

A Study of the Trinitarian Theology of Catherine
Mowry LaCugna with Particular Reference to Her
Understanding of God as Transcendent

by

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Abstract

Catherine Mowry LaCugna expresses concern, in her 1991 book *God for Us*, that the doctrine of the Trinity has become irrelevant to Christian life due to a focus on speculation concerning the intra-divine relations at the expense of soteriology. She looks to ‘re-conceive’ the doctrine, firstly, by offering a model which calls for the essential unity and correspondence of *oikonomia* and *theologia*; secondly, by developing an ontology of persons in communion; and thirdly, by recasting the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* as creation *ex amore*. In doing so she attracts criticism from theologians who suggest she strays perilously close to pantheism. In this thesis, LaCugna’s understanding of the triune God’s transcendence is explored, evaluated and defended, through five approaches. The first is a study of several of her early articles, bringing some of her ideas on analogy, apophaticism, metaphor, doxology and the theological model into the discussion. The second is an exploration of the themes of divine freedom, necessity and pantheism, in dialogue with four figures discussed by or associated with LaCugna – Plotinus, Eriugena, Bonaventure and Aquinas. An examination of her use of the Neo-platonic model of emanation and return and of the ‘walking God’ metaphor is followed by an appraisal of critics including Colin Gunton and Thomas Weinandy. The fifth enquiry involves a study of LaCugna’s theology in the light of Kathryn Tanner’s radical view of divine transcendence. I argue that while some of her more sweeping statements on the God-world relation appear problematic, LaCugna’s expression of the Christian belief in divine transcendence remains sound. Taking her claim that ‘our understanding of the economic and immanent trinities gains by being articulated in several different modes of discourse’ as an invitation, I explore some of the modes with which she engages, seeking to shed further light on her nuanced and compelling vision of the living God.

Declaration of Originality

I, Margaret Anne Campbell, declare that this thesis is my own work. It has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any tertiary educational institution.

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I would like to record my respect and admiration for the late Catherine Mowry LaCugna whose trinitarian theology has inspired me for over a decade, and continues to do so.

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Introduction

The doctrine of the Trinity points beyond itself to the mystery of God who is alive and whose ongoing relationship with creation and persons cannot be frozen or fixed in time. God is a ‘walking God’ who accompanies a pilgrim people, according to a providential plan administered (economized) throughout time.¹

These words by Catherine Mowry LaCugna may seem unlikely ones with which to begin a study of a trinitarian theologian and her understanding of God as transcendent. In them no reference is made to the triune God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit within the economy of salvation, let alone in terms of God’s eternal triune personhood. The image of a ‘walking God’ has its origins in the Old Testament, while the doctrine of the Trinity draws primarily on New Testament texts.² Furthermore, while she writes of ‘the mystery of God,’ both the anthropomorphism of the ‘walking God’ metaphor and the image of God accompanying a pilgrim people seem quite intimate and, it could be argued, incongruous with a Christian understanding of God as radically transcendent. Nevertheless, the words have been selected for two reasons.

The first is that LaCugna refers in the passage to three themes which pervade her theological writing and which are central to my thesis. These will be introduced in my first chapter. The second is to draw attention to the range of images LaCugna uses in an attempt to convey the mystery of God’s relationship with humanity and the world. She refers to the ‘doctrine of the Trinity [pointing] beyond itself’ to a living mystery, and chooses to express this mystery through the use of theological models.³ In addition to the biblical ‘walking God’ metaphor, she writes of ‘a pilgrim people,’ evoking images of the Israelites wandering in the desert; and of a relationship between God and ‘creation and persons’ which cannot be ‘frozen or fixed in time,’ alluding to the forward-looking nature of the Christian story. Alongside these images,

¹ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 321.

² For a discussion on the scriptural roots of the doctrine of the Trinity see Stephen R. Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History and Modernity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 33-55; Declan Marmion and Rik van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 29-51.

³ LaCugna defines a model as ‘a sustained, systematic, relatively permanent metaphor.’ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, “Placing Some Trinitarian Locutions,” *The Irish Theological Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (1985): 30. The theological model is examined from a range of perspectives in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of this thesis.

which look to ‘the concrete language and images of the Bible,’⁴ are the terms ‘persons’ and ‘relationship.’ These words have a rich, if complex, history in trinitarian theology and she engages extensively with them throughout her writings, sometimes controversially.

LaCugna contends that language in a range of forms has a decisive role to play in theological formulations:

Models ensure that all kinds of language are given a hearing. Thus while it is true that ‘trinity’ is a narrative truth insofar as it is the story of Christian salvation, it also can be given conceptual precision and systematic elegance when elaborated as a speculative and comprehensive theological *model*. This is to say nothing more than that our understanding of the economic and immanent trinities gains by being articulated in *several different modes* of discourse.⁵

Her claim, made in one of her early articles, that our understanding of the Trinity can be enriched through the use of a range of theological models and different modes of discourse is an important one in the context of this thesis. LaCugna identifies the relationship between God and the world as the ‘fundamental and common structure of all theological models,’⁶ and it is the integrity of her notion of God’s transcendence in this relationship that is under scrutiny in this study.

Few trinitarian theologians writing in the latter part of the twentieth century have been more harshly criticised than LaCugna for the threat their ideas pose to the Christian notion of divine freedom. Critics identify her reluctance to talk about the immanent Trinity as a serious challenge to the Christian understanding of God as eternally triune. Her views in this regard can appear inconsistent: at times she seems to wholeheartedly reject such talk, yet on other occasions she unequivocally acknowledges the role of the doctrine of the immanent Trinity in upholding the idea of divine freedom.⁷ Like a number of commentators, I consider many of

⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, ix.

⁵ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity as the Mystery of Salvation,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38, no. 1 (1985): 21. My italics in final sentence.

⁶ LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 13.

⁷ One commentator writes: ‘No wonder readers come away thinking that LaCugna wants to have it both ways.’ Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 161. For other references to ambiguity in LaCugna’s ideas, see Aristotle Papanikolaou, review of *God for Us*, by Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *Journal of Religion* 73, no. 3 (1993): 438; Robert P. Imbelli, review of *God for Us*, by Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *Commonweal* 120, no. 2 (1993): 25.

the subtleties of her argument to be lost in some critiques of her trinitarian thought.⁸ Other writers, however, seem content to typecast her as a late-twentieth century theologian who takes a particular interpretation of Rahner's Rule too far.⁹

LaCugna demonstrates in her writings a strong awareness of the challenges faced by theologians who attempt to articulate the mystery of the transcendent God's intimate relationship with creation. She writes, 'That God should be so intent on union with what is other than God is truly a mystery that defies explanation.'¹⁰ In her efforts to articulate this mystery, she respects the Christian notion of God as transcendent in ways not always adequately recognised or acknowledged by Colin Gunton, Thomas Weinandy, Barbara Finan, Duncan Reid and other critics with whom I will engage. I plan to take my place among those who hold some reservations about aspects of LaCugna's trinitarian theology, and yet who want to acknowledge the very important contribution she has made.

My approach in this thesis is distinguished from other studies in two ways. Firstly, I explore in depth her use of theological language – doxological, apophatic and kataphatic speech, as well as her use of metaphor and the theological model. Much commentary on LaCugna has been (understandably) devoted to issues pertaining to the economic and immanent Trinity and the injudicious use of ancient sources. This is not to say that all commentators ignore her writing on doxology (and on language more broadly); indeed many speak positively of LaCugna in this regard.¹¹ Even Thomas Weinandy, one of her most vehement critics, who considers some of her ideas on the Trinity as a 'Christian view of God and his relation to us [to be] fatally and disastrously flawed,'¹² acknowledges her writing to be, at times, 'spiritually and aesthetically moving.'¹³ In a thorough and insightful analysis of her use of 'Rahner's Rule,' Fred Sanders notes that as LaCugna parts ways with Karl Rahner (and,

⁸ These commentators will be identified and their ideas discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

⁹ Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 11. See Chapter 1 of this thesis for a discussion of Rahner's Rule.

¹⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 324.

¹¹ For a study of the practical implications of LaCugna's approach to the Trinity with particular reference to doxology, see Michael Hryniuk, "Growth in Communion: Spiritual Transformation in the Context of L'Arche" (Ph.D., Emory University, 2001), 304-07.

¹² Thomas G. Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 129.

¹³ Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit*, 133, n. 26. Weinandy is referring here to Chapter 9 of *God for Us*, 'Trinity, Theology, and Doxology.'

indeed, ‘parts ways with the Christian theological tradition at large’), she poses ‘her own solution to the question of how to correlate God’s economic presence with God’s eternal being.’ This solution, Sanders explains, involves positing ‘doxology as the link between oikonomia and theologia, allowing a balance between kataphatic and apophatic language.’¹⁴ He observes, ‘LaCugna’s development of this linguistic reflection is intricate and suggestive, but does not concern us here [that is, in the context of a study of the interpretation of Rahner’s Rule].’¹⁵ As Weinandy has done before him, Sanders refers, in a footnote, to LaCugna’s chapter 9 from *God for Us*, ‘Trinity, Theology and Doxology’:

This is a rich chapter, and I believe that LaCugna has articulated here an important insight about the role doxology ought to play in theological language. As a replacement for the doctrine of the immanent Trinity, however, I consider doxology a diversionary tactic, both for LaCugna and in Moltmann.¹⁶

While affirming the importance of the doctrine of the immanent Trinity, and acknowledging that LaCugna’s wariness of its use can be problematic, I question Sanders’ claim that her exploration of doxological language is a diversionary tactic. Drawing on the ideas of theologians Ian Ramsey and Kathryn Tanner, and on selected pre-modern philosophers and theologians with whom LaCugna engages, I contend, in this thesis, that the use of doxological and other forms of theological language plays an important role in supporting the Christian understanding of divine freedom and transcendence.

The second aspect which sets my work apart from previous writers is the extent to which I engage with selected articles written by LaCugna in the years preceding the publication of *God for Us*. Commentators have rightly noted that material discussed in the early articles has been incorporated into *God for Us*.¹⁷ There is, however, significant material (especially pertaining to language, doxology and the theological model) which is either not included in

¹⁴ Sanders does not italicise the Greek terms. He notes that the parting of ways results from LaCugna’s choice not to ‘show the connection between the economic Trinity and immanent Trinity [by] tracing the connection between mission and procession.’ Fred Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity: Rahner’s Rule and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 117.

¹⁵ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 117.

¹⁶ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 117, n. 39.

¹⁷ See, for example, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 178, n. 1; Benjamin C. Leslie, “Does God Have a Life?: Barth and LaCugna on the Immanent Trinity,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 24, no. 4 (1997) 384; Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 113, n. 35.

God for Us, or is referred to by LaCugna primarily in footnotes and rarely discussed in the literature. While a number of theologians refer to these articles, only a few engage with them in depth.¹⁸ In using such material in this thesis, I look to bring pertinent ideas from her earlier writings into the theological discussion.

In an Editorial Symposium dedicated to LaCugna, Alan J. Torrance¹⁹ notes:

The significance of [LaCugna's] insights have not yet, unfortunately, been sufficiently appreciated. She was a prophetic theologian ahead of her time and it is to our detriment that we have not yet felt the full force of her thesis that 'the future of Christian theism would seem to depend on the restoration of the doctrine of the trinity to life and theology.'²⁰

Notwithstanding the fact that these comments were made over sixteen years ago, and that they seem somewhat incongruent with some of Torrance's earlier assessments of LaCugna's work,²¹ I maintain that there is a place for further research into the question of the God-world relationship in LaCugna scholarship. Her writings (particularly those selected for examination in this thesis) testify to her profound interest in theological language. I contend that this aspect of her theology has not received sufficient attention and it is with great interest that I continue to explore primary and secondary sources in this area.

Writing of LaCugna's approach to the immanent Trinity, Michael Hryniuk advises that '[c]are needs to be taken not to throw the baby out with the bath water.' He continues, 'Theological re-conceptions of the doctrine of the Trinity are obviously necessary but they ought not be too quick to discard the inner life of the Trinity with the bath water of sterile speculations that may have historically surrounded it.'²² Given the controversial nature of

¹⁸ The following theologians engage in some detail with LaCugna's early writing: Chung-Hyun Baik, "Ontology and Epistemology in Contemporary Discussions on the Relation between the Immanent Trinity and the Economic Trinity" (Ph.D., Graduate Theological Union, 2009), 151-57; Grenz, *Rediscovering*, 147-62; Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity*, 178-93; Mark S. Medley, *Imago Trinitatis: Toward a Relational Understanding of Becoming Human* (Langham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), 19-68.

¹⁹ Torrance is currently Professor of Systematic Theology, St Mary's College, The School of Divinity, University of St Andrews, Scotland. From 1998-99 he was Senior Research Fellow, Erasmus Institute, University of Notre Dame. LaCugna held the Nancy Reeves Dreux Chair of Theology at the University of Notre Dame prior to her death in 1997.

²⁰ Alan J. Torrance, "The Ecumenical Implications of Catherine Mowry LaCugna's Trinitarian Theology," *Horizons* 27, no. 2 (2000): 347. Torrance quotes from LaCugna, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity," 1.

²¹ Alan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion: An Essay on Trinitarian Description and Human Participation, with Special Reference to Volume One of Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996).

²² Michael Hryniuk, "Triumph or Defeat of the Trinity?: An Eastern Christian Response to Catherine LaCugna," *Diakonia* 33, no. 1 (2000): 25-26.

some of LaCugna's expressed views, this advice should not be ignored. Neither, however, should her understanding of divine freedom be rejected without a careful and wide-ranging evaluation of her trinitarian theology.

Thus, while some negative points made by critics are not without merit, and while I acknowledge the work of Elizabeth Groppe and others who support LaCugna's theological position, I intend to contribute to this discussion. I aim, in doing so, to provide (as one reviewer said of LaCugna's treatment of Küng's theological methodology) an evaluation of her work, 'eschewing both acrimonious denunciation and amiable defense.'²³ I believe the methods used in this thesis will provide fresh insights into her understanding and expression of the God-world relationship.

²³ John T. Ford, review of *The Theological Methodology of Hans Küng*, by Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *Theological Studies* 44, no. 1 (1983): 158.

Chapter One

Mapping the Journey

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to locate both LaCugna's theology and my research within scholarly discourse on the doctrine of the Trinity. It consists of five parts. The first provides an outline of *God for Us* and of five articles I have selected for particular attention, written or co-written by LaCugna prior to the book's publication. The three themes I have identified for examination over the course of the thesis are introduced in the second section. The third section positions LaCugna's work within the wider trinitarian debate: identifying influences prior to Barth and Rahner; noting her place within the trinitarian 'resurgence' of the final decades of the twentieth century; discussing key scholarly writing on LaCugna; and looking to recent trinitarian commentary for an assessment of her legacy, twenty-five years after the publication of her *magnum opus*. In the fourth section, attention is directed toward two theologians with whom I engage extensively during the course of the thesis in the exploration of aspects of theological language: Ian Ramsey and Kathryn Tanner. Finally, the content and methodology of this thesis is outlined, chapter by chapter.

Overview of *God for Us* and Selected Journal Articles

The opening statement in her Introduction to *God for Us* conveys LaCugna's desire for trinitarian doctrine to be relevant and life-changing: 'The doctrine of the Trinity is ultimately a practical doctrine with radical consequences for Christian life.'¹ She describes the doctrine as 'the specifically Christian way of speaking about God,'² and her emphasis on God *in relationship* with humanity is clear: 'The doctrine of the Trinity is ultimately ... a teaching not about the abstract nature of God, nor about God in isolation from everything other than God, but a teaching about God's life with us and our life with each other.'³ *God for Us* is structured in two parts. Part I is entitled 'The Emergence and Defeat of the Doctrine of the Trinity.' It comprises six chapters which document both the early development of the doctrine of the Trinity and its demise, in terms of the separation of *oikonomia* (the trinitarian

¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 1.

² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 1.

³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 1.

plan of salvation history) and *theologia* (the eternal being of God).⁴ LaCugna regards this part of *God for Us* not as a history of trinitarian doctrine *per se*, ‘but an analysis of a specific set of issues in systematic theology within the theoretical framework provided by a distinction between *oikonomia* and *theologia*.’⁵ These chapters cover ‘God’s Economy Revealed in Christ and the Holy Spirit,’ Cappadocian theology, Augustinian theology, Christian Prayer, Thomas Aquinas’ theology and the teaching of Gregory Palamas.

In Part II, ‘Re-Conceiving the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Light of the Mystery of Salvation,’ LaCugna argues for a ‘triumph of the doctrine of the Trinity,’⁶ a triumph in which the unity of *oikonomia* and *theologia* is restored. Over four chapters, LaCugna draws on the insights of her earlier writing and on those of theologians including Rahner, Piet Schoonenberg, Walter Kasper, Yves Congar, Marie-Dominique Chenu (in Chapter 7, ‘The Self-Communication of God’); John Zizioulas and philosopher John MacMurray (in Chapter 8, ‘Persons in Communion’); and Daniel Hardy and David Ford (in Chapter 9, ‘Trinity, Theology, and Doxology’). The New Testament is the predominant source for the final Chapter 10, ‘Living Trinitarian Faith.’ Although reference is made in this thesis to material from Part I of *God for Us*, Part II receives greater attention, as it is in these chapters that LaCugna proposes a reconceived doctrine of the Trinity.

A brief survey of LaCugna’s early journal articles reveals her interest in language. Of the five articles selected for discussion below, three were published in 1985 and a fourth in 1986. “Returning from ‘The Far Country’: Theses for a Contemporary Trinitarian Theology,” written with Kilian McDonnell, was published in 1988.⁷

In the early article, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity as the Mystery of Salvation,”⁸ LaCugna expounds her vision for the Trinity in which the doctrine’s relevance to Christian life is

⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 4.

⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 9.

⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 13.

⁷ Catherine Mowry LaCugna and Kilian McDonnell, “Returning from ‘The Far Country’: Theses for a Contemporary Trinitarian Theology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41, no. 2 (1988): 191-215.

⁸ LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 1-23 is a revised and expanded version of a chapter published a year earlier: Catherine Mowry LaCugna, “Reconceiving the Trinity as the Mystery of Salvation,” in *Rising from History: US Catholic Theology Looks to the Future*, ed. Robert J. Daly (New York: University Press of America, 1984), 123-37.

reinstated. She presents an analysis of Rahner's Rule and introduces model theory as a means of clarifying problematic aspects of the Rule.⁹ Her dual interest in soteriology and theological language is evident in her claim that a 'more soteriologically oriented contemporary reformulation can shed new light on the problem of God and God-language.'¹⁰

In "Placing Some Trinitarian Locutions,"¹¹ LaCugna examines four different modes of speech: analogy; symbol; metaphor and parable; and model, looking to 'develop a connection between trinitarian theology and the hermeneutics of indirection.'¹² The modes of analogy, metaphor and model will be examined in detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis. Her desire for the renewal of trinitarian doctrine is again apparent in "Problems with a Trinitarian Reformulation,"¹³ where she addresses 'problems' in trinitarian theology, including 'the assertion that God is tripersonal.'¹⁴ She observes that 'person' language in trinitarian discourse can make either ontological or functional claims about God,¹⁵ then links this apparent dichotomy with the issue of the separation of the economic and immanent Trinity, concluding, 'If we strain the limits of the economic/immanent distinction ... we may perpetuate certain distortions in a doctrine of God such as ... the stranglehold of "three person" language which inevitably will be misleading.'¹⁶ LaCugna's 'reformulation' of both the paradigm of the economic and immanent Trinity *and* the language of personhood is explored in Themes 1 and 2 below.

⁹ LaCugna, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity," 12. Sanders notes a 'refreshingly unconventional academic dispute' in which both Ted Peters and Roger Olson give the other credit for coining the name 'Rahner's Rule.' Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 3, n. 10. See below and Chapter 2 of this thesis for further discussion on Rahner's Rule, and Chapter 3 regarding model theory.

¹⁰ LaCugna, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity," 14. Interesting (in the light of Kathryn Tanner's classification of LaCugna as a social trinitarian in a number of articles and book chapters) is LaCugna's next statement, 'To bring this about, Jesus Christ must be at the heart of our trinitarian theology.' LaCugna, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity," 14-15. Tanner proposes Christology as a more appropriate alternative to the Trinity as a model for human community. For a discussion on LaCugna's Christology in this respect, see Margaret Campbell, "The Trinity as Model: Tanner and LaCugna on the Trinity and the Shaping of Human Community," *Colloquium* 48, no. 2 (2016): 146-60.

¹¹ LaCugna, "Placing," 17-36.

¹² LaCugna, "Placing," 17.

¹³ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "Problems with a Trinitarian Reformulation," *Louvain Studies* 10 (1985): 324-40.

¹⁴ LaCugna, "Problems," 332.

¹⁵ LaCugna, "Problems," 332-35.

¹⁶ LaCugna, "Problems," 340.

LaCugna takes a new approach to language and theology in the article, “Philosophers and Theologians on the Trinity,”¹⁷ engaging with philosophers of religion¹⁸ and observing that ‘[t]heologians stand to learn from philosophical exploration of this area [trinitarian theology] which historically has generated so many difficult linguistic and philosophical quandaries.’¹⁹ Her enthusiasm for the task is clear when she writes, ‘There is always the challenge to advance new ways of thinking and speaking about God.’²⁰

Finally, in “Returning from ‘The Far Country,’” LaCugna and McDonnell identify a ‘general malaise’ concerning trinitarian theology.²¹ They suggest that this is usually attributed to the level of speculative complexity for which this field of theology is notorious. The two main themes in the article are doxological language and the theological model, both of which will be explored at length in this thesis.²²

Three Themes

The three themes I have identified are based on the content of the first three chapters in the second half of *God for Us*.

¹⁷ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, “Philosophers and Theologians on the Trinity,” *Modern Theology* 2, no. 3 (1986): 169-81.

¹⁸ Michael Durrant, Stephen T. Davis and Aloysius P. Martinich.

¹⁹ LaCugna, “Philosophers and Theologians,” 169. The application of first order predicate logic to a passage from Augustine taken out of historical context raises many questions from the theologian’s perspective. However, LaCugna defends the methodology of the philosophers to some extent, conceding, ‘The trinitarian tradition has certainly given the impression that it consists only of speculative (ahistorical) analogies of *immanent* divine life which are rather removed from the events in (salvation) history.’ LaCugna, “Philosophers and Theologians,” 173. The ensuing discussion on doctrine, mystery, liturgical language, and the analysis of language being turned ‘back upon the issue of *trinitarian* language’ again attests to LaCugna’s interest in language and in the articulation of a Christian understanding of God-in-relation. LaCugna, “Philosophers and Theologians,” 176. LaCugna’s italics.

²⁰ LaCugna, “Philosophers and Theologians,” 178. See reference below to Thomas McCall’s book chapter in which he also seeks dialogue between philosophers and theologians: Thomas H. McCall, “Theologians, Philosophers, and the Doctrine of the Trinity,” in *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity*, ed. Thomas H. McCall and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 336-49.

²¹ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 191.

²² LaCugna has written extensively (and much scholarly commentary has been forthcoming in response) on the doctrine of the Trinity as ‘a stumbling block to the concerns of Christian feminism’ and on ways to address this problem. This aspect of LaCugna’s theology is not the focus of this thesis. See Catherine Mowry LaCugna, “God in Communion with Us: The Trinity,” in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 84; LaCugna, *God for Us*, 18, n. 7; LaCugna, “Problems,” 337-39; Catherine Mowry LaCugna, “The Baptismal Formula, Feminist Objections, and Trinitarian Theology,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26, no. 2 (1989): 235-50.

Theme 1: *Oikonomia* as a Chiastic Model of Emanation and Return

The first theme is referred to in the opening quotation of this thesis, where LaCugna writes of God's providential plan 'administered (economized) throughout time.'²³ She advocates a renewal of trinitarian theology, motivated by an insight that any speculation on the mystery of God to which the doctrine of the Trinity points (and which is too often relegated to the 'abstract' intradivine relations of the immanent Trinity) should be grounded in the story of salvation as revealed in Scripture. She delineates, as noted above, the reasons behind the defeat of the doctrine of the Trinity, tracing the process of decline from its pre-Nicene biblical beginnings. 'By the medieval period in both Byzantine and Latin theology,' LaCugna explains, 'the divine persons were thought of as existing "in" God, in a realm cut off from the economy of salvation history by virtue of an unbreachable ontological difference.'²⁴

Like many trinitarian theologians writing in the latter part of the twentieth century, LaCugna devotes considerable attention to Rahner's Rule, an axiom or guide proposed by German Jesuit priest Karl Rahner which states: 'The "economic" Trinity is the "immanent" Trinity and the "immanent" Trinity is the "economic" Trinity.'²⁵ She shares Rahner's view that the economy of salvation is the only valid starting point in trinitarian theology, but expresses concern that he 'seems to conceptualize the one self-communication of God in the economy of Christ and the Spirit as having two levels' – Father, Son and Spirit at both the immanent and at the economic level.²⁶

A significant biblical text for LaCugna is the liturgical hymn of thanksgiving from Ephesians 1:3-14. The passage is first quoted in full in *God for Us* at the beginning of Chapter 1.²⁷ Further references are made to the text throughout her work, mainly in the context of God's providential plan for the fullness of time, 'to gather up all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth.'²⁸ She describes this text as a summary of the economy or *oikonomia* for

²³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 321.

²⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 210.

²⁵ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel, with an introduction, index and glossary by Catherine Mowry LaCugna (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 22.

²⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 222.

²⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 21. LaCugna's scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

²⁸ Eph 1:10.

which (in the seventh chapter of *God for Us*) she develops a theological model. Offered as an alternative to the model of the economic and immanent Trinity, the model of *exitus* and *reditus*, or emanation and return, expresses for LaCugna the ‘one ecstatic movement of God outward by which all things originate from God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and all things are brought into union with God and returned to God.’²⁹

LaCugna calls here for an abandonment of the ‘misleading’ terms ‘economic’ and ‘immanent Trinity’ in favour of the terms *oikonomia* and *theologia* which more accurately reflect the biblical and pre-Nicene understanding of God and soteriology. Within this framework, *oikonomia* is reclaimed as the starting point for trinitarian reflection, and proclaimed to be ‘just as ineffable as is the eternal mystery of God (*theologia*).’³⁰ This model also serves as a foundation for the second theological theme pertinent to this thesis: divine-human communion.

Theme 2: *The Mystery of Divine-Human Communion*

‘We have not even begun to mine the riches of the insight that God (and therefore creation) is essentially relational.’³¹ LaCugna refers, in my opening quotation, to God’s ‘ongoing relationship with creation and persons’ which cannot be frozen or fixed in time. For LaCugna, ‘relationality is at the heart of what it means for God to be God.’³² She describes trinitarian theology as ‘par excellence a theology of relationship, which explores the mysteries of love, relationship, personhood and communion within the framework of God’s self-revelation in the person of Christ and the activity of the Spirit.’³³

In *God for Us*, LaCugna follows her discussion of the relationship between *oikonomia* and *theologia* in Chapter 7 with a detailed study of the encounter between divine and human persons in the economy of redemption in Chapter 8, an encounter which she regards as ‘the central preoccupation of the Christian doctrine of God.’³⁴ She writes of the relationship

²⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 223.

³⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 230. LaCugna’s italics.

³¹ LaCugna, “Philosophers and Theologians,” 178.

³² Catherine Mowry LaCugna, “The Relational God: Aquinas and Beyond,” *Theological Studies* 46, no. 4 (1985): 663.

³³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 1; see also LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 13.

³⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 243.

between her model of *oikonomia* and *theologia* and the divine-human relation: ‘The insistence on the correspondence between *theologia* and *oikonomia* means that the focus of the doctrine of the Trinity is the communion between God and ourselves.’³⁵ In Chapter 8 she examines the implications of this correspondence between *theologia* and *oikonomia*, and develops her ‘ontology of relation.’

She draws, in this process, on the ideas of the Cappadocian Fathers – Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus – and seeks to integrate their ideas with those of philosopher, John MacMurray and Eastern Orthodox theologian, John Zizioulas. Like Zizioulas, LaCugna acknowledges the significance of the development in the Cappadocians’ trinitarian theology in which personhood was given ontological priority over substance or nature. In identifying personhood and not substance as the ultimate principle, the Cappadocians ‘superseded in many important respects classical Greek philosophy in which personhood was seen as something added to being.’³⁶ LaCugna embraces this concept and identifies some of its important implications for creation and the God-world relation. She contrasts the Cappadocians’ approach to creation (as an act of divine freedom) with that of proponents of Greek cosmology. Plato, she suggests, considered the world to have originated from God out of necessity and Plotinus held a similar view, using the concept of ‘emanation.’ The Cappadocian ontology of personhood is essential to LaCugna’s vision of creation as a free rather than a necessary divine act: ‘By predicating personhood and not substance as the ultimate principle, and because freedom is a hallmark of personhood, the world was said to originate out of divine freedom: the freedom and love of a personal God.’³⁷

Theme 3: *Creation ex nihilo* and *Creation ex amore*

As part of her exploration of the language of doxology in Chapter 9 of *God for Us*, LaCugna discusses some of the implications of both her model of the *oikonomia* and her relational ontology for a trinitarian understanding of the mystery of God’s ‘ongoing relationship with

³⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 243.

³⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 244. John Zizioulas identifies the ‘clear and fundamental distinction between person and nature’ as a means of allowing ‘the concept of the person to emerge more clearly as a distinct category in ontology.’ John Zizioulas, “The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution,” in *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*, ed. Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 50. Criticism by patristic scholars of Zizioulas’ and LaCugna’s interpretation of Cappadocian theology will be discussed below.

³⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 244.

creation.’³⁸ Congruent with her concerns surrounding undue focus on God’s being-in-itself, she suggests that creation should be seen as an unbounded act of divine love, and proposes a recasting of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* as creation *ex amore*.

In her writing on the God-world relation and on the doctrine of creation, LaCugna looks to theologians such as Pseudo-Dionysius, Richard of St. Victor and Bonaventure who have incorporated into their theology the maxim, *bonum diffusivum sui*. She discusses the ideas of divine necessity and divine desire in the light of this maxim. (The connection with Bonaventure will be explored more fully in Chapter 4.) Although LaCugna acknowledges the importance of not collapsing ‘the “infinite qualitative distinction” between God and the world,’³⁹ she makes claims which raise questions about her stance on divine freedom. Her statement, ‘To be God is to be Creator of the world,’⁴⁰ for example, has attracted much criticism in this regard, and will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 6 of this thesis.

Locating LaCugna within the Wider Trinitarian Debate

Influences Prior to Barth and Rahner

In this section, I locate LaCugna ideas within the period from Immanuel Kant to Karl Barth and Karl Rahner. LaCugna’s program to retrieve the doctrine of the Trinity from the Nicene and post-Nicene theological developments (which, she argues, contributed to the doctrine’s ‘defeat’) contains echoes of Adolf von Harnack’s program of historical reconstruction. From von Harnack’s perspective, the doctrine of the Trinity was subjected to ‘perversions of primitive Christianity to make it acceptable and defensible in the context of a new, Hellenistic, cultural setting.’⁴¹ Stephen R. Holmes quotes Colin Gunton as a more recent

³⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 321.

³⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 355. The ‘Christian distinction’ identified by Robert Sokolowski in his book *The God of Faith and Reason* is often referred to in recent scholarly literature on the God-world relationship. It signals a clear departure from the God-world distinctions found in pagan religions and philosophical systems. Sokolowski writes of a natural tendency for human reason to see the divine as the best part of the world and for a religious impulse which sees the divine as ultimate principle in the world. However, unique to Christianity, and having as its basis the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, this distinction is one ‘between the world understood as possibly not having existed and God understood as possibly being all that there is, with no diminution of goodness or greatness.’ Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 23.

⁴⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 355.

⁴¹ Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 197. Grenz writes, ‘Reminiscent of Harnack, LaCugna traces this unfortunate development [the misguided division of talk about the triune God *ad intra* and *ad extra*] to a type of “Constantinian fall” of theology that emerged at the time of the Arian controversy and the Council of Nicaea, when the idea of divine impassibility came to be applied to the Logos, thereby opening the way for theologians to separate *theologia* from *oikonomia* and subsequently to concentrate on the former.’ Grenz, *Rediscovering*,

example of such contrasting of biblical divine attributes with ‘philosophical’ attributes: ‘the impersonal attributes come from Greece, the Greek philosophical tradition; the personal ones come from the Bible and don’t appear to be consistent with them.’⁴² The influence of von Harnack is similarly evident in LaCugna’s claim that Christian theism is ill-equipped to address questions of human suffering and social justice:

Theology cannot answer [such questions] by taking refuge in the classical metaphysical properties of God, such as omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, impassibility, incorporeality, and simplicity, since these are the very attributes that seem dubious. The only option is for Christian theology to start afresh from its original basis in the experience of being saved by God through Christ in the power of Holy Spirit.⁴³

Kant’s influence on LaCugna is noted by several theologians. Charles D. Raith, for example, sees her as representing ‘a continuation of the post-Enlightenment, radically nominalist epistemology that began with Kant,’⁴⁴ and Millard J. Erickson locates her ideas within a wider development in Western culture associated with a move from a metaphysical to a historical view of reality. Erickson writes:

Prior to the Enlightenment a metaphysical statement or a statement about what something was in itself was believed to make the most true statement about something. Now, however, that status is accorded instead to historical statements, statements about what has really happened.⁴⁵

197. Raith likens ‘the modern quest of the search for the historical Jesus’ to LaCugna’s ‘search for the historical Trinity.’ Charles D. Raith, II, “*Ressourcing the Fathers?: A Critical Analysis of Catherine Mowry LaCugna’s Appropriation of the Trinitarian Theology of the Cappadocian Fathers,*” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10, no. 3 (2008): 284.

⁴² Colin E. Gunton, *The Barth Lectures* (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 94, cited in Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 198. Holmes adds, ‘This is, to be fair, a posthumously published transcript of a lecture, and so perhaps a blunter statement than Gunton would have offered in public by choice; however, the same point, albeit in more nuanced language, is made in (e.g.) *Act and Being* (London: SCM, 2003), 39-54.’ Connections between Gunton’s and LaCugna’s understanding of divine attributes will be explored in Chapter 2.

⁴³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 3.

⁴⁴ Raith, “*Ressourcing the Fathers?*,” 283.

⁴⁵ Millard J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 296. Raith sees LaCugna as representing what John Milbank describes as a type of neo-orthodoxy which favours history over more abstract philosophical concepts. Raith, “*Ressourcing the Fathers?*,” 284, n. 94. Milbank writes: ‘In the case ... of various currents of neo-orthodoxy, an attempt is made to articulate this knowledge [of God] in terms of categories proper to theology itself: usually this means granting a methodological priority to the full revelation of God in Christ, with all its narrative specificity, over the seemingly more general and abstract acknowledgement of God as creator.’ John Milbank, “The Theological Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1999), 21.

LaCugna's understanding of her place within such development is, perhaps, more nuanced than commentators would concede. She observes that neither metaphysics nor history alone is satisfactory, as 'neither one can justify its claim without appealing to an unverifiable norm outside itself.'⁴⁶

Kant's claim that 'the doctrine of the Trinity, taken literally, has *no practical relevance at all*, even if we think that we understand it; and it is even more clearly irrelevant if we realize that it transcends all our concepts,'⁴⁷ is one with which LaCugna takes issue. The opening sentence of *God for Us* states, as noted above, that the 'doctrine of the Trinity is ultimately a practical doctrine with radical consequences for Christian life.'⁴⁸ Her efforts to demonstrate the doctrine's practical nature, however, involve an emphasis on the economy of salvation as God's life with us, which places her, it can be argued, in continuity with G.W.F Hegel and his 'introduction of historicity into the concept of God.'⁴⁹

Hegel is an important figure in the field of twentieth century trinitarian theology, although interpretations of his influence vary greatly. As Holmes notes, 'his account of God's life as being lived out through the life of the world is repeatedly assumed in modern theology.'⁵⁰ His relocation of the basic metaphysical gulf from one existing between Creator and creation (fundamental to the theology of the early church) to one existing between Father and Son was a significant move, as was his proposal that this gulf 'will be overcome in the eschatological synthesis which is spirit-filled life.'⁵¹ LaCugna defends Rahner's Rule against interpretations

⁴⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 4. Kant's 'objection that trinitarian doctrine says nothing intelligible about God's intrinsic being' is said, however, to have influenced LaCugna through the work of Schleiermacher. Anatolios claims that Schleiermacher problematically 'separates the meaning of the doctrine from the doctrine itself,' and that several 'recent theologians [including LaCugna] have adopted Schleiermacher's approach.' He continues, 'The inner contradiction that plagues this approach is most dramatically presented by LaCugna's work, which attempts the baffling balancing act of insisting both on the urgent meaning of trinitarian doctrine for Christian experience as revelatory of God's "being as communion" and yet cautioning that trinitarian doctrine does not really mean that God *is* Trinity.' Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 4.

⁴⁷ Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 65. Kant's italics.

⁴⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 1.

⁴⁹ Grenz, *Rediscovering*, 32.

⁵⁰ Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 186.

⁵¹ Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 186. Not everyone would agree with this synthesis being characterised in eschatological terms.

which would suggest ‘pantheism (Hegelian or otherwise), the view that God is nothing other than the world or world-process.’⁵² She argues that Rahner does not intend the axiom in this way, and certainly she looks to distance her own treatment of the God-world relation (in which ultimately all things in heaven and on earth are gathered up in Christ) from that of Hegel.⁵³ Subtle connections between LaCugna and Hegel continue to be drawn in the literature, however, and these will be explored in this thesis.⁵⁴

LaCugna’s Place in the Trinitarian ‘Resurgence’ of the Late Twentieth Century

The resurgence of interest in trinitarian theology in the final decades of the twentieth century and beyond has been well documented. Sanders observes, ‘What was at first only a trickle of seriously scholarly interest gradually turned into a steady stream of publications throughout the 1980s becoming in the past ten or fifteen years a deluge of books and articles which only a bibliomaniac could hope to catalog.’⁵⁵ Although a cataloguing librarian at heart, I will resist the temptation to classify such a vast body of literature, but will note attempts by past and recent theologians to identify trends, with a view to locating LaCugna within the movement. LaCugna, herself, classifies some of the early contributions to trinitarian resurgence in “Problems with a Trinitarian Reformulation.”⁵⁶ She prefaces her list with a reference to Rahner’s concern that ‘most Christians in their practical life are “mere monotheists” ... and that the major part of religious literature could remain even if we dispensed altogether with the doctrine of the trinity [*sic*].’⁵⁷ The three main groups of theologians she identifies as

⁵² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 216.

⁵³ Writing of her reluctance to discuss the immanent Trinity, Aidan Nichols describes LaCugna as ‘the Catholic version of the Neo-economic Trinitarianism of the Lutheran, Jürgen Moltmann, though minus the latter’s Hegelian underpinning for which it is only in the economy – specifically on the Cross – that God fully becomes Trinity at all.’ Aidan Nichols, “The Fate of Patristic Trinitarianism in Modern Catholic Theology,” in *The Mystery of the Holy Trinity in the Fathers of the Church*, ed. Vincent D. Twomey and Lewis Ayres (Maynooth, Ireland: Four Courts Press, 2007), 158.

⁵⁴ See, for example, comments by Duncan Reid in Chapter 6 of this thesis on LaCugna and the God-world relationship.

⁵⁵ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 2. For an annotated bibliography of major trinitarian works from approximately 1965-1995, see David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One* (Maiden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), Appendix 1, ‘Recent Works in Trinitarian Theology,’ 339-42. For more recent bibliographies see Giles Emery, *The Trinity: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 205-14 and Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 205-21.

⁵⁶ LaCugna, “Problems,” 324-25.

⁵⁷ LaCugna, “Problems,” 324. LaCugna paraphrases a statement from Rahner, *The Trinity*, 10-11, and suggests that he means ‘unitarians’ rather than ‘monotheists.’

‘having begun to reinterpret the Christian tradition’ are: those who ‘revised classical analogies (psychological and social) along the lines of a more contemporary philosophy and anthropology’;⁵⁸ those who ‘have intentionally avoided the complex speculative questions of God’s “inner life” by focusing on the cross or resurrection of Jesus’;⁵⁹ and those ‘who for a variety of reasons see no need to retrieve and reformulate a Trinitarian doctrine of God.’⁶⁰ She seems to identify most clearly with the theologians in the second of the three groups, observing the result of their Christological focus to be ‘a more soteriological trinitarianism, one consistent with the most ancient practice of the church.’⁶¹ The influence of members from this group, particularly Schoonenberg, will become evident below.

Barth, considered along with Rahner to have been instrumental in the twentieth century revival in interest in trinitarian theology, saw the economy of salvation as ‘the key to the nature of God in his eternal, immanent life.’⁶² Barth writes in his *Church Dogmatics*, ‘The reality of God which encounters us in his revelation is his reality in all the depths of eternity.’⁶³ Marmion and van Nieuwenhove describe Rahner’s axiom and his claim that ‘the *mysterium Trinitatis* is primarily a *mysterium salutis*’ as ‘a decisive reorientation of trinitarian theology.’⁶⁴ Rahner’s influence on the flourishing of trinitarian discourse in general, and on LaCugna in particular, can hardly be overstated. Although she chooses to ‘part ways’ with Rahner in her proposal for an alternative trinitarian model, her knowledge of and respect for his work is demonstrated in her Introduction to the 1997 republication of *The Trinity*.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ William J. Hill, Joseph A. Bracken, George H. Tavard and Robert W. Jenson.

⁵⁹ Eberhard Jüngel, Walter Kasper, Jürgen Moltmann, Patricia Wilson-Kastner and Piet Schoonenberg.

⁶⁰ Maurice F. Wiles, C.C. Richardson, Charles Welch, Gordon D. Kaufman, Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, G.W.H. Lampe.

⁶¹ LaCugna, “Problems,” 324.

⁶² John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 36. LaCugna acknowledges the vital role played by Rahner and Barth in the reawakening of interest in trinitarian theology in the twentieth century. See LaCugna, *God for Us*, 210, 233, n. 2.

⁶³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, trans. G.W. Bromiley, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 479. For a comparative study of Barth and LaCugna, see Leslie, “Does God Have a Life?,” 377-98.

⁶⁴ Marmion and van Nieuwenhove, *Introduction to the Trinity*, 11.

⁶⁵ LaCugna writes in the Introduction, ‘It is a boon to have Rahner’s seminal work available once again.’ Acknowledging his legacy and achievement, and responding to his concern expressed in *The Trinity* regarding the irrelevance of the doctrine (noted above), she continues, ‘Perhaps the greatest tribute to Rahner would be to note that because of his book and the theological discussions that continue to follow, no longer is it true that if

Michael Downey places LaCugna in continuity with these two twentieth century theological giants, seeing her as moving ‘further along the path plowed by Barth and widened by Rahner.’⁶⁶ Stanley J. Grenz provides ‘a more thorough account of the trajectory in which she stands’ in his summary:

LaCugna combines impulses from Zizioulas with Barth’s focus on the revelational significance of the divine disclosure in Christ, Rahner’s linking of the immanent Trinity with the economic Trinity—which she revises and reformulates as *theologia* and *oikonomia*—and the interest in viewing the divine life through the history of the trinitarian persons evident in Pannenberg, Moltmann, and Jenson.⁶⁷

In her doctoral thesis, LaCugna evaluated Hans Küng’s theological method.⁶⁸ Though not considered a key figure within the trinitarian revival under discussion, Küng must be acknowledged as a formative influence on LaCugna. Sanders considers him to have taken Rahner’s Rule as ‘a kind of declaration of independence from trinitarian speculation,’⁶⁹ and observes strong connections between his and LaCugna’s ideas. Sanders quotes, for example, the following passage from Küng’s *On Being a Christian* in which he says that no biblical statements about Father, Son and Spirit

are ontological statements about God in himself and his innermost nature, about the static, self-sustaining essence of a triune God. In the whole of the New Testament such statements are concerned with the manner of God’s revelation: his dynamic activity in history, the relationship of God to man [*sic*] and man’s relationship to God. The triadic formulas of the New Testament are meant to express, not an inner-divine (immanent) essential unity in itself but a salvation-historical (economic) unity of Father, Son and Spirit in their encounter with us.⁷⁰

Sanders claims that Küng was ‘the first voice in this discussion to engage in polemic against the very concept of God *in se*’ and notes the ‘pejorative usages of “static” and “self-

the doctrine of the Trinity were to be “dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged.”” Rahner, *The Trinity*, xi.

⁶⁶ Michael Downey, review of *God for Us*, by Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (1993): 73.

⁶⁷ Grenz, *Rediscovering*, 148.

⁶⁸ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, “The Theological Methodology of Hans Küng” (Ph.D., Fordham University, 1979). This thesis was later published as Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *The Theological Methodology of Hans Küng* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982).

⁶⁹ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 88.

⁷⁰ Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), 475, quoted in Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 88.

sustaining” [that] begin to appear in his rhetoric.’⁷¹ While these terms and others such as ‘frozen’ (often contrasted with ‘dynamic’) pervade LaCugna’s language, the most telling influence of Küng on LaCugna is surely his statement: ‘The New Testament is not concerned with God in himself, but God for us, as he has acted on us through Jesus himself in the Spirit, on which the reality of our salvation depends.’⁷²

In the first chapter of his book, *The Quest for the Trinity*,⁷³ Holmes includes three theologians rather than two in a section on twentieth century origins: Barth (God and revelation) and Rahner and Zizioulas (economy and personhood), observing that the work of these three has been taken forward by a vast array of writers during the latter decades of the twentieth century. Zizioulas is rarely included with Barth and Rahner in this way, but in the context of LaCugna’s formative influences, the inclusion is apt, as she draws heavily on Zizioulas’ relational theology and on his interpretation of the Cappadocian Fathers.⁷⁴ Holmes then identifies three broad themes: ‘The Trinity and History’: Pannenberg, Moltmann, and Jenson; ‘The Trinity and the Life of the Church’: Boff and Volf; and ‘Analyzing the Trinity’: Plantinga, Leftow, and Rea.⁷⁵

Associations can be made between LaCugna’s theology and features of each of these groupings. Her views on the historical aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity, on divine passibility and on doxology associate her with the first group; she is regularly described as a ‘social trinitarian’ and often categorised with Boff, Volf, Moltmann and Zizioulas in this regard; and a connection also exists (though admittedly it is more tenuous) with the third group. Thomas McCall, an ‘analytic theologian,’ has, in a recent essay, made what he calls ‘a modest effort at bridge-building’⁷⁶ between analytic and systematic theologians. Entitling his

⁷¹ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 88.

⁷² Küng, *On Being a Christian*, 475-76, quoted in Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 88. Surprisingly, LaCugna does not refer to Küng in *God for Us*.

⁷³ Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, Chapter 1, “‘The History that God is’: Studying the Doctrine of the Trinity,’ 1-32.

⁷⁴ Pamela Kirk records, in a CTSA Seminar report, that ‘LaCugna mentioned the Greek Orthodox tradition, the liturgy, and the experience of lived monastic piety as having a formative influence on her thinking.’ Pamela Kirk, “Women’s Seminar in Constructive Theology,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 47 (1992), 176.

⁷⁵ Holmes acknowledges that these themes resemble those used by Grenz in *Rediscovering the Triune God*. Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 16, n. 51.

⁷⁶ McCall, “Theologians, Philosophers,” 337.

essay, “Theologians, Philosophers, and the Doctrine of the Trinity,” he references LaCugna who made a similar effort in bridge-building in the mid-1980s in her article, “Philosophers and Theologians on the Trinity.” McCall notes the irony, however, of LaCugna’s criticism, in that early article, of ‘philosophers of religion’ for overlooking the essentially historical character of trinitarian theology, and particularly for missing important differences between the Greek East and the Latin West.⁷⁷ As will become evident in the discussion below, LaCugna ‘finds her own proposal now subject to criticism for drastically overplaying any differences between Western and Eastern patristic theology.’⁷⁸ Indeed, the scale of the resurgence of writing on the Trinity in the late twentieth century may well eventually be eclipsed by a growing corpus of publications criticising those who, in their enthusiasm to revive trinitarian doctrine, misread patristic and other sources.

Scholarly Commentary on LaCugna

As scholarly commentary on LaCugna is extensive, I have selected four theologians with whom to engage in detail. These are Barbara Finan, Thomas Weinandy and Colin Gunton in Chapter 5, and Duncan Reid in Chapter 6. I will provide reasons for their selection, as well as relevant bibliographic references, in the respective chapters. Other commentators will be discussed and referred to where they provide relevant additional arguments. *God for Us* was reviewed extensively at the time of publication and significant authors of brief reviews include Joseph Bracken, Joseph Di Noia, Robert Imbelli, Kilian McDonnell, Aristotle Papanikolaou, Ted Peters and Gunton. The list in the footnote below is not exhaustive but includes many of the insightful and extensive commentaries on her work.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ LaCugna, “Philosophers and Theologians,” 173-74. In LaCugna’s defence, she acknowledges that ‘De Régnon’s typology [for the basic differences between East and West] greatly simplified the matter.’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 11.

⁷⁸ McCall, “Theologians, Philosophers,” 346.

⁷⁹ Cunningham, *These Three Are One*; Erickson, *God in Three Persons*; Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Grenz, *Rediscovering*, 147-62; Mary Catherine Hilker, “The Mystery of Persons in Communion: The Trinitarian Theology of Catherine Mowry LaCugna,” *Word and World* 18, no. 3 (1998): 237-43; Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity*, 178-93; Medley, *Imago Trinitatis*, 19-68; Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2002); Haydn D. Nelson, *The Problem of the Providence of God: How Can a God Outside This World Also Be Present in It?* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), 103-23; Roger E. Olson and Christopher A. Hall, *The Trinity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002); Neil Ormerod, *The Trinity: Retrieving the Western Tradition* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2005); Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993); Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*; Torrance, *Persons in Communion*; Elizabeth T. Groppe, “Catherine Mowry LaCugna’s Contribution to Trinitarian Theology,” *Theological Studies* 63, no. 4 (2002): 730-63; Elizabeth T. Groppe, “Creation *Ex Nihilo*

The Assessment of LaCugna's Theology in Recent Trinitarian Scholarship

In his book, *The Quest for the Trinity*, Holmes, critical of the way many recent theologians have drawn on patristic sources, makes the following claim:

I see the twentieth century renewal of Trinitarian theology as depending in large part on concepts and ideas that cannot be found in patristic, medieval, or Reformation accounts of the doctrine of the Trinity. In some cases, indeed, they are points explicitly and energetically repudiated as erroneous – even occasionally as formally heretical – by the earlier tradition.⁸⁰

LaCugna has received much criticism regarding her interpretation of historical sources. The main points of contention include the assumptions she makes based on what is known as the De Régnon thesis (which, as McCall notes above, places undue emphasis on the distinction between the Greek East focusing on the three divine persons and Latin West focusing on divine unity),⁸¹ the importance she (influenced by Zizioulas)⁸² places on the idea of the ontological priority of person over substance in Cappadocian theology,⁸³ and her interpretation of Aquinas⁸⁴ and Palamas.⁸⁵

and *Ex Amore: Ontological Freedom in the Theologies of John Zizioulas and Catherine Mowry LaCugna*,” *Modern Theology* 21, no. 3 (2005): 463-96; Hryniuk, “Triumph or Defeat of the Trinity?,” 5-26; Leslie, “Does God Have a Life?,” 377-98; Declan Marmion, “Trinity and Salvation: A Dialogue with Catherine LaCugna’s *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*,” in *Trinity and Salvation: Theological, Spiritual and Aesthetic Perspectives*, ed. Declan Marmion and Gesa Thiessen (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), 81-100; Earl C. Muller, “Real Relations and the Divine: Issues in Thomas’s Understanding of God’s Relation to the World,” *Theological Studies* 56, no. 4 (1995): 673-95; Earl C. Muller, “The Science of Theology: A Review of Catherine LaCugna’s *God for Us*,” *Gregorianum* 75, no. 2 (1994): 311-41; Raith, “*Ressourcing the Fathers?*,” 267-84.

⁸⁰ Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 2. Contributions to the ‘growing corpus’ supporting the claim articulated here by Holmes include Sarah Coakley, “‘Persons’ in the ‘Social’ Doctrine of the Trinity: A Critique of Current Analytic Discussion,” in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 123-44; Sarah Coakley, “Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa: Introduction—Gender, Trinitarian Analogies, and the Pedagogy of *The Song*,” *Modern Theology* 18, no. 4 (2002): 431-43; Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Lewis Ayres, “Augustine, the Trinity and Modernity,” *Augustinian Studies* 26, no. 2 (1995); David Bentley Hart, “The Mirror of the Infinite: Gregory of Nyssa on the *Vestigia Trinitas*,” *Modern Theology* 18, no. 4 (2002): 541-61.

⁸¹ See, for example, Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 364, n. 4, 384; Grenz, *Rediscovering*, 147; Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay ‘On the Trinity’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 301; Michel René Barnes, “Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology,” *Theological Studies* 56, no. 2 (1995): 238; Marmion and van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 27.

⁸² On Zizioulas’ misinterpretation of patristic sources see Grenz, *Rediscovering*, 143-45 and Groppe, “Creation *Ex Nihilo*,” 487, n. 10. Alan Torrance claims that LaCugna’s approach to the question of triune personhood echoes the weaknesses of Zizioulas.’ Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, 2.

⁸³ See, for example, Raith, “*Ressourcing the Fathers?*,” 268, 269, n. 7, 284; Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity*, 180, and, on LaCugna’s interpretation of Tertullian, 191.

⁸⁴ See, for example, Muller, “The Science of Theology,” 311-41; Muller, “Real Relations and the Divine,” 675-76.

