conundrum, four main ways have been proposed to deal with this problem. The first two are what we may call traditional historical schools or approaches – the Greek Trinitarian School and the Latin Trinitarian School. The latter two represent a more recent development (in the past fifty years) both, in the theological and philosophical camps. It has become somewhat fashionable, especially since the 1980s, among theologians to talk about 'Social Trinitarianism' (or 'Relational Trinitarianism'), whereas among analytic philosophers and those whom we might call analytic theologians, to refer to 'Relative Identity Trinitarianism'. (1) Greek Trinitarianism (GT) purports to represent the teachings of the Cappadocian fathers of the fourth century AD and wishes to emphasize its starting point in the revealed economy of salvation (the works of the so-called '*Economic Trinity*'). Its primary aim is to secure an adequate distinction of the three 'persons' within the Godhead. (2) Latin Trinitarianism (LT) dates back to the psychological Trinitarian triads of St. Augustine, bishop of Hippo. It is typically conceived of as having its starting point in the definition of one, indivisible essence of God's being subsisting in three persons. (3) Social Trinitarianism (ST) claims to have its roots in the early Greek Tradition of the Cappadocians, emphasizing a variety of relational models of Trinity as constitutive to God's being. Their claim to stand firmly in the tradition of Greek Trinitarianism, however, has recently been contested (Hennessy 2007; Rea 2009, 704-705). (4) Relative Trinitarianism (RT) (also known as Relative Identity Trinitarianism) has its roots in recent analytic theologians' attempt to reformulate the concept of numerical sameness without limiting it by absolute identity relations (Brower – Rea 2009; Rea 2003). What appears to be a 'logical problem of the Trinity' is thus approached by employing linguistic analytical tools.

## The Emergence of De Régnon Paradigm

Theodore de Régnon (1831-93) was a French Jesuit scholar educated in history, philosophy, theology, as well as mathematics and natural sciences who also taught in all these fields at several prestigious Parisian colleges. He became famous by establishing the paradigm of playing off Eastern and Western trinitarian teachings against each other. He did so in his trinitarian magnum opus *Etudes de théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité* (vols. 1 and 2: 1892 and vol. 3: 1898) to offset what he considered too narrow and limiting trend promoted by Pope Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* encyclical (1879). In his encyclical, Leo XIII lifted up the theological legacy of Thomas Aquinas as normative or (almost) paradigmatic. De Régnon feared that concepts such as 'nature' and 'person' would seduce theology to an abstract philosophical schema (De Régnon 1892, 251). He decided to look elsewhere for a fresher, biblically based, and existentially more adequate source – and he found it in the theology of the Greek fathers, especially the Cappadocians. Instead of starting with the one, indivisible substance (*substantia*) or essence (*essential*) of the divine being, de Régnon's interpretation of the Greek fathers posited that the *oikonomia salutis* (economy of salvation) with concrete divine actions in human history should become the foundational source for distinguishing the Father, Son, and Spirit as three distinct agents. Their unity is, nevertheless, is a substantial unity of one action, originated by the Father and enacted through the Son by the power of the Spirit (De Régnon 1892, 350). The Latin theologians, beginning with St. Augustine, according to de Régnon, tended to employ psychological analogies (like *intellect, memory, and will*) to substantiate the triunity of the divine nature. Nature is thus foundational for distinct modes of subsistence to emerge. The Greeks, on the other hand, speak of distinct *hypostaseis* as containing the one divine nature, where unity is safeguarded by the one divine action (De Régnon 1892, 276). Over

the decades that followed after the publication of De Régnon's volumes on the Trinity, this distinction has been elevated to a divisive contrast and as such was often indiscriminately used by Western scholars – such as the Catholic theologian Karl Rahner (1970), the Lutheran Robert Jenson (1997), or the Reformed Calvinist Jurgen Moltmann (1981) – and Eastern Orthodox theologians, such as John Zizioulas (1985), alike in their systematic and philosophical theologies.