The wave of late twentieth century trinitarian theology, or ‘The Trinitarian Project’ as it has been named,⁸⁶ is currently undergoing a period of re-evaluation.⁸⁷ Scholars have observed a tendency in dogmatics since the time of Barth for theologians to seek ‘a right conception of the Trinity,’ in order to ‘unlock all sorts of difficult knots into which particular doctrines have become contorted over the generations.’⁸⁸ This movement is described by Cunningham as a historical portrait of trinitarian doctrine ‘colored primarily by the contemporary author’s judgment about “where everything went wrong.”’ He adds, ‘And of course the shape of the whole becomes more idiosyncratic, the further back the writer is willing to go to find a scapegoat.’⁸⁹

In arguing for the defeat and ‘re-conceiving’ of the doctrine of the Trinity on soteriological grounds, and in identifying scapegoats or ‘villains in her narrative’⁹⁰ (particularly Augustine and Aquinas) LaCugna can be considered part of ‘The Trinitarian Project.’ A call for a ‘more rounded, and balanced understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity and its place in the history of Christian theology’⁹¹ (requiring a process described as clearing the decks)⁹² is warranted to

⁸⁵ See, for example, Hryniuk, “Triumph or Defeat of the Trinity?,” 5-26; Duncan Reid, “The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology: An Alternative View,” *Pacifica* 9, no. 3 (1996): 289-300.

⁸⁶ Introduction, *Advancing Trinitarian Theology: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 15.

⁸⁷ Noble and Sexton, writing of Holmes’ 2012 work, frame late twentieth trinitarianism not as a revival at all, but rather as ‘a distortion of the doctrine articulated by the fathers of the church on the basis of Holy Scripture.’ T.A. Noble and Jason S. Sexton, “Introduction,” in *The Holy Trinity Revisited: Essays in Response to Stephen R. Holmes*, ed. T.A. Noble and Jason S. Sexton (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2015), 1. Sanders describes the current process as an intervention ‘as in the kind of uncomfortable meeting where somebody with a substance abuse problem finds themselves suddenly confronted by a group of friends who sit them down and say “you can’t go on like this.” Modern trinitarian theology, Holmes is insisting, cannot go on like this.’ Fred Sanders, “Redefining Progress in Trinitarian Theology: Stephen R. Holmes on the Trinity,” in *The Holy Trinity Revisited: Essays in Response to Stephen R. Holmes*, ed. T.A. Noble and Jason S. Sexton (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2015), 11.

⁸⁸ *Advancing Trinitarian Theology*, 15.

⁸⁹ Cunningham, *These Three Are One*, 32.

⁹⁰ Grenz, *Rediscovering*, 151.

⁹¹ *Advancing Trinitarian Theology*, 15.

⁹² Sanders, “Redefining Progress,” 25. Sexton describes Paul Molnar’s book, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity* as ‘a ground clearing exercise a decade ahead of Holmes’ effort.’ Jason S. Sexton, “Introduction,” in *Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, ed. Jason S. Sexton (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 18.

some extent.⁹³ It is heartening, though, to note that, in the opinion of Noble and Sexton at least, Holmes ‘is not rejecting everything written by influential theologians’ such as LaCugna.⁹⁴ Cunningham observes that the focus by critics on perceived problems of interpretation can overshadow LaCugna’s ‘discussion of the practical implications of trinitarian doctrine for worship and ethics – even though these latter concerns chiefly motivate [*God for Us*].’⁹⁵ I, too, question whether the issue of historical sources needs to impinge on every aspect of the further examination of her work. As it is beyond the scope of this thesis to address the many concerns raised regarding LaCugna’s misinterpretation of such sources, I shall comment on implications of inaccuracies where possible only as they arise in the thesis.

On a more positive note, I am indebted to Fred Sanders who, in his doctoral thesis and subsequent book, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity*,⁹⁶ has developed a useful means of categorising interpretations of Rahner’s Rule. In an attempt at ‘sorting, characterizing, and discriminating among the proliferation of trinitarian theologies [in the second half of the twentieth century],’⁹⁷ Sanders takes as his point of departure the response of theologians to Rahner’s Rule and identifies a number of ‘core concerns’ which motivate those who make use of the rule.⁹⁸ He classifies as ‘radicalizers’ those who ‘develop the axiom’s implications in the direction of the closest possible identity between economic and immanent Trinity’⁹⁹ and includes in this group, Schoonenberg, Küng, Moltmann, Pannenberg, Robert Jenson and LaCugna. He classifies as ‘restricters’ those who ‘argue for limits on Rahner’s Rule in order

⁹³ Marmion notes that trinitarian theologians of the present and recent past, including LaCugna, ‘generally take their cue from [the doctrine of the Trinity’s] legacy of marginalisation and functional irrelevance for a large part of the twentieth century.’ He calls for ‘greater dialogue between Patristic scholars and systematic theologians’ to ‘help overcome this unfortunate legacy.’ Marmion, “Trinity and Salvation,” 91-92.

⁹⁴ Noble and Sexton, “Holy Trinity Revisited,” 2. LaCugna is named here alongside Barth, Rahner, Moltmann, Pannenberg, Zizioulas, Gunton and Jenson.

⁹⁵ Cunningham, *These Three Are One*, 32.

⁹⁶ Frederick Russell Sanders, “The Image of the Immanent Trinity: Implications of Rahner’s Rule for a Theological Interpretation of Scripture” (Ph.D., Graduate Theological Union, 2001); Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*.

⁹⁷ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 2.

⁹⁸ For another recent attempt at classifying approaches to Rahner’s Rule see Randal Rauser, “Rahner’s Rule: An Emperor with No Clothes?” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7, no. 1 (2005): 81-94. Rauser’s article will be discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

⁹⁹ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 6.

to maintain a sharper conceptual distinction between the economic and immanent Trinity,'¹⁰⁰ and includes in this group, Congar, Kasper, von Balthasar, T.F. Torrance and Molnar.¹⁰¹ He proceeds to subdivide the 'radicalizers,' distinguishing between 'those who are prone to dissolve the immanent Trinity into the economic without remainder, and those who continue to hold to the doctrine of the immanent Trinity so long as it is strictly identified with the economic in one way or another.'¹⁰² In his analysis, Sanders places LaCugna in the first of these sub-categories.¹⁰³ However, I will argue that LaCugna can fall into both of these sub-categories, that it is never her intention to dissolve the economic into the immanent Trinity, and that the alternative model she proposes is an attempt to avoid such a dissolution.

Sanders identifies the core concerns of the 'radicalizers' of Rahner's Rule to be firstly, a fear that the doctrine of the Trinity is facing irrelevance; secondly, a desire 'to have the actual presence of God in the events of the gospel narrative' (that is, that 'in the events of Jesus Christ's life we have actual contact with God, and should not look above, below or behind those events');¹⁰⁴ and thirdly, a concern with metaphysics and traditional concepts of transcendence, such that (in the case of Pannenberg, for example) a more 'philosophically eclectic attempt [should be made] to locate transcendence within a historical framework.'¹⁰⁵

The first concern of the 'restricters' is to recognize and safeguard the freedom of God. Sanders notes, 'In the thought of most restricters, this core value (divine freedom) and the corresponding main danger (entanglement of God with the world process) are so closely

¹⁰⁰ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 6.

¹⁰¹ Sanders notes that 'qualification' and 'radicalization' are 'the opposing categories laid down' in Ralph Del Colle, "The Triune God," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 137. See Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 84, n. 2.

¹⁰² Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 84.

¹⁰³ Sanders writes, 'If it were only a matter of shifting the emphasis of the immanent Trinity to the economic Trinity, LaCugna's work would hardly be controversial. But it is not a question of emphasis it is a question of relocating the entire doctrine of the Trinity within the economy of salvation, and eliminating the immanent Trinity altogether.' Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 119. Holmes, too, writing on the ambiguity of Rahner's Rule, considers LaCugna to have insisted that 'Rahner was not sufficiently radical to see that the logic of his position demanded an insistence that the life of God simply is the life of the world.' Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 11. Holmes refers in a footnote to the notorious passage, LaCugna, *God for Us*, 221-23. Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 11, n. 32.

¹⁰⁴ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 161.

¹⁰⁵ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 162.

linked it would be redundant to draw the connections.’¹⁰⁶ Secondly, some ‘restricters’ are concerned, alongside divine freedom, that historical contingency and human freedom be respected.¹⁰⁷ The third and final core value of ‘restricters’ concerns the ‘soteriological vision implicit in their theological vision.’¹⁰⁸ Sanders observes that there are two competing soteriological visions at play between the ‘radicalizers’ and the ‘restricters.’ Members of the former group are more likely to describe ‘a God who is open to humanity (Moltmann), a God whose very life is not only God’s, but at the same time our own (LaCugna),’ whereas those in the latter group, describe a ‘God who is absolutely self-sufficing.’¹⁰⁹ Sanders suggests that ‘LaCugna’s style of argumentation can make it seem that anyone with a developed interest in the immanent Trinity (conceived of as God *in se*) is in the grip of a “non-soteriological doctrine of God.”’¹¹⁰ He makes the point that there are actually ‘competing soteriologies under consideration rather than a soteriological vision versus a non-soteriological one’ and argues that the concern of the ‘restricters’ is that their emphasis on God’s aseity should not imply a non-soteriological emphasis.

Unsurprisingly, LaCugna’s key concerns are compatible with the ‘radicalizers’ and the issues on which I am defending her – divine freedom and transcendence – fall into the core values of the ‘restricters.’ While I acknowledge the point made above by Sanders regarding LaCugna and soteriology, I would like to respond by suggesting, in a similar vein, that Gunton’s, Weinandy’s and Molnar’s styles of argumentation can make it seem that anyone with a developed interest in reducing the ‘gap’ between the immanent and economic Trinity is in the grip of a pantheistic and monistic doctrine of God. I want to highlight the point that there is actually more than one way of safeguarding divine freedom and transcendence. Furthermore, while LaCugna’s wariness of talk of the immanent Trinity can be regarded as ‘an over-reaction to the real dangers inherent in a distinction between an immanent and economic Trinity,’¹¹¹ such dangers clearly do exist. As Sanders acknowledges:

¹⁰⁶ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 163.

¹⁰⁷ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 163.

¹⁰⁸ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 165.

¹⁰⁹ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 165.

¹¹⁰ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 166.

¹¹¹ Leslie, “Does God Have a Life?,” 389.

Although restricters, especially the less reflective ones (few of whom have been mentioned in [his chapter on restricters]), often style themselves as taking the safer, more conservative route ... the set of problems generated by a systematic restriction of Rahner's Rule is at least as great as the set of problems faced by the radicalizers.¹¹²

Theologians need to walk a fine line in negotiating Rahner's Rule. The problems inherent in its application are examined by LaCugna and her decision to look for an alternative paradigm arises from what she sees as insurmountable problems in this regard. These will be discussed in the next chapter of this thesis. Her views are more sophisticated than the conclusions some of her critics come to would suggest, and her means of articulating the notion of divine transcendence are worthy of exploration.

Conversation Partners on Theological Language

Kathryn Tanner and Ian Ramsey are important figures, both in their own right as eminent theologians and in the context of this thesis. The nature of the role of Tanner's ideas in my research is primarily methodological: LaCugna's understanding of divine transcendence will be examined in the light of Tanner's radical view of God as transcendent. Ramsey's writing on the theological model came to my attention in the early stages of my research, as both LaCugna and Tanner had referred to his work. As my reading progressed, a number of interesting interconnections emerged, not only between Tanner and Ramsey but, importantly for the development of my argument, between these two and LaCugna. In the process of introducing Tanner and Ramsey, I will identify the few links I have observed between the writings of the two Anglicans/Episcopalians and will explain the significance of these links for this thesis. I will also specify the limitations I have placed on my engagement with Tanner and Ramsey. The placement of clear boundaries is necessary, particularly with Tanner, as her output is prolific and diverse.

Kathryn Tanner (1957-) is Professor of Systematic Theology at Yale Divinity School. In her research she relates 'the history of Christian thought to contemporary issues of theological concern using social, cultural, and feminist theory.'¹¹³ Her first book, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* was published in 1988. In it she addresses theologians' speech about God and God's relationship to the created world, rather than

¹¹² Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 158.

¹¹³ "Kathryn Tanner," Department of Religious Studies, Yale University, accessed August 27, 2016, <http://religiousstudies.yale.edu/people/kathryn-tanner>

discussing the content of the theological issues raised by the doctrine of Creation itself. She writes, ‘My direct concern is not for the object of theological discourse – e.g., God, the world, eternal life – but for theologians’ talk about it.’¹¹⁴ The book ‘concerns Christian talk about God as an agent in relation to created beings, particularly those assumed to have their own power and efficacy,’¹¹⁵ and is written in response to the charge that ‘Christian theologians speak incoherently about the nature of God and the created world.’¹¹⁶

The extent of the priority Tanner has given to the study of theological language *per se* has changed over the course of her academic career. Fourteen years after the publication of *God and Creation*, she writes of her ‘shift from methodological to substantive preoccupation,’¹¹⁷ and refers to her teachers from Yale Divinity School who ‘often half-jokingly quipped that one day they would eventually *do* theology, rather than spend all their time talking about how to go about it.’¹¹⁸ She outlines her theological trajectory from philosophy to theology, and contrasts the methodological focus of her first book with the more practical approach in those which followed, describing *The Politics of God*, for example, as moving to a ‘more overt discussion of the function of religious discourse in Christian lives [which explores] how beliefs about God and creation shaped the political stance of Christians.’¹¹⁹ She considers the method of her first book, ‘discourse in an analytical mode,’¹²⁰ to be insufficient for *The Politics of God* and for subsequent books in which she looked to the wider culture through disciplines such as anthropology and sociology to engage with the challenges of Christian life.¹²¹ While I acknowledge both the significance of her post-1988 writings and her reasons

¹¹⁴ Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 11.

¹¹⁵ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 1.

¹¹⁶ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 1.

¹¹⁷ Kathryn Tanner, “How I Changed My Mind,” in *Shaping a Theological Mind: Theological Context and Methodology*, ed. Darren C. Marks (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2002), 115. For commentary on the non-referential and abstract nature of *God and Creation*, see: Kimlyn J. Bender, “Christ, Creation and the Drama of Redemption: ‘The Play’ s the Thing...” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 62, no. 2 (2009): 151-53; David F. Ford, review of *God and Creation*, by Kathryn Tanner, *Religious Studies* 26, no. 4 (1990): 552; Colin E. Gunton, review of *God and Creation*, by Kathryn Tanner, *Expository Times* 100, no. 6 (1989): 236; Maurice F. Wiles, review of *God and Creation*, by Kathryn Tanner, *Journal of Theological Studies* 40, no. 1 (1989): 323.

¹¹⁸ Tanner, “How I Changed My Mind,” 115.

¹¹⁹ Tanner, “How I Changed My Mind,” 117.

¹²⁰ Tanner, “How I Changed My Mind,” 117.

for moving away from her methodologically-focused beginnings, my interaction with Tanner's writings is necessarily limited to ideas expressed in *God and Creation*.¹²² It should also be noted that Tanner has written extensively on the Trinity.¹²³ An analysis of these writings in the light of her 'rules' would make for an interesting study, but is beyond the scope of this thesis.

In *God and Creation*, Tanner identifies a tension, problematic to modern ears, between God's unlimited power in creating and governing the world and the freedom of creatures to make decisions and take responsibility for their lives. She suggests that a modern interpretative framework has subtly transformed an earlier tradition of Christian discourse, rendering current Christian discourse incoherent to philosophers.¹²⁴ In attempting to reformulate Christian claims for a contemporary audience, theologians have become 'forgetful of the coherence'¹²⁵ of Christianity's own forms and discourse. Tanner argues 'that (1) there are ruled relations among traditional forms of theological statements sufficient to provide internal coherence for Christian discourse, and (2) these ruled relations have generally undergone a

¹²¹ Kathryn Tanner, *The Politics of God: Christian Theologies and Social Justice* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992); Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997); Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005).

¹²² My discussion will be based primarily on, but not limited to, the final section of Chapter 2 of *God and Creation*, 'Analysing Theological Cases.' Tanner, *God and Creation*, 48-80.

¹²³ See Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001); Kathryn Tanner, "Trinity," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 319-32; Kathryn Tanner, "Trinity, Christology, and Community," in *Christology and Ethics*, ed. F. LeRon Shults and Brent Waters (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 56-74; Kathryn Tanner, "Kingdom Come: The Trinity and Politics," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 27, no. 2 (2007): 129-45; Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Kathryn Tanner, "The Trinity as Christian Teaching," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Giles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 349-58; Kathryn Tanner, "Social Trinitarianism and Its Critics," in *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology: Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Trinitarian Theology*, ed. Robert J. Wozniak and Giulio Maspero (London: T & T Clark, 2012): 368-86.

¹²⁴ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 2. The problems associated with the doctrine of Providence have been mounting since the late seventeenth century, reaching a crisis following the shattering of faith in progress after World War I. See Charles M. Wood, "Providence," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 91-104. From this time, the doctrine 'was left a rootless, disembodied ghost, flitting from footnote to footnote, but rarely finding secure lodgement in sustained theological discourse.' Langdon B. Gilkey, "The Concept of Providence in Contemporary Theology," *Journal of Religion* 43, no. 3 (1963): 171. Wood considers the situation to have changed little since the 1960s, suggesting that the doctrine has been 'overwhelmed by the challenges it has faced.' Wood, "Providence," 93.

¹²⁵ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 2.

radical transformation during the last five centuries.’¹²⁶ She writes of the inadequacy of a contrastive account of divine transcendence where divine attributes such as rationality and permanence are placed in opposition to the human capacity for irrationality and change. She argues that a contrastive definition for divine involvement with the world is ‘not radical enough to allow a direct creative involvement of God with the world in its entirety’¹²⁷ and devises two rules which she claims can be applied to a range of theological scenarios.¹²⁸

The first rule Tanner proposes to counter the inadequacy of a contrastive definition of transcendence is: ‘Avoid both a simple univocal attribution of predicates to God and world and a simple contrast of divine and non-divine predicates.’ She calls this ‘a rule for talk of God’s transcendence beyond both identity and opposition with the non-divine.’¹²⁹ The second rule is: ‘Avoid in talk about God’s creative agency all suggestions of limitation in scope or manner.’ This rule ‘prescribes talk of God’s creative agency as immediate and universally extensive.’¹³⁰

Two important boundaries will frame my application of Tanner’s rules. I am using only her first rule (although she intended for the two to be used together to address aspects of transcendence and agency) and, related to this restriction, my focus is on God’s nature, or more particularly on LaCugna’s ontology of personhood, rather than on the issue of divine and human agency, which is Tanner’s priority in *God and Creation*. Fortunately for my purposes, Tanner broadens the parameters in the examples she provides for the first rule. As she turns to the discussion of theological cases, she writes, ‘The theological loci of our discussion will vary: we will look at treatments of God’s nature and God’s agency.’¹³¹

¹²⁶ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 5.

¹²⁷ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 46.

¹²⁸ Duncan Reid discusses LaCugna’s understanding of the God-world relation with specific reference to Kathryn Tanner’s rules in his article critiquing LaCugna’s interpretation of the Palamite distinction between essence and energies. Reid’s brief but pertinent comments will be discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis. Reid, “The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology,” 290-92.

¹²⁹ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 47.

¹³⁰ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 47.

¹³¹ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 56.

Tanner makes three references to Ian Ramsey in *God and Creation*. The first two have less relevance to my thesis than the third, and concern respectively the trinitarian and Christological formulas of the early church as rules for linguistic practice, and the use of terms with established non-theological uses such as *hypostasis* and *physis* as ‘model-less’ mnemonics.¹³² In the third reference, she makes a distinction between forms of speech in which she is interested and those which emphasise the use of models. Tanner’s interest lies in ‘forms of speech capable of producing a structure of discourse isomorphic with that which rules for coherent discourse would generate.’¹³³ Therefore she identifies for particular attention ‘grammatical peculiarities of forms of language, more than the conceptual content of terms favoured for theological use.’¹³⁴ She contrasts her proposal with ‘those philosophical analyses stressing the use of theological models in theology.’¹³⁵ Ian Ramsey’s *Models for Divine Activity* is one of three publications cited by Tanner as an example of such analysis.¹³⁶ In his posthumously published set of lectures cited by Tanner, Ian Ramsey explores a number of models of the type to which Tanner refers. This distinction between a ‘grammatical peculiarity’¹³⁷ and a model with conceptual content will be discussed further below.

Ian Ramsey (1915-1972) was Professor of the Philosophy of Religion at the University of Oxford and Bishop of Durham (1966-1972). His writing and research interests included religious language, the relationship between science and religion, and Christian ethics. In the first of his four lectures, delivered in March 1966, he discusses models of God’s activity ‘associated with discourse about the spirit,’¹³⁸ such as fire, anointing, rain and dew. Pertinent to this thesis, particularly with regard to LaCugna’s understanding of theological models, are

¹³² Tanner writes, ‘Ian Ramsey, Bernard Lonergan and most recently George Lindbeck have argued that, despite their expression as first-order claims, the trinitarian and Christological creedal formulas of the early church function ... as rules for linguistic practice.’ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 50. For references by Tanner to Ramsey, see Tanner, *God and Creation*, 175, nn. 14, 16 and 17.

¹³³ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 175, n. 20.

¹³⁴ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 175, n. 20.

¹³⁵ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 175, n. 20. Tanner names ‘king’ and ‘friend’ as examples of such models.

¹³⁶ Ian T. Ramsey, *Models for Divine Activity* (London: SCM Press, 1973). Also cited: Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1982); John MacIntyre, *The Shape of Christology* (London: SCM, 1966).

¹³⁷ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 175, n. 20.

¹³⁸ Ramsey, *Models*, 10.

his ideas on the value of ‘a rich piling up of models’ or the pairing of models in order to convey a double sense of mystery.¹³⁹

In view of the distinction Tanner makes between the use of models in theology and her linguistic approach, it is interesting to note a brief reference by Ramsey, in his third lecture, to the concept of the ‘qualified model.’ A ‘qualified model’ is formed, quite simply, by the addition of a term of qualification to an existing model, resulting in a change in the model’s logical function. Ramsey gives the example of the model ‘presence’ qualified by the prefix ‘omni,’ to produce the qualified model ‘omni-presence.’¹⁴⁰ Other examples of qualified models from his 1957 publication *Religious Language* include ‘impassible’¹⁴¹ and ‘infinitely good.’¹⁴²

While *Models of Divine Activity* is primarily devoted to the category identified by Tanner as models with conceptual content, Ramsey’s *qualified* models, I suggest, closely resemble the kind of ‘grammatical peculiarities’ which capture Tanner’s interest in *God and Creation*. For example, Tanner calls for the use of terms ‘with a lack of formed particularity,’ such as ‘limitless’ and ‘infinity,’¹⁴³ when avoiding a simple univocal attribution of predicates to God. She suggests terms such as ‘simplicity’ over ‘compositeness’ as a heuristic device to demonstrate the structural inadequacy of our language for the world.¹⁴⁴ When used in this manner, words such as ‘infinite’ function linguistically in a similar way to Ramsey’s qualifiers. Thus, the detailed examination of the qualified model in Chapter 3 of this thesis (which draws on Ramsey’s chapter from *Religious Language*, ‘Some Traditional Characterizations of God: Models and Qualifiers’)¹⁴⁵ will inform my argument in Chapter 6, as LaCugna makes use of the qualified model in her discussion of divine attributes. Finally,

¹³⁹ Ramsey, *Models*, 42.

¹⁴⁰ Ramsey, *Models*, 33.

¹⁴¹ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 50-53.

¹⁴² Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 66-71.

¹⁴³ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 60.

¹⁴⁴ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 61.

¹⁴⁵ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 49-89. See also material on qualified models in Ian T. Ramsey, *Words About God: The Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971); Ian T. Ramsey, “Talking of God: Models, Ancient and Modern,” in *Christian Empiricism*, ed. Gerry H. Gill (London: Sheldon Press, 1974); Ramsey, “On Understanding Mystery,” 59-75.

Ramsey's explanation of the logical function of doxological language in his writing on linguistic analysis provides a rich resource with which to explore important aspects of LaCugna's theology with particular reference, of course, to her writing on divine transcendence.

Structure and Methodology

Chapter 2 is structured in three parts, each focusing on one of the three themes identified above. The first, addressing Theme 1, begins with an examination of Rahner's Rule. I outline LaCugna's understanding of the epistemological and ontological issues associated with the application of the rule, and survey scholarly opinion on her reading of these issues. I then introduce the alternative model she offers of *oikonomia* and *theologia* based on the Neoplatonic model of emanation and return (or *exitus-reditus*) where 'All things originate with God (Father), take place through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and, through Christ and the Spirit, all things return to God.'¹⁴⁶ This provides background material for both Chapter 4 (which examines relevant historical and theological connections with LaCugna's model) and Chapter 5 (which discusses the model in detail and addresses criticisms by LaCugna's contemporaries of her use of this model).

The second section, 'The Mystery of Divine-Human Communion,' includes, firstly, an overview of LaCugna's 'ontology of relation'; secondly, a discussion of her concerns regarding the use of classical divine attributes such as 'immutability'; thirdly, a survey of some of her more problematic statements on personhood; and finally, an initial evaluation of these statements.

In the third section, 'Creation *ex nihilo* and *ex amore*,' I examine some of the implications of LaCugna's relational ontology and her model of the *oikonomia* for a trinitarian understanding of the mystery of God's 'ongoing relationship with creation.'¹⁴⁷ In her relational ontology she *recasts* the traditional understanding of creation and of divine freedom. I note some of the controversial ideas she expresses regarding the God-world relationship which will be critically examined in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

¹⁴⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 25.

¹⁴⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 321.

Chapter 3, ‘Catherine LaCugna and Language,’ begins with a detailed examination of apophatic language, and then of some of the modes of speech identified in “Placing Some Trinitarian Locutions,” – analogy, metaphor and model. I draw upon her writings and on those of others who have influenced her thinking, including Max Black, Janet Soskice and Sallie McFague.

Attention then turns to Ramsey’s concept of ‘models and qualifiers.’ As noted above, much of this material informs the discussion in Chapter 6 of this thesis, where LaCugna’s use of terms such as ‘immutably personal’¹⁴⁸ is examined in the light of Tanner’s rule for Christian talk of God as transcendent. The final part of the chapter explores the concept of doxological speech for its capacity to convey and uphold the notion of divine transcendence. The insights of Ramsey, Pannenberg and Schlink assist in the development of my argument.

In **Chapter 4**, ‘Catherine LaCugna and the God-World Relation: Connections with Pre-Modern Thought,’ LaCugna’s ideas on divine freedom, presented in my Chapter 2, are placed within a wider historical and theological context through a chronological examination of the writings of selected philosophers and theologians. As each historical figure is introduced, reference is made to their place in, and influence on, LaCugna’s theology. I focus on two topics for each writer: Plotinus – the *exitus-reditus* schema, and emanation and necessity; John Scotus Eriugena – pantheism and Scripture; Bonaventure – the ‘good’ as self-diffusive, and the Bonaventurian *Itinerarium*; and Aquinas – real and logical relations, and emanation and necessity.

Chapter 5, ‘Catherine LaCugna, Model and Metaphor: A Conversation with Her Critics,’ comprises two related parts. The first looks in detail at both LaCugna’s model of emanation and return, and the metaphor, a ‘walking God.’ In the second, I identify and respond to the concerns raised by LaCugna’s critics with particular reference to the issue of divine transcendence. To this end, I have selected the writings of three critics and two respondents, the critics being Weinandy, Gunton and Finan, and the respondents, Elizabeth Groppe and LaCugna herself. I then pay particular attention to concerns expressed by Gunton and Weinandy. Groppe, the most prolific respondent to these authors since LaCugna’s death, has written two substantial articles addressing some of the issues raised by Gunton and Weinandy. Further insights gained from the writings of Ramsey (Chapter 3); philosophers

¹⁴⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 301.

and theologians of the more distant past (Chapter 4); Groppe; and LaCugna are drawn upon in this chapter to defend LaCugna against claims relating to Neo-platonism and pantheism.

In the opening section of **Chapter 6**, Tanner's concept of non-contrastive transcendence and her rules for coherent talk about God are further explored. I provide an overview of Tanner's explanation of her first rule: 'Avoid both a simple *univocal* attribution of predicates to God and world and a simple *contrast* of divine and non-divine predicates,' and note some of her examples, in which she applies her rule to actual theological cases (such as Tertullian). In the second half of the chapter, I engage with Tanner's rule with particular reference to LaCugna's understanding of human and divine personhood and of creation, the second and third of the thesis' three major themes.

Conclusion

Catherine LaCugna's contribution to theology has now been outlined and placed in the broader context of trinitarian scholarship. Several conversation partners have been identified. While some of these, such as Gunton, Weinandy, Groppe, Finan and Reid, have engaged directly with her writing, others, particularly Ramsey and Tanner, provide useful tools and concepts for my argument. Some of the potential threats to the Christian understanding of God as transcendent in LaCugna's writing have been noted, as have concerns by Sanders regarding her use of the language of doxology as a substitute for the doctrine of the immanent Trinity. My method outlined, the focus now turns to the three themes I have identified as underpinning her trinitarian theology.

Chapter Two

Catherine LaCugna's Theology of Salvation, Personhood and Creation

Introduction

This chapter is structured according to the three themes identified in my first chapter: 'Oikonomia as a Chiastic Model of Emanation and Return,' 'The Mystery of Divine-Human Communion' and 'Creation *ex nihilo* and Creation *ex amore*.' Each section will be approached differently, reflecting the way its theme is to be developed in the thesis. The first section introduces LaCugna's alternative to the immanent-economic scheme: the model of *oikonomia* and *theologia*. I preface the discussion on this model (as she does) with a summary of LaCugna's interpretation of Rahner's Rule (identifying its advantages and limitations) and a brief study of interpretations of the rule by the Catholic theologians Piet Schoonenberg and Yves Congar. As noted in my previous chapter, Sanders classifies interpreters of Rahner's Rule as either 'radicalizers' or 'restricters,' placing Schoonenberg (with LaCugna) in the former category and Congar in the latter.¹ Drawing on Sanders, I provide, in this section, a foundation for discussion, later in the thesis, of LaCugna's views on both the immanent Trinity and the model of *oikonomia*. Sanders' classification method (as well as his account of LaCugna's understanding of ontology and epistemology) assists in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the new model she proposes.

The second section, 'The Mystery of Divine-Human Communion,' examines LaCugna's ontology of personhood (noting the influence of MacMurray, Zizioulas and the Cappadocians) and discusses her approach to the negative divine attributes in the light of her recast ontology. I highlight problematic aspects of her expression of divine and human personhood, including what appears, at times, to be her univocal use of the term 'person.' This material provides background for Chapter 6 where I discuss some of LaCugna's claims in the light of Tanner's rule for Christian talk about God as transcendent.

In the third section, I explore (in dialogue with ideas expressed by Elizabeth Groppe in her article: "Creation *ex nihilo* and *ex amore*: ontological freedom in the theologies of John Zizioulas and Catherine Mowry LaCugna") LaCugna's vulnerability to accusations of

¹ While both Sanders and LaCugna examine the response of the three Catholic theologians, Schoonenberg, Congar and Kasper, I will limit discussion to Schoonenberg and Congar.

pantheism and monism, and I assess LaCugna's interpretation of the concept of creation *ex amore*, taking into account the arguments she offers in her defence of divine freedom. Finally, I consider the influence of the Christian mystical tradition on LaCugna's theology.

Theme 1: *Oikonomia* as a Chiastic Model of Emanation and Return

*The 'Possibilities and Limits' of Rahner's Rule*²

Karl Rahner's axiom: 'The "economic" Trinity is the "immanent" Trinity and the "immanent" Trinity is the "economic" Trinity,' receives extended commentary in some of LaCugna's early articles and in *God for Us*.³ She explains that 'Rahner's axiom [shows] that trinitarian theology is meant above all to be a truth about the mystery of salvation. That is, it is a way of both narrating and conceiving the God who *saves* and the *God* who saves.'⁴ LaCugna enquires into the meaning of the word 'is' (in Rahner's Rule) in the article, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity as the Mystery of Salvation." The paragraphs below outline the main points she covers through this enquiry.⁵ She discusses the metaphorical nature of God-language, and draws on ideas from linguists and theologians, including Paul Ricoeur, Gottlob Frege, Robert Funk and Sallie McFague.⁶ Analysing the axiom on three levels, she asks: 'first, to what do the terms 'economic', 'immanent' and 'trinity' refer? second, how *is* the economic trinity an immanent trinity? and third, how is the whole equation related to God?'⁷

Addressing the three terms (economic, immanent and trinity), LaCugna suggests that we need to look beyond their accepted definitions to an understanding that they are 'theological constructs ... for referring to a *set of relations*, one internal, and the other external to God.'⁸ She continues, 'The fact that we have in mind a set of relations implies that we do not mean that one reality, "God-the-economic-trinity", is another reality, "God-the-immanent-trinity",

² The section of Chapter 7 in which LaCugna examines some implications of Rahner's Rule when interpreted ontologically and epistemologically, is entitled 'Possibilities and Limits of the Axiom.' *God for Us*, 216-17.

³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 210-32; LaCugna, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity," 2-14; LaCugna, "Placing," 32-33; LaCugna, "Problems," 192, 202-03.

⁴ LaCugna, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity," 22.

⁵ While LaCugna's writing on language will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis, the paragraphs below demonstrate her engagement with metaphorical language and model theory in her early articles.

⁶ LaCugna, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity," 11-13.

⁷ LaCugna, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity," 10. LaCugna's italics.

⁸ LaCugna, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity," 10. LaCugna's italics.

but that one set of relations *is* another set of relations.’⁹ While we are now equipped with this understanding of the word ‘is’ in the axiom as ‘bridging’ two sets of relations, questions remain as to the nature of the distinction. She turns here to the *second* level of reference, drawing on the work of Ricoeur, particularly his article, “Biblical Hermeneutics.”¹⁰

LaCugna makes the distinction, following Ricoeur, between the literal and metaphorical sense of the verb ‘to be’:

The literal sense correlates a subject and a predicate and implies that in a certain way the relation describes *what is* the case. ... A metaphor is a semantic invention in which two words of meaning not ordinarily associated with each other are brought into relation (A ‘*is*’ B). The power of the metaphor is that it ‘re-describes’ the reality of both subject and predicate. Thus the metaphorical sense of the verb ‘to be’ creates a tension between subject and predicate as well as between the two types of interpretation (literal and metaphorical).¹¹

She asserts that it is clear that the ‘is’ in the axiom is not intended to be interpreted literally, but rather either metaphorically or analogically, concluding that on the second level of interpretation, the axiom ‘turns out to be a complex metaphorical predication of “God as such” who is indistinguishable from “God for us.”’¹²

For the third level of interpretation, LaCugna turns to model theory. Discussing the overarching model of ‘God-in-relation,’ she names and provides reasons for the theological *distinction* between God ‘proceeding internally in self-expressive love, and the God who creates and sustains us.’¹³ LaCugna explains that the distinction is made ‘(a) to uphold divine freedom, (b) to avoid equating God with the world, and (c) to avoid the agnostic or nominalist perspectives which despair of any real knowledge of God on our part.’¹⁴ She also identifies several theological issues and controversies that have plagued Christianity over the centuries which are held in tension within this model:

⁹ LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 10. LaCugna’s italics.

¹⁰ Paul Ricoeur, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” *Semeia*, 4 (1975): 29-148.

¹¹ LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 11. LaCugna’s italics.

¹² LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 12.

¹³ LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 13.

¹⁴ LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 13.

When this model (God-in-relation) is legislated by the axiom of Rahner, then we can achieve a balancing act between Sabellianism and Arianism, tritheism and unitarianism, agnostic scepticism and naïve realism. We can incorporate the demands of eternity and history, self-differentiation and unity.¹⁵

LaCugna names these tensions and yet she is often thought of as not achieving an appropriate balance in any of them herself, having been accused of Sabellianism, tritheism and agnostic scepticism in the three pairings respectively. Further investigation into the third of these pairings will take place below in the sub-section, ‘The Immanent Trinity and Agnosticism.’

Recognising Rahner’s ‘is’ as a means of bridging two sets of relations, she questions whether the distinction between the economic and immanent Trinity is in any sense ontological or merely epistemological. In Chapter 7 of *God for Us*, LaCugna raises again the question of the nature of any distinction between the economic and immanent Trinity and comes to the conclusion that Rahner’s Rule should be interpreted epistemologically rather than ontologically. Sanders summarises her thought process as follows: ‘[LaCugna] believes that most discussions on Rahner’s Rule devolve into antinomies because most interpreters presuppose that the distinction drawn by the Rule is ontological, a distinction between two Trinities.’¹⁶ He continues:

If Rahner’s Rule is ontological, then it errs in both directions at once. On one hand, making the economic-immanent Trinity distinction a real distinction between two different realities puts too great a distance between the two. ... On the other hand, Rahner’s Rule does not just make a distinction; it posits and overcomes the distinction all at once, thus equating immanent and economic ontologically. In LaCugna’s estimation, this equation would be disastrous.¹⁷

LaCugna spells out the implications of a strict ontological identity in the following passage (quoted in part in my previous chapter):

Is God with us exactly identical to God as such? Is there, in other words, a strict ontological identity between the eternal and temporal aspects of the one divine self-communication? If so, it would be difficult to see how

¹⁵ LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 13-14.

¹⁶ Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 214. LaCugna explains the need to draw an *epistemological* distinction as follows: ‘... the distinction between economic and immanent Trinity is strictly conceptual, not ontological. There are not two trinities, the Trinity of experience and a transeconomic Trinity. There is one God, one divine self-communication, manifested in the one economy of creation, redemption, and consummation.’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 212.

¹⁷ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 114.

Rahner's axiom differs from pantheism (Hegelian or otherwise), the view that God is nothing other than the world or world-process.¹⁸

The two 'ontological' interpretations of Rahner's Rule are thus considered by LaCugna to be unsatisfactory. In her Introduction to Rahner's *The Trinity*, she reiterates that the rule requires nuancing in order to hold together two important tenets of the Christian faith: 'If Rahner's axiom is construed ontologically, then it clearly requires qualification, since, as it stands, it fails to shed light on an adequate way to maintain both the ontological difference between God and creation, and the ontological relatedness of God to creation.'¹⁹ She looks, then, to interpret the rule epistemologically, asking if 'there is a way to preserve a distinction of reason between economic and immanent Trinity without allowing it to devolve into an ontological distinction.'²⁰ The 'way' LaCugna chooses involves the proposal of an alternative paradigm which will be introduced below, following further discussion of some of the significant issues with which she struggles.

Commentary on LaCugna's Interpretation of Rahner's Rule

Throughout Chapter 7 of *God for Us*, LaCugna makes statements which not only demonstrate her awareness of the importance of safeguarding God's freedom in theological discourse, but which also acknowledge the intention of the doctrine of the immanent Trinity in this regard. Indeed, she defines conditions under which inquiry 'into the immanent ground of the missions of Son and Spirit remains a legitimate theological enterprise.'²¹ She considers the distinction between economic and immanent Trinity to be an epistemological one which

¹⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 216. LaCugna writes, in a similar vein, in a note in a 1985 article, 'W. Kasper observes that if one does not carefully qualify the sense of the "is" in Rahner's axiom and interprets it literally, then no ontological distinction between God and the world can be made (Hegel).' LaCugna, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity," 10, n. 14, quoting from Walter Kasper, *Der Gott Jesu Christi* (Mainz: Matthias-Grunewald-Verlag, 1982), 333. For a discussion of the potential threat to the Christian understanding of divine freedom inherent in Rahner's Rule, see William J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 141-42. Defending Rahner in this regard, LaCugna notes that the axiom does not clarify issues surrounding divine freedom 'not to create.' She makes the point that 'divine freedom was not the issue around which he formulated the axiom.' Rahner, *The Trinity*, xv.

¹⁹ Rahner, *The Trinity*, xv. In an article published in 2001, Sanders makes the interesting observation that trinitarian theology has moved its focus from reconciling threeness with oneness to hunting for 'new and improved devices for securing the Trinity and the world to each other. ... The knotty Trinity has braided itself deftly into our history, and some of the most interesting theological work of the past half-century has been devoted to following the involutions and convolutions of those knots.' Fred Sanders, "Entangled in the Trinity: Economic and Immanent Trinity in Recent Theology," *dialog: a journal of theology* 40, no. 3 (2001): 175.

²⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 217.

²¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 231.

brings together the ideas of 'God' and 'God with us' into the paradox that stands at the base of all theological knowledge: God freely, utterly and completely bestows God's very self in the encounter with human persons, yet God remains ineffable because the creature is incapable of fully receiving or understanding the One who is imparted.²²

LaCugna looks to affirm that "God *as* God" is altogether present in the economy of salvation history, and at the same time that God also exceeds and outstrips the human capacity to receive or explain this self-communication.'²³ However, she places conditions on any inquiry into the immanent Trinity, stating that such investigation is acceptable '*provided ... it is understood properly and modestly ... as a reflection on God's self-disclosure in the person of Christ and the activity of the Holy Spirit.*'²⁴ Few would disagree that the economy of salvation is the appropriate starting point for trinitarian reflection and that a certain level of humility is required when venturing into speculation on God *in se*. However LaCugna seems to take both the emphasis on the economy and the required level of humility much further than most.

While she has no interest in compromising the Christian understanding of divine freedom, a reluctance to engage in speculation on the intra-divine relations pervades much of her writing. Even as she acknowledges God's transcendence, she asks if there is 'a way to say that the specific modalities of God's self-communication in Christ and the Spirit are ineffable because they show us the triune nature of God, without appealing to "intradivine" relations or "intra-divine" self-communication'²⁵ Two related questions arise from this reluctance to appeal to the 'intradivine' relations. The first is: What provokes LaCugna's concerns over discourse and speculation on the immanent Trinity? and the second: Is the agnosticism, which accompanies such concerns, detrimental to a Christian understanding of the triune God?

²² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 231. The notion of divine freedom is also upheld in the following statement: 'The distinction between the economic and immanent Trinity is a way of holding onto the truth that God is personal, that God is free, that God cannot be reduced to human history or human perception.' LaCugna, *God for Us*, 304. For an earlier example of LaCugna's guarded acceptance of speech about God's inner life, see LaCugna, "Problems," 29-30.

²³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 217. LaCugna's italics.

²⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 231-32. LaCugna's italics.

²⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 217.

LaCugna's Concerns

LaCugna looks, in her re-conceived model, to maintain 'the essential identity between *oikonomia* and *theologia* in a way that makes soteriology decisive for theology of God and does not banish the Trinity of persons to an intradivine sphere, unrelated to the creature.'²⁶ It is the risk of a 'gap' between *oikonomia* and *theologia* that motivates LaCugna to re-frame the doctrine of the Trinity. In similarly negative language, she describes the immanent Trinity as 'envisioned in static ahistorical and transeconomic terms.'²⁷ This language betrays a fear of the 'possibility of a *deus absconditus* (hidden God) who lurks behind *deus revelatus*.'²⁸ She advises that 'the theologian must be careful not to set up two trinities' and thus 'not introduce another layer or level of God's triune existence.'²⁹ She cautions that 'as the history of the doctrine of the Trinity shows, as soon as we begin to argue on the basis of ... intradivine distinctions, we leave the economy behind. As soon as we leave the economy behind, the doctrine of the Trinity has no bearing on faith.'³⁰ Sanders identifies 'relevance' as one of the key concerns of 'radicalizers' and this is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in LaCugna's warning.

The Immanent Trinity and Agnosticism

Rather than speculate on this 'hidden' God and risk speech becoming detached from the economy, LaCugna prefers to speak of the eternal God as incomprehensible mystery. This is

²⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 210. LaCugna and McDonnell express a concern that soteriology diminishes in significance when the intra-divine life is taken as a starting point. They write, using the example of the introspective psychology of Augustine: 'The reified speculative account required to talk intelligibly about the inner life of God seems to bear out the judgment that the specific details of redemptive history were in the end peripheral to trinitarian speculation.' LaCugna and McDonnell, "Far Country," 213.

²⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 223.

²⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 211.

²⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 229. McCormack questions the concern over 'two Trinities.' He notes that Rahner's axiom conveys that 'the three persons who make up the "economic" Trinity are the same *persons* who as three make up the "immanent" Trinity, and conversely.' He continues, 'Surely this is right, but it fails to make a claim which anyone ever sought to deny. No one has ever maintained that there are six divine persons, three who act in the "economy" and, with personal identities different from any economic agents, three others who do not.' Bruce L. McCormack, *Trinity and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 264. Sanders, however, is more sympathetic to maintaining a degree of caution against unlikely theological understandings. Speaking of Walter Kasper's concern that the economic Trinity could be collapsed into the immanent Trinity (the reverse scenario of the concerns most frequently expressed), Sanders places the possible misinterpretation in 'the same category as the double Trinity against which Rahner rails: a doctrinal position which nobody explicitly defends, but which lurks undefined in the background nonetheless as both the presupposition and the logical outcome of the dominant ways of thinking.' Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 129.

³⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 227.

seen by some not as a means of safeguarding divine transcendence, but as enshrouding our understanding of God in unknowing, and casting doubt on the integrity of revelation. Benjamin Leslie suggests that ‘it is not primarily the attribute of divine freedom that is jeopardized in LaCugna’s proposal (and consequently pantheism is not the logical conclusion of her line of thought), but rather it is the authenticity of revelation that is at stake.’³¹

Many commentators consider LaCugna’s hesitancy in speaking of the intradivine to be problematic. Her engagement with the ideas of Piet Schoonenberg only reinforces this view. While I will argue below that LaCugna’s ideas are not as extreme as those of Schoonenberg, the issue of agnosticism in her theology must be addressed. Neil Ormerod uses the language of ‘remoteness’ to argue, against LaCugna, in favour of the doctrine of the immanent Trinity when he writes: ‘To evoke the divine mystery and incomprehensibility runs the long term risk of making God not “so full of meaning as to be impossible to grasp completely”, but simply meaningless or of turning the doctrine into an elaborate religious myth.’ What is at stake, he claims, is ‘whether a real self-communication of the divine is possible or not.’ He asks, ‘Can God really enter into our human history, or is God locked into the divine incomprehensibility to such an extent that God is forever remote from our world?’³² LaCugna, in contrast, asserts that the existence of an ‘intradivine realm is precisely what cannot be established on the basis of the economy, despite the fact that it has functioned within speculative theology ever since the late fourth century.’³³ How is it possible that the case for a ‘remote’ God can be argued from the point of view of defence of the doctrine of the immanent Trinity *and* from the perspective of those keen to diminish its role in theological discourse? Part of the answer lies in problems inherent in Rahner’s Rule. The benefits of the rule as well as the difficulties associated with its interpretation will be discussed below.

Schoonenberg and Congar

Both LaCugna and Sanders discuss Schoonenberg’s and Congar’s interpretation of Rahner’s Rule. They agree that Schoonenberg and Congar (and, indeed Kasper) each approve of

³¹ Leslie, “Does God Have a Life?,” 394.

³² Ormerod, *The Trinity*, 25. Ronald F. Thiermann sees the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity as a means of ‘guarding both the hiddenness and presence of God’s identity.’ He argues, ‘God’s hiddenness is not some elusive self lurking behind or beyond the [Gospel] narrative depiction. God’s hiddenness is simply a quality of God which the shape of the narrative itself indicates.’ Ronald F. Thiermann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1985), 139.

³³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 223.

Rahner's soteriological emphasis.³⁴ In her commentary, LaCugna also observes that both theologians call for a degree of asymmetry between the axiom's copulas. Sanders, however, looks to contrast and distance their positions, categorising Schoonenberg as a 'radicalizer' and Congar as a 'restrictor.'

In an article published in 1975, Schoonenberg presented thirty-six theses on the doctrine of the Trinity.³⁵ The first ten fall under the heading 'On the direction of theological thinking.' The asymmetry to which LaCugna refers pertains to this idea of the direction of theological thinking. She quotes Schoonenberg's first three theses:

1/ All our thinking moves from the world to God, and can never move in the opposite direction.

2/ Revelation in no way suspends this law. Revelation is the experienced self-communication of God *in* human history, which thereby becomes the history of salvation.

3/ With reference to God's Trinity, this means that the Trinity can never be the point of departure. There is no way that we can draw conclusions from the Trinity to Christ and to the Spirit given to us; only the opposite direction is possible.³⁶

The agnosticism for which Schoonenberg is notorious³⁷ is evident in his third thesis and is made more explicit in his twenty-fifth:

25/ Not determined [by the axiomatic unity of economic and immanent Trinity] is whether God, apart from salvation ('before the creation'), is ('was') in some way trinitarian, e.g., existing in three principles of being which are the foundations of His self-communication in salvation history. This question is merely speculative and its answer depends on the relationship between God's immutability and His free self-determination. Although trinitarian theology presupposes that God really revealed Himself, His own being, to us, it must at the same time recognize the ineffability of that being.³⁸

³⁴ See LaCugna, *God for Us*, 218-20; Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 85, 124, 128.

³⁵ Piet Schoonenberg, "Trinity—the Consummated Covenant: Theses on the Doctrine of the Trinitarian God," *Sciences Religieuses* 5, no. 2 (1975): 111-16.

³⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 218, quoting Schoonenberg, "Consummated Covenant," 111.

³⁷ Sanders notes, 'Later writers could point to [Schoonenberg's] work as an example of why the axiom needs to be handled with care.' Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 87-88.

³⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 218-19, quoting Schoonenberg, "Consummated Covenant," 114.

It is not difficult to draw a connection between Schoonenberg's refusal to read back into the immanent Trinity the distinctions evident in the missions of the divine persons, and LaCugna's reluctance to do so. While it is on this point that LaCugna eventually parts ways with Rahner, I contend that LaCugna's views are less radical than Schoonenberg's. In her exploration of the word 'is' in Rahner's Rule, for example, she makes

a twofold historical observation: first, that the two classic distortions of Christian teaching on God, Sabellian modalism and Arian subordinationism, resulted from not taking seriously enough the equivalence indicated by the 'is'. Second, contemporary theologies likewise commonly run aground in one or other of these same directions.'³⁹

She cites Schoonenberg's approach as an example of a contemporary 'Sabellian' imbalance, as he argues that 'God is not eternally self-differentiated but God "becomes" triune in the event of Jesus Christ.'⁴⁰ While LaCugna focuses, in her remaining commentary on Schoonenberg, on his approval of an 'inherent asymmetry between economic and immanent Trinity' such that 'there can be no strict ontological identity [between the two],'⁴¹ Sanders pursues the issue of agnosticism. He states that Schoonenberg actually achieves the opposite of Rahner's intention in devising the rule, which was to press for more exact knowledge of the immanent Trinity by 'guaranteeing the connection between missions and processions.'⁴² Sanders' illustration here is very helpful:

[Schoonenberg] claims to know even less than the older tradition behind Rahner, which at least knew that God was eternally triune without reference to the economy. With Rahner the Rule was a lens by which to see the necessary connection of mission and procession; with Schoonenberg it is more like a wall on which is written the warning: Do not speculate beyond the economic Trinity; it is all you have, so as far as you are concerned it is the immanent Trinity.⁴³

³⁹ LaCugna, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity," 3.

⁴⁰ LaCugna, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity," 3, n. 5, referring to an earlier German version of the 1975 revised article translated into English. Piet Schoonenberg, "Trinität—der vollendete Bund: Thesen zur Lehre vom dreipersonlichen Gott," *Orientierung* 37 (1973): 115-17.

⁴¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 219.

⁴² Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 85.

⁴³ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 85.

Despite her criticism of Schoonenberg and his Sabellian error, some of LaCugna's ideas bear a confusingly strong resemblance to his.⁴⁴ Randall Rauser has categorised LaCugna (along with Moltmann) as an anti-realist as a result of her agnosticism toward the immanent Trinity.⁴⁵ However, as noted above, I contend that LaCugna's approach is more nuanced than it may appear from the material presented in this thesis to date. Sanders' metaphors of 'wall' and 'lens' will, when applied to LaCugna, assist in defending her against some undeserved compartmentalisation.

LaCugna is correct in saying that both Congar and Schoonenberg acknowledge that Rahner's Rule requires qualification. She writes, 'Yves Congar [like Schoonenberg] advances a ... caution about the "vice versa" in Rahner's principle.'⁴⁶ What LaCugna doesn't emphasise is that Congar is *critical* of Schoonenberg, and while she interprets Schoonenberg's theses as arguing for an asymmetry, Congar queries what he sees as an unacceptable level of *reciprocity* in Schoonenberg's approach.⁴⁷ Sanders argues that Congar considers readings such as Schoonenberg's to be 'misinterpretations of Rahner's Rule.'⁴⁸ Congar contends that 'we cannot expect the economic Trinity to reveal the immanent Trinity fully (as the *vice versa* would imply).'⁴⁹ For Congar, because 'the self-communion of God takes place in history, there are limitations, at the very least those of temporality and chronology, placed upon God,' and 'there remains a certain degree of disparity between what God is *in se*, and

⁴⁴ Earl Muller notes in this regard that LaCugna 'wishes to back away from God's eternal being (and any eternal processions) and leave it wrapped in apophatic splendour.' Muller, "The Science of Theology," 334.

⁴⁵ Rauser, "Emperor with No Clothes?," 91-94. LaCugna observes that 'the degree to which one is willing to vest the model with some "ontological" basis differs among scholars.' She refers her readers to the 'vast literature on the problem,' recommending Funk, McFague, Barbour, Black, Ramsey and Scharlemann. LaCugna, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity," 12, n. 21. See also William Ury who places LaCugna in the 'instrumentalist camp.' William Ury, *Trinitarian Personhood: Investigating the Implications of a Relational Definition* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 35, n. 55. Interestingly, Kathryn Tanner considers the epistemological realism-antirealism debate to be 'overblown in its theological importance' and tries not to engage in it. Gary Dorrien, "Truth Claims: The Future of Postliberal Theology," *The Christian Century* 118, no. 21 (2001): 22.

⁴⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 219.

⁴⁷ Admittedly, Congar is addressing a series of corollaries made by Schoonenberg between the economic and immanent Trinity, not quoted by LaCugna. See, for example, Sander's abbreviated version of Schoonenberg's thesis 11: 'The salvation-economy fatherhood of God is the inner-divine fatherhood, and *vice versa*.' Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 86, based on Schoonenberg, "Consummated Covenant," 112.

⁴⁸ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 125.

⁴⁹ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 126.

what God is able to be *ad extra*.⁵⁰ He asks the question, ‘can the free mystery of the economy and the necessary mystery of the Tri-unity of God be identified?’⁵¹ LaCugna would answer in the affirmative.