Beginning in 1980s, the new movement of Social Trinitarianism (of which we will speak below) claimed the Cappadocians as their ideational forefathers; but initially, the scales were tipped towards defending the Western view and downgrading the Greeks. For example, to appeal to Economic Trinity, in de Régnon's interpretation of the Latin tradition (or so the early interpreters tended to argue), is to reject the ancient Trinitarian principle according to which *opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* (the operations of the Trinity in history, that is, outside of God's immanent being, are indistinguishable). Since the violation of this principle is not acceptable, lest we end up in polytheism, Western theological tradition has instead set out to emphasize "divine simplicity." Augustine in his *City of God* depicts the Christian God as "the Simple and Unchangeable Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, One God, in whom substance and quality [or attributes] are identical" (Augustine 1887, XI, 10). Divine simplicity is the notion that God is radically devoid of any composition or complexity in his being. There are no conceivable distinctions between existence and essence, potency and actuality in the divine ontology. To reject this would be to reject the established notion of divine ontological perfection in terms of completeness and immutability. In consequence, according to this Western approach, our knowledge of God in his *aseitas* (total otherness) must not come on the basis of random or even orchestrated events in history but rather from our reflection on God's nature, using logical inference propped up by appropriate passages from divine revelation.

The new movement of Social Trinitarianism accuses the classical Latin Trinitarianism of relying too much on static descriptions of God by means of abstract, philosophical categories, which make God distant and impersonal. To counter this perceived deficiency, Social Trinitarians speak of three, distinct centers of consciousness (or persons) within the one being (*ousia*) of God, manifested as distinct *hypostaseis* of the Father, Son and Spirit. Inner relations of these three *hypostaseis* are constitutive to God's immanent being, hence the notion of relational ontology. More specifically, the divine personal subsistence is directly constituted by the eternal relationship of mutual, self-giving love between the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. The divine being is thus a relational being.<sup>6</sup> Their mutual love constitutes who they are together in a perichoretic indwelling (communion) within the Godhead. As John Zizioulas explains: "Love is not an emanation or 'property' of the substance of God ... but is constitutive of his substance, i.e. it is that which makes God what he is, the one God. Thus love ceases to be a qualifying property of being and becomes the supreme ontological predicate. Love as God's mode of existence 'hypostasizes' God, constitutes his being" (Zizioulas 1985, 46).

Social Trinitarianism became visible as a distinct, though diverse movement (Collins 2008, 30) following the publication of Jürgen Moltmann's book, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* in 1981. Moltmann asserted the existence of a historically continuous line of Trinitarian theology from the time of the Cappadocian fathers to the contemporary Orthodox theologians, which gravitates "towards an emphatically social doctrine of the Trinity and criticize[s] the modalistic tendencies in the 'personal' Trinitarian doctrine of the Western church. The image of the family is a favourite one for the unity of the Triunity: three persons – one family" (Moltmann 1981,

<sup>6</sup> Stanley Grenz talks about the "the perichoretic understanding of the construction of the self in relationship that enjoys a long pedigree within the Christian tradition but was overshadowed by the Augustinian inward turn" (Grenz 2002, 55).

198). To secure the unity of the Godhead, Moltmann invokes the concept of 'perichoresis,' used originally in the Christological controversies (mainly in the 4th and 5th century AD) and claims that the patristic fathers used this concept to describe the "sociality of the three divine Persons" (Moltmann 1981, 199). Many others followed Moltmann<sup>7</sup> in the last forty years to emphasize (1) relationality and social aspects in the Trinity, (2) the three distinct persons in the Godhead, (3) the concept of *homoousios* to describe the Son's ontological relationship with the Father, (4) the call for a return to the Biblical sources and the revealed *oikonomia salutis* as the basis for our understanding of the God of the Gospel, (5) the importance of the Great Tradition of the Ecumenical Church, (6) as well as various anthropological, social, and political implications of our conceiving of God in line with the Social Trinitarianism's emphases.

## The Ambivalent Usefulness of De Régnon Paradigm

Interestingly, de Régnon lists Tertullian and Hilary of Poitiers as representatives of Greek Trinitarianism, which is rather inconsistent with how we would see the boundaries between East and West (De Régnon 1892, 259). This leads us to an important observation that what we should understand by the term 'Greek' in de Régnon's work are patristic theologians writing in both, Latin and Greek, whereas 'Latin' refers to later scholastic theologians (Hennessy 2007, 179). It is not surprising, therefore, that after a closer reading of de Régnon one begins to suspect that "de Régnon's paradigm" has indeed been misunderstood, abused and "exposed [recently] as simplistic and misleading" (Hennessy 2007, 181). There have even been attempts to demonstrate that "de Régnon's underlying intent [was] to stress the complementarity and unity that exist between the 'Latin' and 'Greek' theological approaches" (Hennessy 2007, 181). This is in stark contrast with his later interpreters, regardless of whether they happened to belong to those who endorsed his alleged paradigm or those who rejected it. To be sure, as Hennessy rightly points out, "de Régnon does distinguish between 'Latin' and 'Greek' trinitarian systems, according to how they begin with reflection on nature or persons, he most emphatically does not oppose them. To oppose them, as later recipients and users of the paradigm have done, would have gone against his overarching aim" (Hennessy 2007, 191). Furthermore, de Régnon's aim was to remind theologians of the limits of human inquisitive reason and the abysmal depth of the divine mystery. Cataphatic rational inferences should be balanced (and sometimes, perhaps, replaced) by apophatic events of awe. He wished to do so, among other things by contrasting (yet in a complementary way) the theologies of the Greek (i.e. patristic) and Latin (i.e. later scholastic) eras. He expresses it beautifully in these words:

Let us leave behind these divergences and rival fluctuations of language. Let us not be Sabellians, defending the one against the three by a confusion that suppresses distinction. Nor let us be Arians, upholding the three against the one by a division that destroys unity. ... These are the very tricks of the devil, who plays wickedly with us, as with an unsteady balance (De Régnon 1892, 210).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna (1992; 1993) and Elizabeth Johnson (1992) on the Catholic side; Miroslav Volf (1998), David Brown (1985), Peter Forrest (1998), William L. Craig (2009), Cornelius Plantinga (1986), Timothy Bartel (1993), Richard Swinburne (1994), William Hasker (2013), Stanley Grenz (2001; 2002) and many others on the Protestant side. Arguably, the most complex and systematic treatment of this topic can be found in the works of Wolfhart Pannenberg, especially his *Systematic Theology* (1991).

<sup>8</sup> This citation is a translation de Régnon's text by Kristin Hennessy (2007, 197).

The question remains, why was the so-called ‘de Régnon paradigm’ adopted by so many (in a reinterpreted way that is dissimilar to his original intentions)? Are Barnes (1995, 61) and Hennessy (2007, 196) correct in suggesting that modern theology ‘needed such opposition’? If so, what exactly is the nature of modern theology (or a large portion of it)? Can we apply ‘de Régnon paradigm’ as it was conceived by later (mis)interpreters of de Régnon’s Trinitarian works to any period in history of the Church?

With regard to the latter question, we can follow Glenn Butner and argue “for the limited validity of the de Régnon paradigm by demonstrating its applicability in the Carolingian–Photian dispute surrounding the *filioque*” controversy in the 9th century (Butner 2015, 399). The political climate of the period and willful ignorance of Western envoys to Constantinople engendered a contrasting, mutually denigrating discourse on the Trinity between East and West. This trend, in any case, did not last long. Social models of the Trinity continued to be used in the West (following the Carolingian–Photian dispute), coming into disrepute only after the IV. Lateran Council (1215) and the condemnation of Joachim de Fiore’s ‘quaternist’ accusation relative to Peter Lombard’s trinitarian views.<sup>9</sup>

Notwithstanding its limited historical viability, we should not let this paradigm (as understood by later interpreters of de Régnon’s teaching) cloud and/or limit our contemporary trinitarian reflections based on ‘which side’ we happen to be on. As Butner rightly points out, “Beginning with the oneness of God simply does not lead inevitably to a theology in which the persons are captive to substance ontology”<sup>10</sup> (Butner 2015, 412) as a logical outcome of improperly relating the divine being and persons;<sup>11</sup> likewise, starting out with the three distinct persons does not inevitably lead to a theological flirting with tritheism. “What does inevitably cause problems is a controlling schema that treats the divine *essence* and *persons* as separate realities, so that one purportedly Eastern approach must find a way to *synthesize* the essence out of persons that are distinct from it, while a purportedly Western approach must find a way to *derive* three persons from a pre-existing united substance” (Butner 2015, 412).

There seems to be a twofold motif behind the eager employment of ‘de Régnon Paradigm’ by Social Trinitarians today: first, appealing to the great, Greek fathers as the historic starting point of ‘our’ approach (i.e., Social Trinitarianism) promises to lend plausibility to this approach; secondly, if we assume there to be a separating distinction between the shared *essence* and concrete *persons*, this naturally leads us to favor one approach over the other and to emphasize differences rather than to look for overlaps (in a complementary manner). As Butner provokingly points out, “As

<sup>9</sup> This is an unfortunate episode, for Joachim de Fiore’s views, rather than presenting an unquestionable challenge for Western orthodoxy, constituted an unwelcomed competition with ‘court theologians’ with high political ties. These were followers of Peter Lombard who had favored the conceptual approach (especially the concept of *quaedam summa res*), refusing any use of analogies (Robb 1997, 25). According to Joachim, “There is no way that the essence can assume a conceptual status without then having to be counted as a distinct element in the equation, one which, because it has the same value as a Person, becomes a fourth Person, or one which dwarfs the Persons altogether” (Robb 1997, 28); Fiona Robb is citing de Fiore’s *Psalterium decent chordarum* (Fiore 1517, fo. 277ra-b). Instead, “the Persons owe their divinity only to their relationship with one another and unity is established through this relationship” (Robb 1997, 29).