Also of interest, and even supporting LaCugna’s concerns regarding the *deus absconditus*, is Sanders’ query as to whether Congar is aware of the scope of the restriction imposed by his notion of ‘distance between the economic, revealed Trinity and the eternal Trinity.’⁵² Sanders asks the following questions:

Do these restrictions simply return us to a situation wherein all the deleterious effects of anti-trinitarian timidity that Rahner lamented are once again a possibility? Do we really know or experience anything of the divine persons in the economy, or does the immanent Trinity retreat once more behind a screen of smooth efficient causality, condescension for the sake of the missions, and purely verbal revelation?⁵³

Sanders concludes that Congar seems to fall into ‘an error common among those who suggest restrictions on Rahner’s Rule’ in that he ‘does not undertake to explain what process of inference might be permissible for constructing an economically-based theology of the immanent Trinity.’⁵⁴ Furthermore, Sanders points out that ‘few restricters recognize that the act of restricting Rahner’s Rule places demands on a theological system no less stringent than those which come into play among the radicalizers.’⁵⁵ Rahner’s Rule is clearly not easy to apply. Like Congar, LaCugna looks to modify the axiom. She quotes a rephrasing by Kasper which, while not possessing the simple elegance of the original axiom (as she concedes), *does* make the point that ‘there is not a simple ontological identity between “God” and “God with us.”’⁵⁶

⁵⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 219.

⁵¹ Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Smith, vol. 3 (New York: Seabury Press, 1995), 13.

⁵² Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 15.

⁵³ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 127.

⁵⁴ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 127. Reid writes of Congar in this regard: ‘... the second clause [of Rahner’s axiom] represents for Congar a claim to know too much about God. “The economic trinity reveals the immanent trinity – but does it reveal it entirely?” God is much more than we can possibly imagine. This “more” is not inconsistent with what we have known and experienced – but it is more.’ Duncan Reid, *Energies of the Spirit: Trinitarian Models in Eastern Orthodox and Western Theology* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997), 85.

⁵⁵ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 127.

⁵⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 220.

[I]n the economic self-communication *the intra-trinitarian self-communication is present in the world in a new way*, namely, under the veil of historical words, signs and actions, and ultimately in the figure of the man Jesus of Nazareth.⁵⁷

While acknowledging that it is impossible to specify from God's side what is new, she nevertheless can make the claim that 'God is God "in a new way" because of the world.'⁵⁸

The core concerns of Congar as a 'restrictor' – the freedom, mystery and grace of God – are congruent with the direction he has taken. LaCugna's core concerns as a 'radicalizer' include the relevance of doctrine and its grounding in the gospel. Clearly, for both 'radicalizers' and 'restrictors,' these are simply *core* concerns and are not mutually exclusive. Of course Congar wants to affirm the soteriological motivation behind Rahner's Rule; and of course LaCugna wants to affirm God's freedom, mystery and grace.

LaCugna's decision to part ways with Rahner arises from her disagreement with his view that 'distinctions in the economy originate and are grounded in distinctions "in" God.'⁵⁹ This disagreement stems from his use of the 'undeniable distinctions of persons in the economy to posit intra-divine self-communication' which, she claims, renders him 'caught in the stranglehold of the post-Nicene problematic.'⁶⁰ There are traps at every turn into which even the most careful, erudite and respected theologian can fall. This is one of the reasons LaCugna offers an alternative model.⁶¹

LaCugna and the Neo-Platonic Model of Emanation and Return

LaCugna opens the first chapter of *God for Us* with a description of the doctrine of the Trinity as 'the summary statement of faith in the God of Jesus Christ.'⁶² She draws on

⁵⁷ Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 276, cited in LaCugna, *God for Us*, 220. LaCugna's italics. Like Medley, I consider 'LaCugna's consideration of Congar and Kasper' to balance criticisms levelled against her relating to Schoonenberg's views on the immanent Trinity. Medley, *Imago Trinitatis*, 65, n. 20.

⁵⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 220.

⁵⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 221.

⁶⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 222.

⁶¹ For further discussion by Groppe and LaCugna on the limitations of the economic-immanent Trinity model and the decision to propose the model of *oikonomia* and *theologia*, see Chapter 5 of this thesis.

⁶² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 21.

Scripture and the image of light in an attempt to articulate something of the mystery of the transcendent God's presence among us through the incarnation:

Even though God 'dwells in light inaccessible,' Christ is the visible icon of the invisible God, making tangible within human history and within human personality the ineffable mystery of God. The Spirit, present and active in creation from the very beginning, leads all of creation back to its origin, God.⁶³

She quotes the liturgical hymn of thanksgiving from Ephesians 1 which describes 'the shape of salvation history.'⁶⁴ These early comments by LaCugna and the reference to Ephesians have been highlighted here for the richness and relevance of the concepts to which they allude. The notion of *exitus* and *reditus* or 'an economy that advances *a Patre ad Patrem*'⁶⁵ is expressed in this liturgical hymn.

LaCugna claims that in his axiom, Rahner 'seems to conceptualize the *one self-*communication of God in the economy of Christ and the Spirit as having two levels:

Father, Son, Spirit God's self-communication *in se*

Father, Son, Spirit God's self-communicating *ad extra*,
the missions of Word and Spirit.⁶⁶

She contrasts this model, which identifies an intra-divine self-communication, with a biblical and pre-Nicene sense of the economy, which is

the one dynamic movement of God (Father) outward, a personal self-sharing by which God is forever bending toward God's 'other' (cf. Eph. 1:3-14) ... The economy is the 'distribution' of God's life lived with and for the creature. Economy and theology are two aspects of *one* reality: the mystery of divine-human communion.⁶⁷

⁶³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 21.

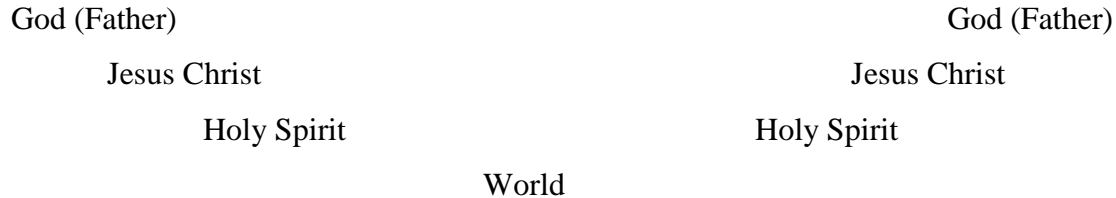
⁶⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 21. Eph 1:3-14. She returns to this passage throughout *God for Us* and especially in her penultimate chapter, 'Trinity, Theology, and Doxology.'

⁶⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 25.

⁶⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 222. LaCugna's italics.

⁶⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 222. LaCugna's italics.

LaCugna provides a visual representation of the ‘chiastic model of emanation and return,’ by which ‘the dynamic shape of the economy could be represented (crudely) as a point moving along a parabola.’⁶⁸



In this divine movement, as she explains, ‘[t]here is neither an economic nor an immanent Trinity; there is only the *oikonomia* that is the concrete realization of the manifestation of the mystery of *theologia* in time, space, history, and personality.’⁶⁹ It is at this point in her argument that she calls for an abandonment of the ‘misleading’ terms ‘economic’ and ‘immanent Trinity’ in favour of the terms *oikonomia* and *theologia*, which more accurately reflect the biblical and pre-Nicene understanding of God and soteriology.⁷⁰

This model more effectively communicates LaCugna’s emphasis on soteriology. Furthermore, it addresses the concerns about by-passing *oikonomia* which she and McDonnell express in the following passage:

As we look back on a tradition which we in part affirm, we nonetheless find certain aspects of that tradition problematic. We renounce the by-passing of redemptive history. Christ was sent to be the face of God turned toward the world so that in the power of the Spirit, Christ might be the path back to God. In no other place but in creation, in ‘fleshly’ history, is God to be met and known.⁷¹

⁶⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 223.

⁶⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 223. In her chapter from the first volume of *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives* published in the same year as *God for Us*, LaCugna depicts the two models in a slightly different way, the main point of difference being the change of names from ‘Father, Son, Spirit’ in the immanent Trinity to ‘God, Christ, Spirit’ in the economic Trinity. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, “The Trinitarian Mystery of God,” in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, vol. 1, ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 177.

⁷⁰ Leslie notes that LaCugna became increasingly averse to speaking about the immanent Trinity over time. He writes, ‘While the basic shape of her arguments remains consistent throughout her writings, there is a line of development in her thought which shifts from guarded caution regarding the possibility of speaking of God *in se* to specific rejection of an immanent Trinity.’ Leslie, “Does God Have a Life?,” 384. While I acknowledge this trend, I contend that LaCugna ‘left room’ for some form of speculation and reflection on the immanent Trinity even in her later writings, including *God for Us*.

⁷¹ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 212.

Within this framework, *oikonomia* is reclaimed as the starting point for trinitarian reflection, and considered to be ‘just as ineffable as is the eternal mystery of God (*theologia*).’⁷²

Kärkkäinen draws attention to LaCugna’s insight regarding the ineffability of both *oikonomia* and *theologia*:

Here we come to the brilliant observation of LaCugna that predicating the identity of the *oikonomia* and *theologia* means that the economy of salvation (‘economic Trinity’) is no less a mystery than the eternal mystery of God (‘immanent Trinity’).⁷³

For all the negativity LaCugna’s model attracts regarding her views on the immanent Trinity, her alternative model has much to commend it. Her theology of personhood also contains both keen insight and weaknesses, and it is to this area of her work that the discussion now turns.

Theme 2: The Mystery of Divine-Human Communion

LaCugna considers the encounter between divine and human persons to be the central preoccupation of the Christian doctrine of God.⁷⁴ While few, if any, would dispute the significance of this encounter to the Christian faith, the ontology of personhood she has developed, arising as it does from the implications of the correspondence between *oikonomia* and *theologia*, has produced some problematic statements and ideas on the divine-human relationship. The problems lie, primarily, in what appears to be her univocal treatment of divine and human personhood, interpreted by some as a threat to the Christian understanding of God as transcendent. It is useful to draw attention, however, to LaCugna’s recognition that the ‘term *person* can be applied to God only analogically or apophatically.’⁷⁵ Marmion and van Nieuwenhove support this guideline, stating that ‘concepts such as “Person” and “relation” used in reference to the Trinity can only be applied to the human community in an *analogous* rather than a univocal way.’⁷⁶ This chapter section will explore the apparent

⁷² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 230. LaCugna’s italics.

⁷³ Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity*, 187.

⁷⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 243.

⁷⁵ LaCugna writes, ‘Even though the term *person* can be applied to God only analogically or apophatically, person indicates relationship, freedom, ineffability, mystery, the capacity to love and know, and the capacity to be loved and known.’ LaCugna, “The Trinitarian Mystery of God,” 180.

⁷⁶ Marmion and van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 205. For a discussion on the risk of ‘forgetting the analogy which permeates any representation of the divine,’ such that ‘God is in danger of becoming “too human,”’ see Rudi A. Te Velde, “The Divine Person(s): Trinity, Person, and Analogous

tension in LaCugna's use of the word 'person' in her re-conceived ontology of personhood and relation.

LaCugna's Understanding of Personhood

LaCugna clearly articulates the relationship between her main thesis in *God for Us* (expounded in Chapter 7, 'The Self-Communion of God') and the ontology of personhood which she develops in Chapter 8, 'Persons in Communion.' Identifying the 'project' of her book as thinking about 'the relationship between *oikonomia* and *theologia* as a structuring principle for trinitarian theology,'⁷⁷ she describes Chapter 8 as a survey of theories of divine and human personhood in view of this project. She writes, 'The previous chapter established as a methodological principle that there is a basic correlation between the economy of salvation and the eternal being of God. We need now to specify the ontology appropriate to this insight, namely, an ontology of relation or communion.'⁷⁸

Inherent in a model such as LaCugna's, which brings together the ideas of the economy of salvation and the eternal being of God, is the risk, as commentators have noted, of 'bringing God and the world too close.'⁷⁹ Her wariness of referring to God *in se* inevitably raises concerns around divine freedom. It is not surprising that, given the continuity she seeks to achieve between the content of Chapters 7 and 8 of *God for Us*, aspects of her ontology of personhood will give rise to similar concerns. As noted above, the prime motivation behind her call to 'abandon' talk of the immanent and the economic Trinity is to avoid any concept of the existence of two Trinities: 'As soon as we free ourselves from thinking that there are two levels to the Trinity, one *ad intra*, the other *ad extra*, then we see that there is *one* life of the triune God, a life in which we graciously have been included as partners.'⁸⁰ With the divine-human *encounter* as her focus, LaCugna has no desire to speculate on God as Godself or, indeed, on humanity independent of God. The terms and phrases she uses to speak of this encounter render her vulnerable to criticism.

Naming," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Giles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 359-70.

⁷⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 249.

⁷⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 249.

⁷⁹ Colin E. Gunton, review of *God for Us*, by Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 47, no. 1 (1994): 137.

⁸⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 228. LaCugna's italics.

LaCugna develops an ‘ontology of relation’ by integrating ‘the insights of the Greek and Latin trinitarian traditions with the categories of modern thought.’⁸¹ She notes as highly significant the Cappadocians’ predication of personhood and not substance as the ultimate principle, observing that this development ‘superseded in many important respects classical Greek philosophy in which personhood was seen as something added to being.’⁸² Her survey of theories of divine and human personhood leads to the formulation of her own ideas on this topic.

In the first of three chapter sections, LaCugna draws on the ideas of modern thinkers.⁸³ She engages with Barth, Rahner and Zizioulas, as well as theologians in the fields of feminist theology, liberation theology and Christian ethics. Consistent with her views on the benefits of dialogue between theologians and philosophers,⁸⁴ she also refers to the ideas of Scottish philosopher John MacMurray. In two volumes, *The Self as Agent* and *Persons in Relation*, MacMurray proposes a view in which personal existence is constituted by relationship with other persons.⁸⁵ LaCugna contrasts Descartes’ ‘turn to the subject’ with MacMurray’s ‘turn to the other.’⁸⁶ The significance of this latter concept for a trinitarian theology of relation is that the emphasis is on relationship rather than individualism: ‘The focus on person as *the one who acts in relation to another* rejects the paradigm of the introspective, self-reflective

⁸¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 243. LaCugna discusses the problems associated with the use of the word ‘person’ in her early articles. See especially LaCugna, “Problems,” 332-35; LaCugna, “The Relational God,” 647; Catherine Mowry LaCugna, “Philosophers and Theologians,” 177-78; LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 200.

⁸² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 244.

⁸³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 250-88.

⁸⁴ LaCugna, “Philosophers and Theologians,” 169-181. While this article examines a particular aspect of trinitarian theology (the formula of God as three persons and one substance, as expressed by Augustine), LaCugna advocates more broadly-based dialogue between theologians and philosophers: ‘Theologians and philosophers have quite a bit to say to each other. Theologians can counterbalance discourse that tends towards the ahistorical with soteriological rootedness and historical conscientiousness. Philosophers can challenge theologians to be more exact in our formulations, and more consistent in our systemization of history, exegesis, doctrine and theology. The cumulative effect of a joint dialogue might even be the restoration of a doctrine that for too long has only been collecting dust on the shelves of church history.’ LaCugna, “Philosophers and Theologians,” 178-79.

⁸⁵ MacMurray delivered the Gilford Lectures, entitled “The Form of the Personal,” at the University of Glasgow in 1953-1954. The lectures were later published in two volumes: John MacMurray, *The Self as Agent* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957) and John MacMurray, *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber, 1970).

⁸⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 256.

person, and discredits the ideal of autonomy or self-sufficiency as the fullest realization of personhood.’⁸⁷

Given that MacMurray was not specifically addressing theological issues, LaCugna looks also to Zizioulas’ exploration of the implications for theology of the Cappadocian insight on personhood. The first major implication is that ‘God’s ultimate reality cannot be located in *substance* (what it is in itself), but only in *personhood*: what God is toward another.’⁸⁸ The second is that ‘love is constitutive of God’s being but as a predicate of person, not substance. Since love produces communion among persons, love causes God to be who God is.’⁸⁹ She quotes the following crucial concepts expressed by Zizioulas: ‘Thus love ceases to be a qualifying – i.e., secondary – property of being and becomes the supreme ontological predicate. ... the ontology of God is not subject to the necessity of substance. Love is identified with ontological freedom.’⁹⁰

LaCugna relies on this concept of freedom in her vision for a renewed relational ontology. She acknowledges that Zizioulas’ ideas on freedom and personhood are provocative, given the Western tendency to equate freedom with autonomy and self-possession, and explains Zizioulas’ means of distinguishing between human and divine personhood in the following passage:

The person is always seeking to go beyond himself or herself toward another, to escape from all necessity and boundedness, but the creature cannot escape being limited. Personhood cannot be fully realized as a human reality, thus ‘the authentic person, as absolute ontological freedom, must be “uncreated”, unbounded by any necessity, including its own existence.’⁹¹

LaCugna writes, ‘God is the only one whose ecstasis is without limit, whose perfect self-expression is also perfect conformity to self.’⁹²

⁸⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 259. LaCugna’s italics.

⁸⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 260.

⁸⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 261.

⁹⁰ John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004), 46, quoted in LaCugna, *God for Us*, 261.

⁹¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 261, quoting Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 43.

⁹² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 262.

The second section, 'Toward an Understanding of Persons in Communion,' consists of eight 'notes' (*notae*) of personhood. These notes summarise the insights which emerge through her survey of personhood in modern thought.⁹³ LaCugna opens the third section, 'Communion with the Living God through Christ in the Holy Spirit,'⁹⁴ by identifying the economy as the starting point for all 'speculation on the nature of God, on the meaning of existence, on how best to live the Christian faith.'⁹⁵ Her statement on the clarification of personhood is significant in that it draws attention to her *Christology* and *pneumatology* which (like the qualification she places on the term 'person' when referring to divine personhood) provides an important reference point to consider when addressing some of her more problematic statements. She writes, 'The clarification of personhood must always be referred to Jesus Christ, who is the communion of divine and human, and to the Holy Spirit who transfigures and deifies human beings, uniting all persons, divine and human, in communion.'⁹⁶

LaCugna's reference to Jesus as the 'communion of divine and human, "hypostatically" uniting two natures without separation, without mingling, without confusion (Chalcedon)'⁹⁷ attests to her understanding of the uniqueness of Christ. She acknowledges that in Christ, divine and human 'remain what they are; they are not combined into a *tertium quid*, but because of Jesus Christ they now literally "exist" entirely with reference to each other.'⁹⁸ For LaCugna, 'Jesus is what God is: infinite capacity for communion.'⁹⁹ She writes: 'Christian

⁹³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 288-92. The headings for the eight *notae* are as follows: (i) Persons are essentially interpersonal, intersubjective; (ii) A person is an ineffable, concrete, unique, and unrepeatable ecstasis of nature; (iii) The person is the foundation of a nature; (iv) The freedom of the deified human being consists in being free-for, free-toward others, poised in the balance between self-possession and other-orientation; (v) Persons are catholic in two respects; (vi) The achievement of personhood requires asceticism; (vii) Person is an exponential concept; (viii) Living as persons in communion, in right relationship, is the meaning of salvation and the ideal of Christian faith.

⁹⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 292-304.

⁹⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 292.

⁹⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 292. LaCugna discusses in turn, 'Jesus Christ: The Communion of Divine and Human,' 'The Holy Spirit: Uniting Persons in Communion,' and, finally, 'The Living God,' in which she reinterprets some of the classical attributes of God in the light of the insights on personhood she has gathered during the course of her chapter. This third section, which can be seen as the culmination of her reflections on personhood, will serve as the main source material for my engagement with Tanner's rule and, as such, will be examined in some detail in my final chapter.

⁹⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 296.

⁹⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 296.

⁹⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 296.

theology looks to the person of Jesus Christ to see both who God is and who we are. Jesus Christ is the visible icon of the invisible God (2 Cor. 4: 4), as well as the exemplar of human nature.’¹⁰⁰ The revelation of the divine essence in Christ is not considered by LaCugna to be ‘of an impersonal nature, an “in-itself”, but the highest, most perfect realization of personhood and communion.’¹⁰¹ She does not see the ‘unity’ of divine and human in Christ as a unity resulting from a univocal application of the word ‘person.’ Rather, this unity must be understood in the context of the perfect nature of the trinitarian self-expression toward a humanity unable to receive such perfection: ‘The mystery of [God’s unity with human nature in the person of Jesus Christ] continues in the ongoing and permanent presence of the risen Christ through the power of the Spirit.’¹⁰²

LaCugna’s understanding of theologies of grace, the Holy Spirit and deification also demonstrates an awareness of the Creator-creature distinction. ‘To be sure, ‘she writes, ‘the Spirit does not change the human nature into a divine nature, but if substance is seen to derive from personhood, then the Spirit brings about an ontological union of God and the creature.’¹⁰³ She refers, with approval, to Rahner, who

followed the Eastern theology of divinization, and coined the category of ‘quasi-formal’ causality to indicate that God’s grace is neither extrinsic to the creature (efficient causality) nor is the creature’s substance changed into something else (formal causality) but the creature is ‘made God’ according to the order of grace.¹⁰⁴

Her description of the Holy Spirit as ‘a bridge between God and the world’ must be interpreted alongside her quotation from Christian Duquoc, who recognizes the ‘otherness’ of God in relation to creature:

[The Spirit] makes the divine communion open to what is not divine. He is the indwelling of God where God is, in a sense, ‘outside Himself’. [The Spirit] is therefore called ‘love’. He is God’s ‘ecstasy’ directed towards [God’s] ‘other’, the creature.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 293. See also LaCugna, *God for Us*, 291.

¹⁰¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 246.

¹⁰² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 320. For LaCugna’s understanding of salvation through Christ, see *God for Us*, 249.

¹⁰³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 297.

¹⁰⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 317, n. 145, referring to Rahner, *The Trinity*, 34-38.

¹⁰⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 297, quoting Christian Duquoc, *Dieu différent: Essai sur la symbolique trinitaire* (Paris: Édition du Cerf, 1978), 121-22, translation in Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 148.

Substance and Personhood

Reference has been made in the paragraphs above to ‘God’s ultimate reality’ being ‘located in personhood rather than substance’¹⁰⁶ and to the divine essence of Christ (as being the most perfect realization of personhood)¹⁰⁷ contrasted with an impersonal nature or an ‘in-itself.’ While LaCugna draws directly on Zizioulas’ interpretation of the Cappadocian ‘achievement,’ she also stands in continuity with a more recent school of thought on the divine attributes. A brief overview of this tradition will provide some context for the evaluation of LaCugna’s more challenging ideas on personhood and will also, importantly, provide a foundation for the study of her notion of God as ‘immutably personal’ in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

In an essay on the doctrine of divine attributes, Holmes refers to the unfavourable reception of the negative, metaphysical, ‘Greek’ attributes in von Harnack’s ‘accounts of history that stressed the difference between Hebrew and Hellenistic mindsets.’¹⁰⁸ As noted in my previous chapter, twentieth century theologians continue to demonstrate a wariness of substance metaphysics. Applauding Zizioulas’ achievements, Gunton writes, for example, of his championing of ‘the centrality of particular persons, divine and human alike, against those theories of being, all too prevalent in Western thought, which submerge them in some great sea of substance.’¹⁰⁹

LaCugna, too, pits substance metaphysics against an ontology of relation, claiming that the ‘root of the nonsoteriological doctrine of God is its metaphysics of substance: the pursuit of what God is “*in se*,” what God is “in Godself” or “by Godself.”’¹¹⁰ Commentators have

¹⁰⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 260.

¹⁰⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 246.

¹⁰⁸ Stephen R. Holmes, “Divine Attributes,” in *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 64. For Holmes’ discussion of the ‘revisionist proposals’ of Isaac Dorner and P.T. Forsyth, see “Divine Attributes,” 55, and Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 191-94.

¹⁰⁹ Colin E. Gunton, “Persons and Particularity,” in *The Theology of John Zizioulas*, ed. Douglas H. Knight (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 97. See also Colin E. Gunton, *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 21-22. For similar views, see Christoph Schwöbel, *God: Action and Revelation* (Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1992), 46-61. Gunton notes that in his exposition of the attributes, ‘or what he preferred to call perfections, of God, Barth gave priority to what can be called the more clearly personal of them, in preference to those more abstractly metaphysical.’ Colin E. Gunton, “The Being and Attributes of God: Eberhard Jüngel’s Dispute with the Classical Philosophical Tradition,” in *Theology through the Theologians: Selected Essays 1972-1995* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 71. For Barth’s explanation of his choice of the term ‘perfections,’ see Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 322.

¹¹⁰ For negative references by LaCugna to substance metaphysics, see LaCugna, *God for Us*, 3; LaCugna, “Problems,” 324, 331; LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 16. LaCugna (translating from John of

questioned LaCugna, and some of her contemporaries, for giving such priority to an ontology of relation over substance metaphysics.¹¹¹ Indeed, some have gone so far as to draw parallels between LaCugna and Eunomius, due to her tendency to focus on one divine attribute to the exclusion of others.¹¹² Raith argues:

LaCugna attempts to make one characteristic (i.e. to-be-in-relation) *the* characteristic of divine being; this, however, is more akin to Eunomius than to the Cappadocians. In his opposition to the Cappadocians, Eunomius attempts to make one characteristic of God ('unbegottenness') *the* essential quality of being. ... LaCugna claims that the Cappadocians believe that 'by saying what God is according to relation one has said all that needs to be said, since relation (Father to Son) is the mode of God's being.'¹¹³

Raith is not troubled by LaCugna naming 'being-in-relation' as a divine attribute. What he finds problematic is her singling this attribute out as '*the* essential characteristic of God.' He insists that after noting this characteristic, LaCugna 'must go on to say that God is also immortal, invisible, impassible ... and the like.'¹¹⁴ Clearly a balanced approach is required, such that both relational and substance metaphysics are brought into theological discourse.¹¹⁵

Damascus' *Expositio Fidei Orthodoxae, Patrologiae cursus completis*, ed. J.P. Migne, Series Graeca (Paris, 1857-1866), 94,792C) lists the following divine attributes: 'God is without beginning, without end, eternal and everlasting, uncreate[d], unchangeable, invariable, simple, uncompound, incorporeal, invisible, impalpable, uncircumscribed, infinite, incognisable, indefinable, incomprehensible, good, just, maker of all things created, almighty, all-ruling, all-surveing.' LaCugna, *God for Us*, 317, n. 153. Holmes is justified in claiming that the impersonal, negative attributes 'have been jettisoned with as much alacrity as celebration by many recent theologians.' Holmes, "Divine Attributes," 63-64.

¹¹¹ See David Coffey, *Deus Trinitas: The Doctrine of the Triune God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 159, n. 29; Muller, "The Science of Theology," 326; Coakley, "'Persons' in the 'Social' Doctrine of the Trinity," 156.

¹¹² For further discussion on the nature of Eunomius' error, see Holmes, "Divine Attributes," 62-63.

¹¹³ Raith, "Resourcing the Fathers?," 278. Raith quotes LaCugna, *God for Us*, 59.