<sup>10</sup> It is not easy to interpret this term. For Aristotle, substances are either particular things of a certain kind or, in some cases, matter itself. But Aristotle did not use the Latin ‘substantia’ but rather the Greek word ‘ousia’, which is the present participle of the word being (in feminine form!). When used with an article, the word ‘ousia’ signifies a particular kind of being.

<sup>11</sup> “The point should be obvious,” chronologically speaking, “in that the Scriptures themselves first clearly reveal the oneness of God in the Old Testament, only subsequently revealing the three persons in the New Testament” (Butner 2015, 412).

soon as we recognize that approaches that speak first of the persons are only speaking of the divine essence understood relationally or with respect to unique properties, while approaches that speak first of the essence are only speaking of the shared properties of the divine persons, we can begin to eliminate the void between being and persons created by treating these two realities as really distinct" (Butner 2015, 412). While Butner may be going too far in his effort that favors overlaps and complementarity between GT and LT, neglecting some obvious sore points and genuine differences in theological conceptualizations, his approach has an appeal and good merit. It continues in the genuine legacy of de Régnon, in contrast to the divisive paradigm attributed to him, to emphasize complementarity of Western and Eastern theological language, without which both sets of emphases are susceptible to step out of the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy established by the triune Gospel narrative and articulated by the ecumenical creeds.

Richard Cross is another theologian highlighting convincingly Latin Trinitarianism's affinity with the Greek approach. Ever since the Middle Ages (building on Augustine) the established Western view has held that "the divine essence is a numerically singular property shared by all three persons. And this, of course, is precisely the Eastern view too," asserts Cross and points out that "it is not clear that Eastern views of the relationality of the divine persons are massively different from those defended by Western theologians" (Cross 2002, 290). Cross follows the lead of Thomas Aquinas (who draws heavily from Aristotle) by claiming that "... the only distinguishing features among the persons are their relations – that, in the standard terminology, they are *subsistent relations*" (Cross 2002, 287).<sup>12</sup> But doesn't this bring us close to modalism? After all, relations are typically understood as properties of distinct entities (substances). What happens then when the three persons of the Trinity cannot be identified as substances but merely relations (mere properties – can we avoid modalism? Aquinas' solution is to name these relations within the Godhead as 'subsistent relations.' This can be interpreted in various ways or even ignored as unintelligible (which automatically brings us back to modalism). However, if we are able to maintain the ontological unity of being and persons then these subsistent relations are concrete manifestations of the divine being, divine essence that is itself relational (God as a community of love).

Cross makes another interesting appeal when it comes to a 'progressive' understanding of the divine essence as a 'unique' universal. He does it when he explores John Scotus' reflection on this topic. Scotus seemed to have adopted "the Western tradition (on the question of universals) for creatures, but, with the Eastern tradition, allowing the term 'universal' to refer to numerically singular objects such as the divine essence too. ... the divine essence is a substance in a very different sense from the persons: it is a universal, whereas the persons are irreducibly particular" (Cross 2002, 289).<sup>13</sup> The implications of such distinction seem to play a crucial role in defending Latin Trinitarianism against accusations of Modalism, while demonstrating its affinity with Greek Trinitarianism. Linguistic categories that are employed in the realm of divine ontology do not necessarily imply the same meaning and relations in the realm of 'temporal' ontology (ontology of the created realm). Though this cannot be demonstrated empirically, it can be argued for as a conceivable, logically coherent solution when one refers to an entity beyond the confines of this world – a being whose self-revelation points unequivocally in this direction. Latin metaphysical conceptions of the Trinity thus need not be at substantial variance with the Greek (perhaps more dynamic) Trinitarian conceptions.

<sup>12</sup> This view is held by most of contemporary Catholic theologians. See: W. Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (Kasper 1992).

<sup>13</sup> Cross cites this text from Scotus' work *Ordinatio*. See: (Scotus 1956, 16).

## Conclusion

The so-called ‘de Régnon paradigm’ has been shown to have an ambivalent meaning. During most of the 20th century, theologians and philosophers of religion have been wrong to invoke de Régnon’s name as the author of the fateful, separating distinction between Western (Latin) and Eastern (Greek) Trinitarian approaches. The true meaning and legacy of de Régnon’s original ‘paradigm’ has to do with his appeal to complementarity in the spirit of an ecumenical endeavor to perceive, articulate, confess, and participate in the mystery of God’s triune being. The contrast which de Régnon wished to promote was rather between an overly self-confident theological movement of Vatican I. Neo-Thomism (following after the First Vatican Council) – which tended to be too clear-cut and exclusive in its magisterial definitions – and the rich and diverse patristic tradition (both East and West), which did not stand against the magisterial authority but merely questioned the completeness and exclusiveness of its Trinitarian doctrinal formulations.

To be sure, part of Western intellectual tradition seems to be obsessed with the notion of divine simplicity (understood in an ontologically strong sense) and part of the Eastern tradition may be prone to emphasizing the distinctions between the divine persons at the expense of (or disregarding the need for) a robust articulation of the unity of God’s being. The ecumenical, trinitarian creeds, however, both presuppose and demand both emphases within a continued conversation of the worshipping, teaching, and confessing Church. The notion of divine simplicity is not to be discarded; it is to be affirmed in a qualified manner so that God’s relations to His creation remain to be accounted for (Hinlicky 2016, 14). Divine simplicity thus cannot be used as a trump card that lays foundations for an intellectual preference of philosophical articulations of God’s identity over against the doctrinal formulation of Christian creedal orthodoxy. To emphasize divine *aseity* to the extent of isolating God into his detached perfection and relegating the history of salvation to a ‘mimesis’ of revealed divine principles, reinforced by the drama of a crucified Messiah (who is not really, ontologically divine) is to lose the Gospel-revealed history of salvation. God’s freedom to love beings ontologically different from Himself to the point of assuming into His own being the reality of human nature – in the act of incarnation – is thereby precluded or mitigated in some Nestorian variation of the Gospel narrative.

The ‘perichoretic’ interpenetration of distinct centers of consciousness and will provides an intelligible explanation of the unity of God’s being (one divine nature). On the divine level of being, the three persons of the Trinity can be explained in a fully interdependent, relationally constitutive way as a perichoretic communion of distinct centers of consciousness and will; these are constituted by the reciprocity of their eternal love relationship – for “God is love” (1John 4:8). This perichoretic communion of love has a strong ontological status and thus can account for the divine unity (Van den Brink, 2014, 348).

This dynamic, relational conception of the triune divine being has far reaching implications on the level of understanding the Christian concept of salvation, theological anthropology, nature of the sacraments, nature of the church, as well as the church’s engagement in the created world (Moltmann 1981, 70).<sup>14</sup> Far from being a matter of theological speculation, the doctrine of the Trinity understood relationally has constitutive implications for our relationships: on the intrapersonal level,<sup>15</sup> on the interpersonal level, as well as in our relationship with nature

<sup>14</sup> Recent research in phenomenology and sociology of knowledge and also from socio-political theory confirm the importance of developing these implications. See: (Plantinga 1986, 326).

<sup>15</sup> Along with Grenz, we propose that there is an acute need “to develop a social or communal understanding of the concept of the *imago Dei*, a renewal of the Christian communally constituted soul out of the ashes of the demise of the centered self” (Grenz 2001, 3) in contrast to “the self-sufficient, self-constructing ‘therapeutic self’ of modern psychology, as exemplified by Abraham Maslow” or over against the destabilized

(Bernaciak 2018). As David L. Schindler inspiringly puts it: “The crucial point [...] is that the relation to God, and to others in God, that establishes the individual substance in being is *generous*. The relation itself makes and lets me in my substantial being be. This ‘letting be’ implies a kind of primordial, ontological ‘*circumincession*,’ or ‘*perichoresis*,’ of giving and receiving between the other and myself. What I am in my original constitution as a person has always already been given to me by God and received by me in and as my response to God’s gift to me of myself – indeed, has also, in some significant sense, been given to me by other creatures and received by me in and as my response to their gift to me” (Schindler 2008, 403).