¹¹⁴ Raith, "Resourcing the Fathers?," 278. Raith's italics. John Thompson warns against modern attempts to 'encapsulate the Trinity in a brief formula like being in relation.' Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives*, 155. Molnar, too, insists that 'relationality does not define God.' Molnar, *Divine Freedom*, 126-27. In an extended critique of Zizioulas' ambivalence toward an ontology of substance, Elizabeth Groppe refers to André de Halleux, "Personnalisme ou essentialisme trinitaire chez les Pères cappadociens?: Une mauvaise controverse." *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 17 (1986): 265-92, who finds in Zizioulas' reading of the patristics 'a certain antipathy to the language of essence.' Groppe writes, 'De Halleux believes that Zizioulas overstates his case when he contrasts the Cappadocian ontology of person with a metaphysics of substance, for the Cappadocians use not only "person" (prosōpon, hypostasis) but also "substance" and "nature" (*ousia, physis*) in an ontological manner.' Groppe, "Creation *Ex Nihilo*," 488, n.25.

¹¹⁵ Both Gunton and Schwöbel do concede this point. See Gunton, *Act and Being*, 22; Schwöbel, *God: Action and Revelation*, 54-62.

Muller is correct in saying that a ‘purely relational approach in theology leaves the relation hanging, as it were, without grounding.’¹¹⁶

LaCugna’s Problematic Statements on Personhood

The term ‘mystery,’ used in relation to divine and human personhood, appears in many of LaCugna’s statements that are identified as problematic by critics. Concerns are most frequently raised by these commentators when this idea of mystery is linked with terms implying a union of human and divine persons, such as ‘communion,’ ‘interdependence,’ and ‘commingling.’ LaCugna writes, for example, ‘The economy of creation, salvation, and consummation is the place of encounter in which God and the creature exist together as one mystery of communion and interdependence.’¹¹⁷ Similarly, in locating the mystery of divine-human communion in the economy of redemption, she uses the term *perichōrēsis* in a way that could be considered to be lacking in precision, and a significant departure from traditional Christian usage:

The starting point in the economy of redemption, in contrast to the intradivine starting point, locates *perichōrēsis* not in God’s inner life but in the mystery of the one communion of all persons, divine as well as human. From this standpoint ‘the divine dance’ is indeed an apt image of persons in communion: not for an intradivine communion but for divine life as all creatures partake and literally exist in it.¹¹⁸

She does, however, acknowledge God’s gracious act of invitation to humanity, and thus alludes to the asymmetrical nature of the divine-human relationship: ‘Not through its own merit but through God’s election from all eternity (Eph 1:3-14), humanity has been made a partner in the divine dance.’¹¹⁹

I acknowledge that some of LaCugna’s claims about personhood are problematic. Her description of the Holy Spirit’s role as ‘incorporating us into the very life of God, into the

¹¹⁶ Muller, “The Science of Theology,” 326. See also William Norris Clarke, who writes, ‘if the substance, or *in-itself*, pole of being is dropped out, the unique interiority and privacy of the person are wiped out also and the person turns out to be an entirely extraverted bundle of relations, with no inner self to share with others.’ William Norris Clarke, *Person and Being* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1993), 19. For a convincing defence of metaphysics in the face of recent dissatisfaction with substantialist trinitarian formulations, see William P. Alston, “Substance and the Trinity,” in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 179-201.

¹¹⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 250.

¹¹⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 274.

¹¹⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 274.

mystery of *perichōrēsis*, the “to and fro” of being itself which exists in personhood,¹²⁰ adds little to our understanding of the divine-human relationship. An example of her questionable use of the term ‘commingling’ occurs in her final chapter, ‘Living Trinitarian Faith’:

Christian orthopraxis must correspond to what we believe to be true about God: that God is personal, that God is ecstatic and fecund love, that God’s very nature is to exist toward and for another. The mystery of existence is the mystery of the commingling of persons, divine and human, in a common life, within a common household.¹²¹

I consider her use of the word ‘commingling’ in this context to be unnecessarily provocative.¹²² Moreover, the image of a common household in which human and divine persons commingle does raise questions regarding divine freedom. In later chapters I will argue that critics Weinandy and Reid wrongly equate LaCugna’s idea of the *oikonomia* with creation, and, while I will justify my claims in those later chapters, I concede at this point that statements such as the one quoted above can be read to imply that the *oikonomia* is a ‘place’ or domain rather than God’s salvific plan.¹²³

Also controversial are some of the parallels LaCugna draws between the mystery of both human and divine personhood. She does little to distinguish Creator from creature in the following passage:

A person, divine or human, is by definition an ineffable mode of existence, an elusive presence, a unique expression of nature. We speak of a person revealing himself or herself to us. By that we do not chiefly mean learning facts about that person’s past or present but seeing with the ‘eyes of the heart’ who that person is, grasping through love and ongoing relationship his or her ineffable mystery. The more intimate our knowledge of another,

¹²⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 298.

¹²¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 383.

¹²² While LaCugna maintains that ‘the mysteries of [both] human personhood and communion have their origin and destiny in God’s personal existence’ she chooses, in another instance, the less controversial word, ‘intersect’ when referring to the relationship between the triune God and humanity: ‘The heart of *theologia*, as also of *oikonomia* is ... relationship, personhood, communion. The mysteries of human personhood and communion have their origin and destiny in God’s personal existence. The histories of divine and human personhood intersect in the economy that proceeds *a Patre ad Patrem*, through Christ in the unity of the Holy Spirit.’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 246.

¹²³ Other controversial statements by LaCugna include: ‘This common life of God and creature, lived out within a common dwelling place, is the subject matter of theology.’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 78; ‘Baptism means incorporation into the very life of God, which is indistinguishable from God’s life with every creature throughout time, past, present, and future. God’s very life, lived out by persons who love and exist together in communion, is what we experience in the economy of creation and salvation.’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 382.

the more we are drawn to that person's unique mystery, and the deeper that mystery becomes. The same is true of God.¹²⁴

Divine freedom may appear to be further compromised in LaCugna's claim that the 'life of God is not something that belongs to God alone. *Trinitarian life is also our life.*'¹²⁵ For LaCugna, personhood, 'specifically in the person of God the Father, is the modality of God's being God.' God the Father, understood as the cause of everything, including the Son and the Spirit, 'does not indicate priority in being, or time, or eminence, but refers to the fact that God is absolutely personal.'¹²⁶ As many of LaCugna's insights have been gleaned from Zizioulas, and indirectly (and possibly inaccurately) from the Cappadocians, it is important to be aware of her tendency, noted above, to dismiss a metaphysics of substance. This may be another case of LaCugna 'throwing out the baby with the bathwater.' An important question to be considered in the final chapter of this thesis is: What is meant by her expression 'immutably personal'? and: How does the word 'immutably' function in terms of our understanding of God as transcendent? While 'God as personal' is the central theme of this chapter section, the next will explore LaCugna's understanding of God creating out of love.

Theme 3: Creation *ex nihilo* and Creation *ex amore*

In Chapters 7 and 8 of *God for Us*, LaCugna provides an alternative to the immanent/economic Trinity model (Theme 1) and affirms and develops the idea of personhood as the supreme ontological divine predicate (Theme 2). In Chapter 9 she discusses, among other themes, some of the implications of both her model of the *oikonomia* and her relational ontology for a trinitarian understanding of the mystery of God's 'ongoing relationship with creation.'¹²⁷ This discussion includes a proposal for the recasting of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.

In her article, "Creation *ex nihilo* and *ex amore*," Groppe compares the approaches to the God-world relation of Zizioulas and LaCugna, examining, in turn, divine freedom and human freedom in their theologies.¹²⁸ Much of Groppe's discussion focuses on a section from

¹²⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 323-24.

¹²⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 228. LaCugna's italics.

¹²⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 245.

¹²⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 321.

¹²⁸ Groppe, "Creation *Ex Nihilo*," 463-96. Groppe argues that their work 'can contribute to the reconstruction of the meaning of freedom in our postmodern era, reinscribing freedom's effaced coin with the imprint of the love

Chapter 9 of *God for Us* entitled, ‘Ecstasy and Glory.’¹²⁹ She observes that although LaCugna differs from Zizioulas in her articulation of a framework for the reunification of *theologia* (the mystery of God) and *oikonomia* (God’s economy of creation and redemption), ‘it is precisely Zizioulas’ theology of freedom that LaCugna marshals in support of her argument for the simultaneous distinction and inseparability of *theologia* and *oikonomia*.’¹³⁰

Although LaCugna has drawn extensively on the writings of Zizioulas, he, as Groppe points out, has not published a response to her work.¹³¹ Groppe surmises, however, that given Zizioulas’ own reflection on the relationship of *theologia* and *oikonomia*, ‘he might object to LaCugna’s position,’ as Zizioulas considers ‘it is absolutely imperative that one prescind in some respects from reference to creation (part of the divine *oikonomia*) when speaking of the being of God (*theologia*).’¹³² The lengthy passage below by Zizioulas (quoted by Groppe) gives an indication of the importance he places on the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and on divine freedom.

It took the early Fathers (Irenaeus, Athanasius, etc.) a great deal of effort to break down this Greek monism which they thought - and rightly so - endangered the absolute ontological freedom of God, i.e. his transcendence. They produced the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* precisely in order to show that God existed *before* and *regardless* of the world, and thus that it is imperative to be able to refer to God without implicitly or explicitly referring at the same time to the world. ... If God is Trinity he must be so also outside the Economy. If he cannot be *known* as Trinity except in and through the Economy this should not lead us to construct our Trinitarian doctrine simply on the basis of the Economy.¹³³

of God.’ Groppe, “Creation *Ex Nihilo*,” 463. In the final part of the article, she identifies three dimensions of a theology of ontological freedom to which, she proposes, both theologians have contributed: origination, love and law.

¹²⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 350-56.

¹³⁰ Groppe, “Creation *Ex Nihilo*,” 471.

¹³¹ Groppe, “Creation *Ex Nihilo*,” 470.

¹³² Groppe, “Creation *Ex Nihilo*,” 470. Anatolios observes that LaCugna has been strongly influenced by Zizioulas, but states that ‘her conflation of God’s being with God’s relation to the world is not to be attributed to Zizioulas.’ Khaled Anatolios, “Personhood, Communion, and the Trinity in Some Patristic Texts ” in *The Holy Trinity in the Life of the Church*, ed. Khaled Anatolios (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 148, n. 3.

¹³³ John Zizioulas, “The Doctrine of God the Trinity Today: Suggestions for an Ecumenical Study,” in *The Forgotten Trinity*, ed. Alasdair I. C. Heron (London: BBC/CCBI, 1991), 23, quoted by Groppe, “Creation *Ex Nihilo*,” 471. Zizioulas’ italics.

LaCugna is aware of the need ‘not to collapse the “infinite qualitative distinction” between God and the world.’¹³⁴ Furthermore, she acknowledges that ‘Christians have been careful to emphasize that while the nature of God is to love in a way that issues forth in creation, still, creation is the result of divine freedom, not metaphysical necessity.’¹³⁵ In her relational ontology she *recasts* the traditional understanding of divine freedom in its carefully emphasised and vehemently guarded ‘infinite qualitative distinction.’ LaCugna’s stated awareness of issues surrounding divine freedom notwithstanding, the controversial nature of some of her statements cannot be ignored. She writes, for example:

Divine freedom is the freedom of persons who act out of love for the sake of communion. Creation is indeed the fruit of divine love and freedom. But to be the Creator, that is, to be in relation to creation as Creator, is not a relation added on to the divine essence, ancillary to God’s being. To Be God is to be the Creator of the world.¹³⁶

With some justification, Groppe imagines that ‘Zizioulas would see monism lurking here, and a violation of God’s freedom.’¹³⁷ How can one account for what seems to be a disparity between LaCugna’s awareness of the tenets of the Christian faith in terms of the God-world distinction and such claims that so inextricably connect God’s identity with the world?

Part of the answer appears to lie in LaCugna’s understanding of divine personhood. In her relational ontology, freedom should not be seen as a metaphysical constraint, but a freedom for and a freedom toward the other. She explores the notion of freedom in the light of God’s mystery, contrasting a vision of freedom congruent with her model of *oikonomia* and *theologia*, with one bounded by philosophical constraints, arguing that the

claim that all this is incidental to God, or that it need not have been so, is not mistaken because it offends human conceit but because it domesticates the mystery of God by restricting divine freedom to an *a priori* idea of what it means to be free.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 355.

¹³⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 355.

¹³⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 355.

¹³⁷ Groppe, “Creation *Ex Nihilo*,” 471.

¹³⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 169.

She proposes an alternative to the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* which better articulates her understanding of divine freedom: ‘While the world is the gracious result of divine freedom, God’s freedom means necessarily being who and what God is. From this standpoint the world is not created *ex nihilo* but *ex amore, ex condilectione*, that is out of divine love.’¹³⁹

Questions remain, however, even from one as supportive of her theology as Groppe who concedes that some of LaCugna’s statements on the ‘essential unity of *theologia* and *oikonomia*’¹⁴⁰ could be ‘read in a monistic manner if by “essential unity” one understands absolute identity.’¹⁴¹ Groppe proceeds to defend LaCugna, commenting that in her reading, ‘this is not precisely what LaCugna intends.’¹⁴²

Another important factor which may shed light on LaCugna’s approach is her treatment of the traditional divine attributes. As noted above, she is critical of the way such attributes have been used to portray God as autonomous and unrelated to creation:

Traditional philosophical attributes such as immutability and impassibility were predicated of God on the premise that perfection means self-sufficiency, complete independence of and indeterminacy by another. God’s absolute perfection was equated with God’s autonomy and non-reliance on creation.¹⁴³

In view of her model, in which *oikonomia* is the source for contemplation of divine and human relations, LaCugna questions a traditional application of the idea of ‘divine immutability’: ‘Taking refuge in an intratrinitarian self-communication that is altogether unrelated to creation as a way of upholding divine freedom, rests on questionable presuppositions about divine immutability in relation to divine freedom.’¹⁴⁴

She draws here on the Christian tradition whose key figures include Pseudo-Dionysius, Richard of St. Victor and Bonaventure. These theologians understand perfection as ‘goodness

¹³⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 355. The two concepts need not be mutually exclusive. See Michael Lodahl, “*Creatio Ex Amore!*” in *Theologies of Creation: Creatio Ex Nihilo and Its New Rivals*, ed. Thomas Jay Oord (New York: Routledge, 2015), 100.

¹⁴⁰ Groppe is referring in this instance to LaCugna, *God for Us*, 382.

¹⁴¹ Groppe, “*Creation Ex Nihilo*,” 491, n. 52.

¹⁴² Groppe, “*Creation Ex Nihilo*,” 491, n. 52. For a detailed discussion of Groppe’s and LaCugna’s respective treatment of the idea of ‘essential unity,’ see Chapter 5 of this thesis.

¹⁴³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 352.

¹⁴⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 168.

that is self-diffusive, not self-contained: *bonum diffusivum sui*.' In this tradition, God is considered perfect and the highest good, 'because God is the greatest plenitude which by God's very nature overflows, unites with another, consummates love with another.'¹⁴⁵

Groppe interprets LaCugna's response as suggesting that the 'apparent antimony between freedom and necessity is transcended in the mystery of love.'¹⁴⁶ Again suspicious of the idea of divine autonomy, LaCugna observes that some theologians 'are reluctant to associate eros with God, preferring to speak exclusively of *agapē* because *agapē* does not connote "need."¹⁴⁷ She looks to reframe the idea of need: 'When personhood is ultimate then Eros can be thought of as arising out of plenitude not need, because it is out of fullness, not emptiness that the lover wishes to give himself or herself to another.'¹⁴⁸ The 'deep yearning and desire for God we find inscribed in our hearts,' she writes, 'is more intelligible if that desire is rooted in the very nature of God, that is, if God, too, yearns for and desires another, not out of need or lack but out of plenitude of love.'¹⁴⁹

Groppe's Hermeneutical Key for Reading LaCugna

Groppe makes a connection between LaCugna's reference to giving out of plenitude rather than need and Denys Turner's analysis of *eros* in the mystical tradition: '[T]he language of *eros* is the language in which the transcendence of the dichotomy between necessity and freedom is achieved.'¹⁵⁰ Of great interest to my research is Groppe's suggestion (following

¹⁴⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 353.

¹⁴⁶ Groppe, "Creation *Ex Nihilo*," 490, n. 49.

¹⁴⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 352.

¹⁴⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 352. The inconsistency in the capitalisation of the word 'eros' is LaCugna's.

¹⁴⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 353.

¹⁵⁰ Denys Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 58-59, quoted in Groppe, "Creation *Ex Nihilo*," 490-91, n. 49. LaCugna's interest in themes of prayer, divine and human desire and trinitarian and feminist theology could suggest an affinity with the ideas of British theologian Sarah Coakley. Coakley's brief references to LaCugna's work, however, tend to highlight weaknesses rather than points of connection. See Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, 28, 301. For an invitation to Coakley (in a review of *Sexuality and the Self*) to engage with LaCugna on the relationship between *theologia* and *oikonomia*, on prayer and on the language of *perichoresis* and relationality, see Susan Abraham, "Praying the Trinity: Transforming Feminist Trinitarian Theologies," *Modern Theology* 30, no. 4 (2014): 583-85. Coakley does not specifically address LaCugna's ideas in her response, but nevertheless conveys that she is keen not to align her work too closely with LaCugna's. She writes, commendably in my opinion, 'Although I do hint in *GSS* at my main theoretical differences from various illustrious feminist forebears, I deliberately do not turn aside to indulge in hostile polemics against them.' Sarah Coakley, "Response to Reviewers of *God, Sexuality and the Self*," *Modern Theology* 30, no. 4 (2014): 597-98.

her acknowledgement that LaCugna may be vulnerable to charges of monism) that ‘a hermeneutical key to reading LaCugna is to approach her writing as a spiritual exercise, rather than as a series of propositional statements.’¹⁵¹ Her observation that LaCugna must be ‘interpreted in the light of the exploratory character of her speculations, which are more akin to a Bonaventuran *itinerarium* than a scholastic theological treatise,’¹⁵² is one to which I have sought to give due weight in my research. Indeed, it has led to much of what follows in the remainder of this chapter section and in Chapter 4.

While respecting the brilliance of classical speculative theologies, LaCugna observes that a theology centred on soteriology and doxology shifts the focus of trinitarian theology away from speculation on the ‘conundrum about simultaneous oneness and threeness, toward contemplation of God’s ecstatic self-expression in history and personhood.’¹⁵³ She observes that the writers of classical speculative theologies hold in reverence (just as she does) the mystery of God’s immanence as well as God’s transcendence:

Indeed, the contemplative theologians who produced [the classical speculative theologies] - Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, Richard of St. Victor, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Gregory Palamas - knew full well that the supreme mystery was not that God could ‘beget’ and ‘spirate’ *within* God’s eternal being. The mystery is that the begetting and spirating should spill over into history. That God would choose a ‘stiff-necked people’ as covenant partner (Exod. 4:10). That by taking on flesh, suffering and dying in Christ, God was ‘reconciling the world to Godself’ (2 Cor. 5:19). That God would dwell in our hearts, transforming us in the power of the Spirit, making us like unto God (2 Cor. 3:18). The mystery of God is indeed the *immanence*, the indwelling, of divine love, for which we were made as desired partners.¹⁵⁴

One of LaCugna’s aims in uniting *oikonomia* and *theologia* in trinitarian doctrine is to bring about a synthesis of a number of traditionally disparate fields of theology. She writes, ‘Understood as a way of rendering praise to God, trinitarian theology of God reconnects spirituality with theology, orthodoxy with orthopraxis, the contemplative with the

¹⁵¹ Groppe argues, as I do, that LaCugna’s axiom [the unity of *oikonomia* and *theologia*] needs to be ‘contextualized by the qualifications with which she guards against these theological pitfalls.’ Groppe, “Creation *Ex Nihilo*,” 472.

¹⁵² Groppe, “Creation *Ex Nihilo*,” 472.

¹⁵³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 367.

¹⁵⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 367. LaCugna’s italics.

speculative, apophatic with kataphatic, the pastoral with the academic.’¹⁵⁵ While not suggesting that LaCugna would want to closely align herself with Bonaventure’s philosophical world view, I consider it acceptable to draw a qualified parallel between the two theologians. Etienne Gilson defends medieval theologian Bonaventure against those who would dismiss *him* on account of the mystical nature of some of his writing:

The argument usually used to thrust St. Bonaventure outside the frontiers of the history of philosophy consists simply in dubbing him a mystic; and it is precisely to this argument that we appeal to bring him once more within that history. St. Bonaventure is essentially a mystic; but he is at the same time a philosopher, because he conceived the project of systematizing knowledge and being in terms of mysticism; and indeed he is a great philosopher because, like all great philosophers, he followed out his idea to its conclusion in a real synthesis.¹⁵⁶

As is the case with Bonaventure, the synthesis LaCugna achieves in *God for Us* should not be dismissed on the grounds that some of her writing is mystical or spiritual in nature. As Mary Catherine Hilkert observes,

LaCugna’s first degree was in philosophy and she insisted on the need for rigorous thinking, careful argumentation, and clarity of thought and expression. ... Yet she was equally clear that theology’s starting point and norm were located not in philosophical principles or adherence to strict logical coherence, but in fidelity to ‘God’s logic’ as disclosed in the history of salvation. ... LaCugna’s own descriptions of authentic theology stress that it is necessarily Spirit-animated, doxological, apophatic, and contemplative.¹⁵⁷

Groppe’s suggestion to approach LaCugna’s writing along the lines of a Bonaventurian *itinerarium*, rather than a scholastic theological treatise, opens up an interesting area of investigation. The ‘new area’ is hinted at in the close of LaCugna’s and McDonnell’s article, “Returning from ‘The Far Country.’” They confirm their respect for the ‘highly ordered account of elusive presence’¹⁵⁸ from the scholastic period, yet choose for themselves the path

¹⁵⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 368.

¹⁵⁶ Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, trans. Iltyd Trethowan and F. J. Sheed (London: Sheed & Ward, 1938), 485.

¹⁵⁷ Mary Catherine Hilkert, “The Vocation of the Theologian,” *Horizons* 27, no. 2 (2000): 341.

¹⁵⁸ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 215.

of soteriology and doxology: ‘Our itinerarium is not *in mentis Deum* but it is *itinerarium in mysterium salutis*. As such it is also *itinerarium doxologicum*.’¹⁵⁹

Conclusion

Many of the problematical aspects of LaCugna’s theology stem from her abiding concern that God’s relationship with the world and humanity has been portrayed in terms of distance and disinterest. This concern informs her views on the immanent Trinity, on the use of classical divine attributes such as immutability and, more broadly, on divine freedom. In response, she looks to recast the immanent-economic Trinity model, the function of divine attributes and, to some extent, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. This drive to reinterpret doctrine places her within the wider movement of trinitarian renewal in the late twentieth century, as has been noted in my Introduction.

The discussion of LaCugna’s theology to this point in the thesis places much of her work in a negative light. There is, however, much to be admired in what she achieved. As Stanley Grenz observes, ‘Few twentieth-century treatises in trinitarian theology have been more loudly applauded by supporters and more roundly criticized by detractors than *God for Us*.’¹⁶⁰ Alongside their criticisms, theologians acknowledge that LaCugna has no intention of arguing for a pantheistic world view. Paul Molnar (who completed his PhD at Fordham University in the same class as LaCugna¹⁶¹ and who is also possibly her most vocal critic) writes, ‘[t]o be fair, it is quite obvious that she believes that some talk of an immanent Trinity is legitimate – but only if it is nothing more than an analysis of the economy.’¹⁶² Clearly this is by no means an affirmation of LaCugna’s position. Not all critics’ views are as scathing as those of Molnar. Scott Jackson considers Molnar’s critique of LaCugna, Rahner and others to be ‘sometimes tendentious and overly harsh.’¹⁶³ Haydn Nelson acknowledges, as I do, that the language she employs on occasion is ‘certainly suggestive of [a collapse of the immanent

¹⁵⁹ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 215.

¹⁶⁰ Grenz, *Rediscovering*, 158. For acknowledgement of the value of her contribution, see Hryniuk, “Triumph or Defeat of the Trinity?,” 6; Imbelli, review of *God for Us*, 23; Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity*, 178; Marmion, “Trinity and Salvation,” 128; Ted Peters, review of *God for Us*, by Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *Christian Century* 110, no. 1 (1993): 24; Reid, “The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology,” 289; Olson and Hall, *The Trinity*, 105.

¹⁶¹ Sexton, “Introduction,” 18.

¹⁶² Molnar, *Divine Freedom*, 4.

¹⁶³ J. Scott Jackson, “Jesus Christ as the God Who Loves in Freedom: Election, Covenant and the Trinity in the Thought of Karl Barth” (Ph.D., The University of Chicago, 2006), 35.

into the economic Trinity], yet he recognises that she ‘does seek to nuance her position.’¹⁶⁴ Declan Marmion, too, states, ‘My sense is that there is some truth in [criticisms regarding the collapsing of God into the economy] even if a number of them are overstated and overlook subtleties in LaCugna’s discussion.’¹⁶⁵ In his insightful article, Benjamin Leslie observes that it is clear that ‘LaCugna does not wish to surrender a notion of God’s transcendence or otherness,’ and claims that ‘a careful reading reveals that she never actually surrenders the concept [of God *in se.*]’¹⁶⁶ It is important to emphasise that there are legitimate theological issues which led to LaCugna’s proposal of an alternative paradigm to the immanent-economic Trinity. In persisting in the use of the terms ‘economic’ and ‘immanent,’ or in assuming an exact equivalence of these terms with *oikonomia* and *theologia*, commentators continue to obscure the theological points LaCugna attempts to make.

Sanders, critical of much of LaCugna work, writes ‘whether she succeeded or not, LaCugna at least intended to safeguard God’s mystery and eternity.’¹⁶⁷ Like Molnar’s comment above, this is hardly a glowing tribute. Sanders follows his somewhat grudging statement with a quotation from LaCugna: “Trinitarian theology is not merely a summary of our experience of God,” she cautions, “It is this, but it is also a statement, however partial, about the mystery of God’s eternal being.”¹⁶⁸ In the chapters ahead, I ask the question, Does LaCugna succeed in safeguarding God’s freedom and mystery? I will begin to answer this question in the next chapter by exploring LaCugna’s use of language.

¹⁶⁴ Nelson, *Problem of the Providence of God*, 119.

¹⁶⁵ Marmion, “Trinity and Salvation,” 124.

¹⁶⁶ Leslie, “Does God Have a Life?,” 394.

¹⁶⁷ Fred Sanders, “The Trinity,” in *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 34.

¹⁶⁸ Sanders, “The Trinity,” 34, quoting LaCugna, *God for Us*, 4.

Chapter Three

Catherine LaCugna and Language

Introduction

One of the greatest challenges facing those who wish to speak of God, and of their relationship with God, is navigating the tension which exists between the inadequacy and the power of language. The immanent and economic Trinity model provides the conditions for theologians to speak of God's plan of salvation while at the same time safeguarding divine transcendence and freedom. However, LaCugna has expressed misgivings about this model. These misgivings arise primarily through what she considers to be the unhelpful emphasis on God's inner life, engendered by interpretations dating back to the development of the Nicene Creed. In the alternative she proposes, the mystery of the eternal God (*theologia*) is understood to be revealed, articulated and worshipped in the *oikonomia*. She describes *oikonomia* as 'the complete self-revelation of God to us in salvation history [which] by no means diminishes the Absolute Mystery of God.'¹

LaCugna's renewed doctrine of the Trinity 'calls into account all theologies of God, forces us to admit their partiality and inadequacy, and ... requires that every interpretation of who God is be measured against what is revealed of God in the economy.'² It is not surprising then, that her 'model' depicts not two Trinities (one 'positioned' above the other), but a single representation of the *oikonomia*, the Neo-platonic 'chiastic model of emanation and return, *exitus* and *reditus*.' The model expresses the 'one ecstatic movement of God outward by which all things originate from God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and all things are brought into union with God and returned to God.'³

The purpose of this chapter is to survey and evaluate the forms of language LaCugna uses to convey her soteriological and relational program, with particular reference to her treatment of divine transcendence.⁴ Central to this evaluation is her claim that that the economy of

¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 322.

² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 380

³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 223.

⁴ While I draw on LaCugna's early articles throughout the thesis, it is in this chapter that the material is most pertinent. With the exception of "Placing Some Trinitarian Locutions," each of the articles I have selected for

salvation is just as ineffable as is the eternal mystery of God (*theologia*).⁵ While these words, according to at least one theologian, encapsulate a brilliant insight,⁶ they are, for many, yet another example of LaCugna's unacceptable conflation of the immanent and economic Trinity. Like Kärkkäinen, I consider LaCugna's 'insight' to be astute and worthy of further exploration.⁷ If we are asked, as LaCugna asks her readers, to measure every interpretation of our understanding of God against that which is revealed in the economy, it follows that we should look to the biblical narrative in our efforts to find words for God.⁸ Whether we are attempting to evoke the intimacy of a 'walking God' or the grand sweep of salvation history, the Christian understanding of God as immanent *and* transcendent is, according to LaCugna, held within this heuristic framework. She considers the doctrine of the Trinity to be 'not a teaching about God but the doctrine that specifies the conditions under which we may speak of God.'⁹ While she concedes our inability to *adequately* speak of the mystery of God, she is aware of the consequences of moving too far along the apophatic path. She writes in this regard, '[o]veremphasizing the incomprehensibility of God can lead to a stubborn silence that

examination is cited in *God for Us*. While "Re-Conceiving the Trinity" and "Returning from 'The Far Country'" are referred to quite extensively, material from "Problems with a Trinitarian Reformulation," appears in two endnotes (*God for Us*, 45, n. 1, 237, n. 25) and "Philosophers and Theologians on the Trinity," in one endnote. (*God for Us*, 237, n. 25). As indicated in my Introduction, I consider my discussion on language to be significantly enriched by the inclusion of her rarely referenced work.

⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 230.

⁶ Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity*, 187.

⁷ LaCugna's 'insight' should not be regarded as an attempt to reduce or eliminate the notion of mystery from trinitarian doctrine, as Graham Buxton appears to have done when he writes, 'LaCugna's collapse of the Trinity *ad intra* into *ad extra* seeks to eliminate the notion of mystery altogether in a passionate attempt to articulate a practical doctrine with radical consequences for Christian life.' Graham Buxton, *The Trinity, Creation and Pastoral Ministry* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005), 146. He quotes a passage from *God for Us* in which LaCugna states that '*all theological reflection, whether conducted under the rubric of ethics, sacramental theology, ecclesiology, or spirituality, is potentially a mode of trinitarian theology.*' LaCugna, *God for Us*, 380. LaCugna's italics. Susannah Ticciati warns against the idea that 'the doctrine of the incarnation dispels the mystery of God.' It is not, she contends, 'the doctrine which tells us about how God steps out of his incomprehensibility into the light of revelation.' Susannah Ticciati, *A New Apophaticism: Augustine and the Redemption of Signs* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 28. Similarly, Placher states, 'It is through narratives of the humanity of Christ ... that we are given the way of talking about the God who remains unknown to us.' William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking About God Went Wrong* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, John Knox Press, 1996), 199.

⁸ For commentary on LaCugna's engagement with the biblical narrative, see Chapter 5 of this thesis.

⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 380. I suggest that the doctrine has both a didactic and a linguistic role. While LaCugna makes a distinction between trinitarian doctrine and a narration of biblical events, at the same time she acknowledges that the doctrine 'arises out of the salvation history in which God is believed to be revealed through Jesus. ... A trinitarian formulation is second-level (dogmatic) language which expresses that the one whose backside Moses was allowed to glimpse ... the one whom Mary Magdalene embraced, the one who today makes us into people of generosity and peace – that one is verily God.' LaCugna, "Problems," 330.

is nothing more than agnosticism.’¹⁰ Again, speaking in the context of her understanding of the unity of *oikonomia* and *theologia* and of the importance of Scripture, LaCugna warns that negative theology must never be detached from the narratives, symbols and images of biblical revelation.’¹¹

The idea of the doctrine of the Trinity as a grammar for correct speech about God, and LaCugna’s treatment of the classical divine attributes will be discussed in this chapter. Structurally, the chapter comprises six sections, each focusing on different aspects of language. In the first and second, I explore apophatic and analogical language respectively, locating these forms within LaCugna’s trinitarian vision. In the third and fourth, I examine the concepts of metaphor and model. The fifth is an extended exposition of Ramsey’s notion of qualified models,¹² and the final section has doxological language as its focus. LaCugna names doxology or adoration as ‘[u]ltimately, the only appropriate response to the mystery of God revealed in the economy.’¹³ A study of her use of this form of speech offers important insights into her capacity to uphold the Christian concept of divine transcendence.

Apophaticism

LaCugna places God’s relationship with humanity, and with the world, at the centre of her discussion of divine mystery. ‘The theologian,’ she writes, ‘contemplates and speculates about the ineffable mystery of God through the ineffable mystery of the economy,¹⁴ and engages with God ‘silently as well as expressively.’¹⁵ She turns to apophaticism to speak of this God who is ‘for us’:

The absolute mystery of the God for whom to be God is to be irrevocably bound to us in covenantal love, far outstrips the power of any language we might use to indicate this mystery. And yet this is precisely what trinitarian

¹⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 331.

¹¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 331.

¹² While this detailed examination of Ramsey’s theory (and examples) of the qualified model is integrated with what precedes and follows it within this chapter, its full relevance becomes apparent in the final chapter of this thesis. In the current chapter, I introduce features of the theological model which will inform my discussion of LaCugna’s notion of personhood in Chapter 6.

¹³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 321.

¹⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 366.

¹⁵ LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 22.

theology attempts to do: it paraphrases with endless variety the central statement of faith that the one God is love itself. (I Jn 4)¹⁶

Maintaining that the Christian understanding of divine freedom and transcendence is not compromised in her recasting of the immanent/economic model, she explores forms of speech appropriate to the task of articulating the human experience of the triune God. Her proposal entails a broadening of the traditional understanding of apophaticism, in which negative divine attributes, such as immutability and impassibility, are predicated of God's being, apart, as it were, from creation.

LaCugna does recognise that the practice of contemplation drawing on the divine attributes holds a time-honoured place within the Christian apophatic tradition. While she expresses some ambivalence about this approach, she does not entirely dismiss the practice. She acknowledges that words such as 'simple' or 'omnipotent' function not so much 'to provide positive content about God's essence as it is in itself ... [but to] communicate how far beyond human concepts God's essence is.'¹⁷ Attributes such as incomprehensible, infinite, and impassible function, LaCugna explains, as 'terms of apophasis,' in that 'they contain the denial that God is like the creature.'¹⁸ Her concern lies, however, in the potential for God's *essence* to become the prime focus of trinitarian discourse. Theology, she warns 'would be nothing but agnosticism if it denied real knowledge of God, if, in other words, it denied or bypassed the economy.'¹⁹ In calling for 'a positive incorporation of the spirit of apophasis,'²⁰ LaCugna offers an irenic contribution to the debate on substance metaphysics and relational

¹⁶ LaCugna, "Problems," 329.

¹⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 330.

¹⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 332. For the apophatic dimensions of Thomas Aquinas' approach to knowledge about God, LaCugna refers the reader to David B. Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1979) and to Victor White, *God the Unknown and Other Essays* (New York, Harper, 1956). LaCugna, *God for Us*, 370, n. 24.

¹⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 332. My italics.

²⁰ LaCugna, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity," 20. LaCugna considers both Greek and Latin traditions to be in agreement that 'the essence of God is unknowable in itself,' but associates the Greek tradition with the method of apophasis and the Latin with the method of analogy. She describes apophasis (ἀπόφασις, denial of speech) or negative theology, as the affirmation that God altogether transcends human categories and concepts, and kataphasis (κατάφασις, affirmation) or positive theology, as the way of affirmation. She adds, 'Kataphatic theology proceeds on the basis that God is the origin of creation and therefore that God can be named, even if only inadequately, on the basis of the creature.' LaCugna, *God for Us*, 325.

ontology discussed in my previous chapter.²¹ The idea of a ‘combination of negation and affirmation’ is beautifully expressed when she writes, ‘a theology of God must be both silent and forthcoming, just as God is both silent and utters a Word.’²²

LaCugna brings together the roles of apophatic language in theological discourse and her ‘insight’ regarding the economy and the eternal mystery of God, in a number of distinct yet related ways. Firstly, she closely associates a human response of inadequacy (including the failure of speech) with the experience of salvation itself. She writes, ‘the experience of salvation always entails some recognition of one’s inadequacy before God, and therefore one sees the appropriateness of silence before God’s ever greater reality.’²³ Secondly, she classifies the words ‘relation,’ ‘communion’ and ‘person’ as terms of apophasis. These words, she explains, ‘point to what God is in relation to another, not what God is “in itself.”’²⁴ Closely linked with this idea, is her contention that the negative divine attributes function in trinitarian theology more effectively when predicated not of God’s being-in-itself, but of personhood. Contrary to her more conciliatory and accommodating statements, however, she claims that the *only* option in responding to Christian theism is to look beyond a metaphysics of substance and ‘to start afresh from its original basis in the experience of being saved by God, through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.’²⁵ An assertion such as this serves to highlight LaCugna’s concerns about the traditional use of the negative divine attributes and her perception that this contributes to the portrayal of God as remote and

²¹ She suggests that ‘we need a theological doctrine of God which is able to conjoin the insight of negative theology ... with the urge of the theological *ratio* and *explicatio* which feel licensed actively to think and speak of God, and which produce content-statements about God.’ LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 20. Placher provides another perspective on the need for a balance between apophaticism and content statements, when he observes, ‘we cannot climb to heaven on a pile of negatives and paradoxes. ... God has come to us, and, when that happens and we manage to notice, we will find all our intellectual, moral, and social orders mightily upset.’ Placher, *Domestication of Transcendence*, 17.

²² LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 20. See also LaCugna’s and McDonnell’s statement on apophatic and kataphatic language in trinitarian theology: ‘The unknowing of God indicates that we are closest to real knowledge of God. This is a persistent and profound theme in theology and must be as much a part of descriptive trinitarian theologies of God as it is of the mystical tradition.’ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 200; LaCugna, *God for Us*, 300.

²³ LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 19.

²⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 332.

²⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 3.

isolated from the world. However, so sweeping a claim also draws scholarly attention away from her more nuanced contributions.²⁶

Analogy

Analogy is used in theological language as a means of maintaining the ontological distinction between God and creature.²⁷ LaCugna identifies the method of analogy as the preferred means of affirmation for western theologians during the medieval period. She describes it as '[o]ne of the most venerable – and also one of the most inveighed against – traditions in theology,' and as one that 'proposes to move the user from known to unknown.'²⁸ Analogy is a comparison of a proportion: A is to B as C is to D. The example she provides, 'oboe is to musical instrument as lentil is to legume,' shows that the analogy works 'because of both a similarity (the comparison) and a dissimilarity (an oboe is not a lentil.)'²⁹ Her explanation of analogy as seeking the middle ground between univocation and equivocation³⁰ (and her commentary on Thomas Aquinas' understanding of analogy in regard to the Creator-creature distinction) demonstrates her awareness of the traditional function of analogical language in

²⁶ For a nuanced approach to apophatic language and the Trinity, with particular reference to the economy of salvation, see Karen Kilby, "Is an Apophatic Trinitarianism Possible?," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12, no. 1 (2010): 65-77. For discussion on the integration of biblical and apophatic language, see Christoph Schwöbel, "Where Do We Stand in Trinitarian Theology?: Resources, Revisions, and Reappraisals," in *Recent Developments in Trinitarian Theology: An International Symposium*, ed. Marc Vial and Christophe Chalamet (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2014), 70-71.

²⁷ Pannenberg writes of the role of analogy in the preservation of this distinction: 'It is true that the divine transcendence was not alien to the scholastic doctrine of analogy, which in fact was developed in the thirteenth century precisely in order to protect the otherness of God over against the world. At the very beginning of its development there stands the formulation of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 that there can be no similarity between God and creature which is not surrounded by a greater dissimilarity.' Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Analogy and Doxology," in *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1970), 221. He adds in a footnote: 'The original intention of this formula consists in the denial of the attempt of Gilbert of La Porrée to understand the Trinitarian unity according to the analogy of the union of believers with Christ.' Pannenberg, "Analogy and Doxology," 221, n. 14. Robert Masson observes that even this 1215 formulation can 'easily be misunderstood to require a hidden univocal core of meaning : some similarity even if greater dissimilarity.' Robert L. Masson, "The Force of Analogy," *Anglican Theological Review* 87, no. 3 (2005): 473-74.

²⁸ LaCugna briefly discusses the disapproval afforded the *analogia entis* by Lutheran theologians such as Pannenberg and Jüngel. LaCugna, "Placing," 18.

²⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 330.

³⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 330. LaCugna refers the reader to Aquinas' 'classic statement of analogical predication: ... "Analogy lies between univocal and equivocal predication.'" LaCugna, *God for Us*, 370, n. 23. Aquinas writes, 'This [analogical] way of using words lies somewhere between pure equivocation and simple univocity, for the word is used neither in the same sense, as with univocal usage, nor in a totally different sense, as with equivocation.' St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia, question 13, article 5, (Cambridge: Blackfriars, 1964-81). Subsequent references to this work will take the form *ST I*, 13, 5.

safeguarding divine transcendence.³¹ Brian Davies helpfully articulates the distinction between apophaticism and analogy with reference to the God-world relation, and to Thomas Aquinas, as follows:

Thomas' treatment of analogy preserves the proper relationship between God and creation. God is not so altogether transcendent to creation that nothing can be said of God, nor is God defined or contained by creaturely concepts. This combination of affirmation and negation is the Latin version of apophatic theology, distinct from a purely negative theology which would deny that God is knowable through the created order.³²

Given the criticism to which LaCugna is subjected for her univocal use of the word 'person,' it is important to note that she stresses, in "Re-Conceiving the Trinity," that univocation is entirely inappropriate in theological speech. She states that it 'is perfectly clear that a theology which would speak univocally or literally about God's being would run contrary to the whole of the biblical and patristic view of God as well as violate the most basic precepts of all theology and mystical experience.'³³ She suggests the judicious use of analogy as one method of honouring the biblical and patristic view of God, warning also against its uncritical use, for the risk such use poses to 'the distinction between God and God with us.'³⁴ Further emphasising the limitations of analogical language, she concedes that all analogies for the Christian understanding of God as '*with us and for us as love*' will be 'obscure and inadequate.'³⁵

Addressing the benefits of drawing upon a variety of linguistic devices, LaCugna advises that studying analogy, while useful, 'is not a sufficient way to discover the range of usages on

³¹ Discussing the notion of analogy, LaCugna writes, 'Although God and the creature are ontologically distinct, creation in some way resembles God. God is unknowable *in se*, but theology may nevertheless speak about the unknowable God.' LaCugna, *God for Us*, 330.

³² Brian Davies, "Aquinas on What God Is Not," in *Thomas Aquinas: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 228.

³³ LaCugna, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity," 19.

³⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 331. Gerald O'Collins addresses the tension between the inability to speak of God and the desire to do so when he writes, 'We should be properly humble and negative in our theologizing, remembering the infinite differences and acknowledging that here, if anywhere, all analogies end in apophatic silence.' He continues, 'That said, what are some analogies and images that are available?' He discusses a number of trinitarian analogies for the Trinity, including examples from Irenaeus, Augustine, Richard of St. Victor, G.L. Prestige, Martin Buber and Karl Jung. Gerald O'Collins, *The Tripersonal God: Understanding and Interpreting the Trinity*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 2014), 192-201.

³⁵ LaCugna, "Problems," 329. LaCugna's italics.

which theology relies.’³⁶ She views ‘analogy’ as the umbrella of language. ‘What is true of analogy,’ she contends, ‘will be true of other types of language, namely that they are indirect, and that we stand to learn about the referent by examining our usage.’³⁷ The discussion in this chapter now turns to metaphor and model, two of the most powerful tools at the disposal of the theologian attempting to speak of God.

Metaphor

Metaphor is pervasive in religious language. Indeed, as Lakoff and Johnson observe, even our ‘ordinarily conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphoric in nature.’³⁸ Despite its frequent use in common speech, the actual term ‘metaphor’ is notoriously difficult to define. Janet Martin Soskice provides a broad working definition as ‘that figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another.’³⁹ LaCugna’s definition includes ‘seeing one thing as another thing (A is B), the lesser-known in terms of the better-known.’⁴⁰ The fact that a metaphor is a *form of language* is often overlooked. Soskice points out that a metaphor is not an “act” of employing symbolic relations ... or a transfer of meaning,⁴¹ nor is it a physical object. The ‘daffodil,’ for example, is not a metaphor in itself as it is not linguistic. Rather, it can be argued that ‘the daffodil is a symbol of rebirth or that it provides an analogy for rebirth, since neither the category of symbol or of analogy is strictly linguistic.’⁴² Like Soskice, LaCugna alludes to the linguistic nature of metaphor, and, as noted above, describes a narrowing in the field of language from analogy, through symbol, to metaphor.⁴³ Analogy and symbol address

³⁶ LaCugna, “Placing,” 19.

³⁷ LaCugna, “Placing,” 19.

³⁸ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 3, quoted in J. Barrington Bates, “A Riotous Mixture of Phrases: Ian Ramsey’s Assertion of the Impropriety of Religious Language, the Need for This In Liturgical Texts, and How One Contemporary Rite Fails to Be Odd Enough,” *Sewanee Theological Review* 45, no. 4 (2002): 448.

³⁹ Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 15.

⁴⁰ LaCugna, “Placing,” 21.

⁴¹ Soskice, *Metaphor*, 16.

⁴² Soskice, *Metaphor*, 17.

⁴³ LaCugna, “Placing,” 20.

the way 'language bridges meaning and reality, thinking and being, user and world.' With metaphor, 'ontology recedes as we look at language itself.'⁴⁴

Given the difficulty in defining metaphor and the many issues associated with theological speech of all types, it is not surprising that metaphors are, at times, used inappropriately to speak of God. Thus, reference to 'mere metaphor' and comments such as: 'It's only a metaphor' can be problematic. Speaking of God through a device interpreted as 'only a metaphor' diminishes the power of the metaphor to convey something of the 'lesser known' reality.⁴⁵

LaCugna writes of the care which must be taken when using and interpreting metaphor. Firstly she notes McFague's drawing of attention to their 'is - and is not-' character:

The statement, 'This is my body', implies a silent, 'and is not', which is meant to rescue the assertion from the idolatry of literalism. The metaphor embodies a permanent tension which a simile surrenders. Seeing a thread of similarity among dissimilars entails not forgetting the persisting dissimilarity. For religious language this is particularly important. If the tension of the metaphor is resolved, a kind of literalism easily results.⁴⁶

When LaCugna warns that the 'thread of similarity' may be 'a fragile and thin one' which 'easily will tear if made to behave like twine, bearing the weight of dissimilars made into similars,'⁴⁷ she, like McFague, stresses the importance of the implied and silent 'and is not.' She examines the New Testament metaphor of divine fatherhood. In the working out of the

⁴⁴ LaCugna writes, quoting Ricoeur, 'metaphor "is a free invention of discourse" while "symbol is bound to the cosmos."' LaCugna, "Placing," 20. See Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 54.

⁴⁵ Bates, "Riotous Mixture of Phrases," 448. Bates' italics. Bates is referring to Brian Wren who writes, 'If I am criticized for using sexist or racist talk, or for speaking of God in mainly male language and imagery, I can reply, as different Christians do, that "I mean what I say," "I didn't mean that," "I didn't realize what I was saying," or "It's only a metaphor."' Brian Wren, *What Language Should I Borrow?: God-Talk in Worship: A Male Response to Feminist Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 64.

⁴⁶ LaCugna, "Placing," 21. Soskice questions McFague's understanding of metaphor in view of McFague's interpretation of Ricoeur's suggestion that the tension of a metaphor is ontological. Soskice writes, 'The most obvious reading of [Ricoeur's] remarks about redescription and ontological tension is a restatement of the unsatisfactory (A is a B) "two subjects" view that [Soskice has] criticized in Max Black, thus "Man is a wolf" and "Man is not a wolf." ... Whether or not Ricoeur intends his remarks this way, his discussion of the metaphorical "is" and "is not" has been so understood by some writers like Sallie McFague who have been influenced by him.' Soskice, *Metaphor*, 89. Of Max Black, Soskice writes, '... there is an unhelpful tendency for philosophers discussing metaphor to confine their examples to the form "x is a y" ... which suggests not only that, grammatically, metaphors are assertions but also that the metaphorical focus is always in the grammatical predicate.' Soskice, *Metaphor*, 19.

⁴⁷ LaCugna, "Placing," 26.

relationship of Jesus to God in the early church, LaCugna explains, the metaphor of paternity became an analogy of the form a:b :: c:d. ‘Thus: “God is to Jesus as fathers are to sons.”’⁴⁸

LaCugna continues:

Then divine fatherhood is carefully qualified: even though earthly fathers generate sons by sexual procreation, and certainly not without women, and even though fathers antecede their sons, these normal entailments of fatherhood are said not to apply to God.⁴⁹

Theologians need to be attentive not only to maintaining the tension inherent in metaphors, but also mindful of their theological purpose. She asks two questions in this regard: ‘How is metaphor connected with theology and with the doctrine of the trinity? Further, what hermeneutical insight is gained by analysing metaphor?’⁵⁰ Her use of the ‘walking God’ metaphor will be examined in Chapter 5 with reference to its linguistic possibilities and dangers.

Model

LaCugna writes most prolifically on the ‘theological model’ in her early journal articles, particularly, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” “Placing Some Trinitarian Locutions,” and the article co-written with Killian McDonnell, “Returning from ‘The Far Country.’”

Contemporary models of the *immanent* Trinity are the initial focus of attention in “Re-Conceiving the Trinity.”⁵¹ Evident also in these early pages is LaCugna’s call for a soteriological approach to the modelling of the doctrine of the Trinity. She introduces model

⁴⁸ LaCugna, “Philosophers and Theologians,” 176.

⁴⁹ LaCugna, “Philosophers and Theologians,” 176. Referring to Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 159, LaCugna notes his attribution of ‘Arius’ problem to his inability to realize that words like Father and Son provided only models of God’s relationship to Jesus.’ LaCugna, “Philosophers and Theologians,” 180, n. 29. LaCugna concludes: ‘In doctrinal statements about Father and Son, the church is declaring that God may be thought of as the Father of Jesus, and Jesus may be thought of as God’s Son, in the sense that Fathers and Sons share the same nature. A word like “begetting” thus becomes stripped of its ordinary biological connotations.’ LaCugna, “Philosophers and Theologians,” 176.

⁵⁰ LaCugna, “Placing,” 20-21.

⁵¹ LaCugna notes the ‘polite neglect’ the doctrine of the Trinity has endured in most contemporary works, though cites several recent attempts to ‘revise the “models” or analogies of the immanent trinity.’ LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 1. She lists several new models of trinitarian relations and each model’s chief proponent: ‘interpersonal (H. Muhlen); society of persons (J. Bracken); processive relations of divine becoming (L. Ford); temporal unsurpassibility (R. Jenson); semiotic relations (G. Tavard); eschatological consummation (J. Moltmann).’ She sees merit in the emergence of new models which recast ‘archaic terms (e.g., hypostasis, subsistent relation) along with their accompanying metaphysics.’ LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 2.

theory to address issues surrounding the fear of ‘a *deus absconditus* beyond the *deus revelatus*’⁵² and the misleading concept of ‘two Trinities.’

LaCugna defines a model as ‘a sustained, systematic, relatively permanent metaphor.’⁵³ It is ‘a heuristic device which enables us to think and talk about a complex reality that cannot be directly observed (e.g. light).’⁵⁴ The terms, ‘metaphor’ and ‘model’ are often used interchangeably. When differences are observed, they tend to be ones of degree and not of kind.⁵⁵ While metaphor and model are closely related, one point of difference is that the former is always a ‘figure of speech’; the latter, may be linguistic in nature, but may also take the form of an object, as in the case of a miniature model of a train or boat. The two are linked in that ‘[m]etaphors arise when we speak on the basis of models.’⁵⁶ Soskice gives the example of a computer as a (non-linguistic) model for the brain. By considering the computer a model in this context, we may speak metaphorically when referring to neural ‘programming,’ ‘input,’ and ‘feedback.’ Thus, ‘the intelligibility of these terms depends, initially at least, on their being related to this model of the brain.’⁵⁷ A second point of difference lies in the distinction between a model as *regarding* one thing or state of affairs *in terms* of another, and metaphor as *speaking* of one thing or state of affairs in language *suggestive* of another.⁵⁸ Soskice’s use of the term ‘frame’ as a way of clarifying the metaphor/model distinction is a helpful one:

In theology, if we use the concept of fatherhood as a frame on which to develop our understanding of God, then ‘fatherhood’ is the model. But then if we go on to speak of God’s loving concern for his children, we are speaking metaphorically on the basis of the fatherhood model. Talk based on models will be metaphorical, so model and metaphor, though different categories and not to be – as frequently they are by theologians – equated, are closely linked; the latter is what we have when we speak on the basis of the former.⁵⁹

⁵² LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 12.

⁵³ LaCugna, “Placing,” 30.

⁵⁴ LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 12.

⁵⁵ Soskice, *Metaphor*, 55.

⁵⁶ Soskice, *Metaphor*, 101.

⁵⁷ Soskice, *Metaphor*, 101-02.

⁵⁸ Soskice, *Metaphor*, 50-51.

⁵⁹ Soskice, *Metaphor*, 55.