Furthermore, there seems to be a growing movement of contemporary theologians favoring *participatory understandings of salvation* – after all, Christ lives in his Body and animates it with his Spirit (Mojzes 2017). Salvation as a complex history of divine and human engagement should thus be conceived as having a “participatory ontology, according to which human beings are transformed in the Spirit through Jesus Christ into fellowship with the Father” (Van den Brink 2014, 350) for which a relational model of the Trinity seems to be most conducive. “The deeply personal union and communion with God and with our fellow-humans to which we are restored by grace is not something alien to God, but a reflection and extension of God’s own life-in-communion (as the doctrine of our being created in the *imago Dei*<sup>16</sup> suggests).” The divine communion of love graciously and undeservedly includes the human persons “by the double movement of incarnation and ascension of the Son, to whom believers are united by the Spirit” (Van den Brink 2014, 350), which has prompted some Protestant theologians to integrate the Eastern concept of *theosis* in their doctrine of the Sacraments.<sup>17</sup> The *homoousios* of the Nicene Creed (325) should not be taken lightly (Mahrik – Pavlikova – Root 2018) as a philosophical attempt to explain the unexplainable, nor as something pointing to a contingent, transient revelation of God. It should rather be appreciated as an expression of awe, worship, and praise of the deep mystery of God, whose very identity includes the Father, Son (Christ) and Spirit forever bound in a perichoretic communion of love (Petro 2018).

In the end, those wishing to adhere to Christian creedal orthodoxy must (apophatically) acknowledge that some truths must be confessed regardless of whether they can conceptually or metaphysically explain their meaning. Proponents of creedal orthodoxy, therefore, settle for confessing the unity of Father, Son and Spirit as one, triune God, without offering an exhaustive account of the mode of their unity.<sup>18</sup> Appeal to apophatic mystery is legitimate here, as is the spirit of ecumenism (Citbaj 2017).

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Nietzschean self, “wherein the modern ideal of the stable unitary self has been replaced by the decentered fleeting ‘self’” (Grenz 2001, 16-17).

<sup>16</sup> For a good treatment of moral implications of *imago Dei* (especially pertaining to developing one’s conscience), see: (Kondrla – Kralik 2016, 158n).

<sup>17</sup> For a classical example from the time of Lutheran Orthodoxy, see: (Chemnitz 1971, 379).

<sup>18</sup> It is fitting in this respect that Johannes Damascenus begins his most important theological work, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, acknowledging this very fact. (Damascenus 1864, 790)

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SUMMARY: ECUMENICAL TRINITARIAN REFLECTIONS AND THE 'DE RÉGNON PARADIGM': A PROBE INTO RECOVERING THE SOCIAL-TRINITARIAN EMPHASES OF THE CAPPADOCIAN FATHERS. Trinitarian reflections have since the beginning of Christianity as a distinct religious movement been the necessary consequence of the series of events experienced and later recorded in the sacred Scriptures as part of the divine *oikonomia salutis*. The fourth century marked the beginning of creedal formulations of the Trinitarian faith as ecumenical expressions of the general church, informed and formed in their Trinitarian content especially by the Cappadocian fathers and St. Augustine of Hippo. Differences in language and philosophical background spawned distinct yet complementary approaches and emphases that could be reconciled in the creeds and the teaching of the Church (with historical exceptions, such as the Carolingian-Photian dispute). Later scholastic Trinitarian theology in the West, however, and especially its 19th century interpretations and endorsements by Pope Leo XIII, provoked Theodore de Régnon to offer a provocative juxtaposition of what he labeled 'Latin' and 'Greek' approaches to Trinitarian doctrine. His aim was to expose the existing, legitimate and enriching differences in emphases and terminology between the Greek camp (comprising of both, Eastern and Western

patristic fathers of the ancient church) and the Latin camp (which included later, scholastic theologians of the Western Church) and stress their complementarity, rather than a divisive incompatibility. In addition, de Régnon wished to remind theologians (and philosophers) of the limits of human reason and the need for an apophatic epistemological humility. 20th century interpreters of de Régnon's Trinitarian theology misunderstood his original intent and instead constructed the so-called 'de Régnon paradigm' of an (almost) unbridgeable gap between East and West in their approaches to the Trinitarian doctrine. Most proponents of the so-called "Social model of the Trinity" who draw their inspiration from the Trinitarian teachings of the Cappadocian Fathers (foundational for the Greek Trinitarian approach) have adopted this 'paradigm,' criticizing western theology after Augustine of developing theology of the Trinity that is too abstract, philosophical and static, and even prone to modalism. Social Trinitarians have thus urged the West to learn from and integrate critically the valuable emphases of the Greek Trinitarian approach. Regardless of the obvious historical inaccuracy in interpreting de Régnon's original paradigm by the adherents of Social Trinitarianism (which itself is a very diverse movement), there are important implications for theology, religious anthropology, and ecclesiology stemming from this approach.

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