Applying this distinction to my selected model and metaphor, LaCugna's re-conception of the doctrine of the Trinity as *oikonomia* and *theologia* (one state of affairs) is presented in terms of the Neo-platonic model of emanation and return (another state of affairs). This model reframes the doctrine in a way that emphasises *oikonomia* as the entry point of trinitarian reflection. Within this framework, trinitarian discourse is to be grounded in the economy of salvation. The 'walking God' metaphor functions, in this context, as a way of conveying 'God's nearness to us in Christ.'⁶⁰

Ian Ramsey describes a 'model' as a 'situation with which we are all familiar, and which can be used for reaching another situation with which we are not so familiar.'⁶¹ He alerts his readers to the phenomenon of 'shuttlecock theology.' Surveys of the developments of Christology and trinitarian doctrine reveal a tendency for heretics to 'run some model or other – sometimes a highly sophisticated model – to death, in a passionate desire to understand.'⁶² When opponents come forward with a counter model, and with equal or greater passion, the result is sadly another heresy. He points out here that, rather than becoming sceptical, theologians need to be aware of the limitations of models:

The struggle to understand God can never come to a satisfactory end; the language game can never be completed. Broadly speaking, what orthodoxy did was to support the winner of every heat. Orthodoxy aimed at having every model, and it pressed each model into such service as it could give. To press any model was sure, however, to make evident, sooner or later, its inadequacy.⁶³

Examples of this adversarial approach to theology are not difficult to find. The notion of shuttlecock theology is evident in at least two cases central to my thesis. Rahner's Rule is surely an example of a model which has been 'run ... to death, in a passionate desire to understand.'⁶⁴ Rahner's primary motivation in devising the rule was soteriological and yet

⁶⁰ LaCugna and McDonnell, "Far Country," 199, n. 18.

⁶¹ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 61.

⁶² Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 170.

⁶³ Ramsey reiterates elsewhere that models provide only partial insight into divine mystery: 'It is to models that we must look when we want to be articulate about the mystery to which with the qualifiers they point, which with the qualifiers they enable us to reach. But the fact that we have but models which never exhaust the mystery, models which inevitably provide only partial understandings, means that sooner or later, inferences from those models become precarious. We then need to balance one model with its associated context against another model with its associated context.' Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 170.

⁶⁴ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 170.

‘divine freedom’ has become the focus for so many commentators: the ‘radicalizers’ pulling it away from the perception of the existence of two Trinities and the ‘restricters’ rescuing it from the scourge of pantheism. LaCugna may be seen as an ‘opponent’ coming forward with a counter proposal, returned with ‘equal or greater passion.’ (This is not entirely accurate as her model draws on and modifies Rahner’s rather than rejecting it.) While LaCugna’s passion for her cause may have resulted in a small number of insufficiently nuanced statements, critical reaction to her proposal can equally be considered an overreaction – the shuttlecock is ‘smashed’ over the net once again. Surely there is room for more than one model in trinitarian discourse, each possessing strengths and limitations.

In exploring the model of ‘presence’ in *Models of Divine Activity*, Ramsey warns of the dangers of idolatry, should God’s presence be considered to *be* the ‘presence of a fire or a cloud, or a person, the presence of some locatable human being or state of affairs.’⁶⁵ This approach, firstly, gives the models the ‘status and existence of God’⁶⁶ and, secondly, ‘disastrously takes the model as a substitute picture of God.’⁶⁷ Clearly, LaCugna sees the trinitarian model of God-in-relation not as ‘the equivalent of God’s being,’ but as the ‘appropriate framework for explicating the Christian’s experience of salvation by God through Jesus and their Spirit.’⁶⁸

Given LaCugna’s fears that God may be perceived as ‘unrelated’ to creation and her argument that aspects of the doctrine of the immanent Trinity contribute to this perception, it is unsurprising that, even in one of her early articles, she draws attention to Ian Ramsey’s warning to be cautious ‘of talking about God in straightforward language.’ Ramsey advises: ‘Let us never talk as if we had privileged access to the diaries of God’s private life, or expert insight into his descriptive psychology so that we can say quite cheerfully why God did what, when and where.’⁶⁹ Acknowledging a ‘kinship’ with the care expressed in Ramsey’s statement, LaCugna looks to ‘develop a connection between trinitarian theology and the

⁶⁵ Ramsey, *Models*, 36.

⁶⁶ Ramsey, *Models*, 36.

⁶⁷ Ramsey, *Models*, 37.

⁶⁸ LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 14.

⁶⁹ LaCugna, “Placing,” 17, quoting Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 90.

hermeneutics of indirection.⁷⁰ She suggests that analogical, metaphorical, and conceptual language may be brought *together* by the use of models, acknowledging that models share many of the characteristics of metaphor, including indirection, open-endedness and relativity (non-exclusivity).⁷¹ Taking a strong apophatic stance, she notes, ‘God cannot be spoken of except indirectly. This rule is the precondition of theology, as well perhaps as its hardest lesson.’⁷² Is LaCugna too cautious here? Quoting Walter Bowie, she writes, ‘The trinitarian model of God will have, as W. Bowie says, “the authority of the road sign that says to us, ‘in this direction is the way to God’; but no language or name upon the sign can presume to be a final indication of the inner life of the infinite One to whom it points.”’⁷³ This highlights, once again, LaCugna’s reluctance to speak in the language of the immanent Trinity.

LaCugna’s emphasis on the notion of ‘God as relational’ echoes McFague’s in her writing on theological models. McFague identifies the ‘overarching’ religious model as ‘God in relation.’⁷⁴ While for LaCugna, this model ‘forms the outer limit of theological discourse,’⁷⁵ it does not follow that she dismisses models which consider God independent of creation. When LaCugna and McDonnell provide examples of such models, they simply look to emphasise the relational aspects. They describe, for example, the economic-immanent scheme as ‘a model for the divine-human relationship as well as for our knowledge of God,’⁷⁶

⁷⁰ LaCugna, “Placing,” 17.

⁷¹ LaCugna, “Placing,” 30.

⁷² LaCugna, “Placing,” 23.

⁷³ LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 14, quoting Walter Russell Bowie, *Jesus and the Trinity* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), 134.

⁷⁴ McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 27. LaCugna writes, ‘The theologian who considers his or her work in theology to be largely that of constructing models of relationality rather than explicating God’s “being” as such will, it seems to me, wrestle differently with various trinitarian issues.’ LaCugna, “Placing,” 32. McFague expresses this preference in the use of models for ‘relation’ over ‘being’: ‘... the emphasis on *modelling relationships* rather than *defining natures* frees theology to entertain, interpret, and criticize many different models, some explicit but not dominant within the Christian tradition, as well as others that have not been part of the tradition.’ McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 129. McFague’s italics.

⁷⁵ LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 13.

⁷⁶ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 203.

and the doctrine of ‘creation *ex nihilo*’ as ‘a model which summarizes the relationship between God and the world.’⁷⁷

The model is offered as a way of ensuring that ‘all kinds of religious and theological language are incorporated.’⁷⁸ Indeed, LaCugna contends that a ‘highly complex doctrine such as the trinity evidently will not be successful without a mix of languages.’⁷⁹ ‘Theologians,’ she observes, ‘have always freely borrowed concepts and terms from the philosophies of the day.’⁸⁰ The process of building a network of associations and connections is important in LaCugna’s own understanding and use of model and metaphor. Soskice writes of this process as a development, over time, of ‘a rich assortment of models whose sources may be unknown but which have been gradually selected out by the faithful as being adequate to their experience.’⁸¹ Soskice refers to the ‘accretion of images’ as ‘hesitant and approximating, yet confirmed by generations of belief, [constituting] much of what Christians call revelation.’⁸²

The range of models for theological discourse is vast. Sallie McFague attributes the variety of models to ‘the complexity and richness of the divine-human relationship.’⁸³ She notes Ian Ramsey’s claim that diversity is theology’s lifeblood: ‘An endless number of metaphors and models ... is no “death by a thousand qualifications.” Rather, it is life by a thousand enrichments.’⁸⁴ In his paper, “Talking of God: Models, Ancient and Modern,”⁸⁵ Ramsey

⁷⁷ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 203. For the requirement of both philosophical proficiency and poetic sensibility when working with the model *creatio ex nihilo*, see David B. Burrell, “*Creatio Ex Nihilo* Recovered,” *Modern Theology* 29, no. 2 (2013): 14.

⁷⁸ LaCugna, “Placing,” 32.

⁷⁹ LaCugna, “Placing,” 30.

⁸⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 57. LaCugna notes that Augustine borrowed words from a variety of sources: ‘Augustine was fully aware of his inability to express in words the intra-divine relationality. He uses a mixture of technical philosophical language and inventive metaphors.’ LaCugna, “Philosophers and Theologians,” 176-77.

⁸¹ Soskice, *Metaphor*, 153.

⁸² Soskice, *Metaphor*, 153.

⁸³ McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 106.

⁸⁴ McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 106, quoting Ian Ramsey, *Models and Mystery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 60. McFague explores the implications of this diversity. An advantage is that ‘a multitude of models delimits the possibility of any one model becoming an idol.’ An unchecked acceptance of such a multitude of models, however, reflects a relativist stance. McFague looks here to systematic thought as a means of organising ‘all the dominant models in a tradition into an overarching system with a key model of its own.’ She proposes that it is the ‘task of dominant models – with complementary and supporting models – to

quotes from Eric Heaton's book, *His Servants the Prophets*, examples of the free use of 'all kinds of pictures, images, metaphors, models' available to those who wish to talk about God.⁸⁶

[In the Old Testament,] Yahweh's relationship to his people is represented under the figures of a father, mother, nurse, brother, husband, friend, warrior, shepherd, farmer, metal-worker, builder, potter, fuller, physician, judge, tradesman, King, fisherman, and scribe – to mention at random, only a few of the activities of the community.⁸⁷

Models of this kind play a significant role in theological discourse. Looking with hope to a movement 'back towards the center point of the intersection of theology and spirituality,' LaCugna writes, 'A contemporary trinitarian reformulation, were it to be the fruit of a contemplative theology (and all great trinitarian theologians have been contemplatives – Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Richard of St. Victor), just might give us the combination of religious imagery, theological creativity, and soteriological rootedness we are seeking.'⁸⁸ Trinitarian theology is not served well when too clear a distinction is drawn between 'monastic-contemplative and scholastic-speculative approaches.'⁸⁹ Both emphases have their place. When theology is undertaken as a 'disciplined and faithful search to understand the mystery of salvation, the caricaturing of the former as 'biblical, subjective, personal, liturgical, imagistic, moral-psychological, synthetic, and the latter as philosophical, objective, universal, scholastic, conceptual, intellectual, analytic'⁹⁰ has little relevance.

provide the order,' naming 'the dominant model in the Judeo-Christian tradition' as 'that of a personal God relating to responsible and responsive human beings.' McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 106.

⁸⁵ Ramsey, "Talking of God," 120-40.

⁸⁶ Ramsey, "Talking of God," 120. See also Anthony Kelly who writes, 'there is a whole panoply of concepts arising out of human experience which are pressed into theological service: for example, "person", "nature", "relationship", "sending", "procession", "knowing", "willing", "indwelling", "community", "unity". ... Such analogical notions are the stock in trade of the theological tradition.' Anthony Kelly, *The Trinity of Love: A Theology of the Christian God* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989), 20.

⁸⁷ Ramsey, "Talking of God," 120, quoting Eric William Heaton, *His Servants the Prophets* (London: SCM Press, 1949), 71. It is this type of model to which Tanner refers when identifying Ramsey's concept of models and distinguishing his methodology from hers. See Tanner, *God and Creation*, 175, n. 20.

⁸⁸ LaCugna, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity," 17.

⁸⁹ LaCugna, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity," 21.

⁹⁰ LaCugna, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity," 21. LaCugna notes that these categories are derived from the discussion in Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture* (New York: New American Library, 1962). In a contemplative and speculative theology, she writes, '... the theologian will be engaged with God affectively as well as cognitively, imaginatively as well as discursively,

LaCugna and McDonnell outline a number of factors to be considered when evaluating models. I will highlight those pertinent to my defence of LaCugna's use of the model of emanation and return. The authors lament that models are 'almost inevitably understood non-metaphorically, taken to replicate in a precise way rather than to image in an iconic manner,' and that, as a result, 'equally viable models are viewed as being mutually exclusive.'⁹¹ The model of a reality should never be considered to be the reality itself (as Ramsey notes above).⁹² They assert, for example, that a 'model of the divine-human relationship is not that relationship,' insisting that models 'must reflect our unknowing of God,' and that 'a model is reflective vision, not direct beholding.'⁹³ They consider every model to be a distortion, and suggest that our grasp on the model be 'tentative, reserved, open, and only exploited in the knowledge that other models may be (though not necessarily are) equally as revelatory of the presence of God.'⁹⁴

LaCugna and McDonnell make two further observations regarding the divine-human relationship. The first is the recognition that models 'cannot image the essential and immediate character of [this relationship], namely its dynamic and on-going character.'⁹⁵ The second, significant in terms of my study of LaCugna and Bonaventure in the next chapter, is their contention that the divine-human relationship should not be 'a premise for a syllogism

silently as well as expressively, doxologically as well as academically.' LaCugna, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity," 22.

⁹¹ LaCugna and McDonnell, "Far Country," 204.

⁹² See also Anthony Kelly's reference to Aquinas in this regard: 'In short, we are teasing out to more explicit proportions the quiet little phrase, so often unnoticed, of St. Thomas Aquinas as he writes on the use of analogical reason: "Once the Trinity is given, analogical reason has its place." I take this to mean that unless theology keeps being aware of the givenness of the trinitarian mystery, it can easily become locked up in its own models; it begins confusing the model with the reality, the analogy with the mystery, the map with the countryside.' Kelly, *Trinity of Love*, 91.

⁹³ LaCugna and McDonnell, "Far Country," 204. Addressing a strong 'apophatic' stance in McFague's theology, Bromell questions McFague's notion that nothing can literally be said about reality: 'Can McFague herself carry through her "critical realism" consistently by refraining from asserting, even by implication, certain propositions as literally true of God? One suspects not, for she certainly appears to maintain that God ... is at least *related* to the world and to humankind within it. Is the analogical use of "relationship" here to be understood as tensive? Is God to be thought of *as* related, but not (literally) *related*? Is God both related and unrelated? That is, is the (abstract) theistic metaphysical model itself metaphorical?' Bromell's italics. David J. Bromell, "Sallie McFague's 'Metaphorical Theology,'" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61, no. 3 (1993): 495. See also Geoffrey Wainwright, "A Language in Which We Speak to God," *Worship* 57, no. 4 (1983): 315 and Irene Lawrence, *Linguistics and Theology: The Significance of Noam Chomsky for Theological Construction* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1980), 155.

⁹⁴ LaCugna and McDonnell, "Far Country," 204-5.

⁹⁵ LaCugna and McDonnell, "Far Country," 204.

nor strictly propositional treatment.⁹⁶ They see the relationship as ‘a presence into which the believer enters, a life in which the believer participates,’⁹⁷ and suggest that this ‘presence’ is met, and this ‘life’ is nourished in worship.

Discussing the divine-human relationship in terms of worship and creaturely participation, LaCugna and McDonnell turn to doxological language. LaCugna considers doxology a vital linguistic component of theological models. As Ted Peters summarises, she identifies the main acceptable parameters for models of God as the rejection of idolatry, their connectedness with the economy of salvation as revealed in Jesus Christ, and the need to ‘have doxology (praise, thanksgiving, and adoration) as their goal.’⁹⁸ The language of praise has logic of its own. Doxological language will be explored later in this chapter for its capacity to convey divine transcendence.

Ramsey and the Qualified Model

As noted earlier, LaCugna has acknowledged a ‘kinship’ with Ramsey in his call to exercise caution when attempting to describe ‘quite cheerfully why God did what, when and where.’⁹⁹ She has referred, with appreciation, to his work in the field of religious language.¹⁰⁰ Most pertinent to this section of the current chapter is LaCugna’s engagement with his ideas on models and qualifiers whereby ‘models (such as “father”) are qualified by concepts (such as “eternal” and “unoriginated).”’ This, she explains, ‘keeps models functioning in theology at both experiential and abstract levels, for models, like metaphors, redescribe reality.’¹⁰¹ Ramsey describes the relationship between model and qualifier as an intersection. He writes, ‘Indeed, the qualifiers gear into models, they intersect with models, like operators or

⁹⁶ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 205. ‘Syllogism’ is defined as ‘a form of reasoning in which a conclusion is deduced from two given or presumed propositions called the premisses which contain a common or middle term that is absent from the conclusion (e.g., *All As are Bs, all Bs are Cs, therefore all As are Cs*).’ *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “syllogism.”

⁹⁷ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 205.

⁹⁸ Ted Peters, *God—the World’s Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 245.

⁹⁹ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 90.

¹⁰⁰ LaCugna writes, ‘Students of religious language have impressed upon us that theological and religious assertions not only have a unique grammar (this is not special pleading) but also that they are not “of a piece.”’ LaCugna, “Philosophers and Theologians,” 176. She acknowledges the work of Ian Ramsey as helpful on this subject.

¹⁰¹ LaCugna, “Placing,” 31-32.

directives gear in the terms in which they relate.’¹⁰² He then explains, using the example of an exit sign, the guiding function of qualifiers in a religious context:

Suppose you are in some hall and there at the back is written on the wall the word ‘Exit’. Now ‘Exit’ is in part a very good descriptive word. But supposing you see the word ‘Exit’ on an absolutely blank wall, with blanks on either side, you remain rooted to the spot. Before you can do anything there needs to be an arrow added or some doors below. So it is with ‘loving’ and ‘being’. Qualifiers have to be added if they are going to take us to God, if they are to prepare us for a disclosure.¹⁰³

It is in his book *Religious Language* that Ramsey gives his most detailed and systematic account of the qualified model. He claims, as LaCugna has done, that we must expect religious language to be appropriately odd and to have a distinctive logical behaviour. Otherwise, he argues, ‘it would not be currency for the strange kind of situation about which it claims to speak.’¹⁰⁴ He discusses some ‘special examples of this distinctive logical behaviour of religious language – in particular some phrases about God and his attributes.’¹⁰⁵ The three groups of examples he explores are:

- (Group i) The attributes of negative theology: such as ‘immutable’, ‘impassible’.
- (Group ii) The characterization of God by ‘Unity’, ‘Simplicity’, ‘Perfection’.
- (Group iii) Other traditional attributes and characterizations: e.g., ‘*First CAUSE*’, ‘*Infinitely WISE*’; ‘*Infinitely GOOD*’; ‘*CREATOR ex nihilo*’; ‘eternal PURPOSE’.¹⁰⁶

I have selected for closer examination the first and third of these groups, and within the third group, only the third and fourth qualified models. The selection is determined by the level of applicability of these examples to LaCugna’s and Tanner’s use of particular phrases and divine attributes. While Tanner addresses divine simplicity and perfection in some detail, LaCugna does not, and so the second group is not discussed below.

¹⁰² Ramsey, “On Understanding Mystery,” 70.

¹⁰³ Ramsey, “On Understanding Mystery,” 70.

¹⁰⁴ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 49.

¹⁰⁵ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 49-50.

¹⁰⁶ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 50. I am following Ramsey’s practice of italicisation and small capitalisation, where the former indicates the qualifier and the latter the model.

The Attributes of Negative Theology (from Group i)

Ramsey suggests that ‘we understand [the logical behaviour of negative attributes] if we see them as primarily evocative of what we have called the odd discernment, that characteristically religious situation which, if evoked, provokes a total commitment.’¹⁰⁷ Closely associated with his notion of divine disclosure is this concept of ‘total commitment.’ The use of particular attributes distinguishes religious language from non-religious language, potentially inspiring in the reader a commitment to ‘something more’ than we are able to perceive through our senses.¹⁰⁸ He argues that words such as ‘immutability’ and ‘impassibility’ ‘claim for the word “God” a position outside all mutable and passible language.’¹⁰⁹ They place God, therefore, outside the realm in which humans are able to contrast divine and human attributes. The words ‘immutability’ and ‘impassibility’ thus make a ‘language plea’ in that they seek to specify God ‘at the cost of emphasizing his distance from certain characteristics of perceptual language.’¹¹⁰

Though he makes the model-qualifier relation more explicit in the discussion of his third identified group, Ramsey notes that in this first group:

here we have one of the simplest examples of a ‘model’ and a ‘qualifier’, where, in this instance, the qualifier is hardly more than an operator, (i.e. *im-*) which develops and evokes the characteristic situation from the basis of a particular model, e.g. mutability or passibility.¹¹¹

‘Infinitely GOOD’ (from Group iii)

Ramsey commences his discussion on ‘infinite goodness’ with a graded list of those to whom goodness can be attributed:

Ferdinand Lopez	who is hardly good
Long John Silver	who is fairly good
Solomon	who was just good
David	who was very good
Barnabas	who was very good indeed

¹⁰⁷ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 50.

¹⁰⁸ For a detailed exposition of the concepts of ‘religious discernment’ and ‘total commitment,’ see Ramsey, *Models*, Chapter 1, ‘What Kinds of Situations are Religious,’ 11-48.

¹⁰⁹ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 53.

¹¹⁰ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 53.

¹¹¹ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 53.

St Francis	who was intensely good
.	.
.	.
Then: God	who is infinitely good. ¹¹²

He writes, ‘When we speak of God in terms of “infinite goodness” it might seem as though we were making God the last term of a sequence.’¹¹³ He acknowledges that a philosopher may have an understanding of ‘good’ as always implying ‘better’ and that, if this is the case, ‘infinitely good’ becomes a meaningless phrase. ‘In other words,’ he continues, ‘the philosopher might say, by qualifying “good” with “infinitely”, we have drained it of all the meaning it ever had, and we finish with an empirical void.’¹¹⁴ However, the word ‘infinite’ can have a second and more complex logical function:

The first logical function of the word ‘infinite’ is to stimulate us to develop ‘these stories of good lives’ in the right direction. But in tracing such a sequence there is no intention of arriving at ‘God’ as a last term; the intention is to continue long enough with the sequence to evoke a situation characteristically different from the terms which preceded it; until we have evoked a situation not just characterized by a goodness which we admire or feel stirred to follow, but a situation in relation to which we are prepared to yield everything, ‘soul, life and all’. Such a situation ... is often labelled ‘Love’, but only when ‘Love’ has a significantly odd behaviour. For here is adoration, wonder, worship, commitment.¹¹⁵

At this point, Ramsey draws an interesting parallel between theological language and mathematics. The first of the two examples he provides involves a succession of regular polygons, of 3, 4, 5, 6 sides, and so on. If we contemplate the idea of a regular polygon with an infinite number of sides, we are compelled to continue the sequence of sides indefinitely. ‘To what purpose?’ he understandably asks. If the area of the polygon is kept fairly constant, as the number of sides increases, the insight may dawn that the outline of a circle can be perceived. He suggests that the evocation of this mathematical insight is ‘something akin to the disclosure of a characteristically religious situation.’¹¹⁶ He concludes,

¹¹² Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 67.

¹¹³ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 66.

¹¹⁴ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 67.

¹¹⁵ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 68.

¹¹⁶ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 69. Ramsey is obviously not suggesting any crude association between theological language and science. He writes, ‘Christian doctrine does not give a picture of God in the sense of a verbal photograph. Christian doctrine can only be justified on an epistemology very different from that which lay behind traditional views of metaphysics. In no sense is Christian doctrine a “super-science”. Its structure and

‘Infinite’ now has, as in the theological model, a second logical function. It can remind us that the word ‘circle’ commended in relation to this ‘insight’, has a logical behaviour very different from the phrase ‘regular polygon.’ ... Just as no polygon, however numerous its sides, is a circle ... so God as ‘infinitely good’ is not on all fours with Long John Silver or even St Barnabas.¹¹⁷

Rather than leading to an ‘empirical void,’ the phrase, ‘infinite goodness’ can point to something *outside* goodness language, thus giving ‘an appropriate placing to the word “God.”’¹¹⁸

Ramsey looks to address the issue of applying more than a single logical structure in theological language. The example he chooses is the problem of having to speak of God as being both ‘loving’ and ‘impassible.’ He observes, ‘If “God is impassible” and “God is loving” have the same logical structure; if they each say the same sort of thing in the same sort of way about God, then it is impossible to escape from the antinomy they present.’¹¹⁹ The problem can be addressed in the realisation that each assertion has a different logical structure and therefore their claims are not incompatible.

In saying ‘God is impassible’ or ‘God is immutable’ we are claiming that the word ‘God’ is a word that cannot be confined to ‘passibility’ language. The assertion that ‘God is impassible,’ then, ‘concentrates on evoking the fact and claiming that the word “God” is nothing if not logically odd.’¹²⁰ With regard to the assertion, ‘God is loving,’ the term ‘loving’ is simply a means of modelling God in terms of non-divine loving situations. As it stands, ‘the assertion is logically incomplete in an important way, and that to avoid this incompleteness we ought to insert some appropriate qualifier such as “infinitely” or “all.”’¹²¹ He notes that this second assertion, given that it contains a model qualified in this way, has a different logical structure from the first, and, while each evokes an odd situation, ‘the second assertion is more positive

its anchorage in “fact” are much more complex than that parallel would suggest.’ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 171.

¹¹⁷ Ramsey provides another example: the logical leap between the number ‘ $1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{8} + \frac{1}{16} \dots$ ’ and the number ‘2’. Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 69-70.

¹¹⁸ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 68.

¹¹⁹ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 88.

¹²⁰ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 89.

¹²¹ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 89.

in claiming that this special positioning can nevertheless be reached from ordinary [non-divine] language, to which words like “love” belong, once this language has been appropriately qualified, as by the word “infinite.”¹²²

‘CREATOR ex nihilo’ (from Group iii)

Ramsey treats the phrase ‘creation *ex nihilo*’ as a qualified model, describing ‘creation’ as a ‘down-to-earth word’ with a straightforward use in relation to ordinary situations. ‘*Ex nihilo*’ is the qualifier, and one which places considerable strain on the model it qualifies, to the extent that the two terms combined evokes a sense of scandal. The point of the scandal is ‘to insist that when the phrase has been given its appropriate empirical anchorage, any label, suited to that situation, must have a logical behaviour which, from the standpoint of down-to-earth ‘creation’ language, is odd.’¹²³ The phrase evokes a sense of creaturely dependence. Further, it positions the word ‘God’ as one which ‘caps all causal stories and presides over and “completes” all the language of all created things. It places “God” as a “key” word for the universe of “creatures.”’¹²⁴

Ramsey observes that the logical particularity of the phrase ‘creation *ex nihilo*’ is not adequately recognised in all theological writing. Some writers, he notes, ‘[a]s much as the irreligious ... have taken “nothing” as equivalent to “something.”’¹²⁵ Tillich, for example speaks of the ‘nihil out of which God creates.’ Ramsey does not deny that this distinguished writer is making a valid point. He simply suggests that his ‘expression of it in such language is about as logically naïve and misleading as it could possibly be, and that any point as important as [Tillich is] trying to make, deserves rather more careful formulation.’¹²⁶

As noted above, this examination of Ramsey’s theory of the qualified model functions both within the argument of this chapter and as preparatory material for Chapter 6. In the context of *this* chapter, Ramsey’s theory of the qualified model provides examples of the distinctive logical behaviour of theological language. With Ramsey’s qualified model, the appropriate

¹²² Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 89.

¹²³ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 73.

¹²⁴ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 73.

¹²⁵ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 75.

¹²⁶ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 75.

‘oddness’ to which he refers is achieved through the simple addition of a qualifying word. This relatively straightforward construct serves as a suitable prelude to the more intriguing logical behaviour which characterises doxological language.

Doxology

LaCugna considers the language of doxology to be foundational to theological discourse. ‘[T]heology is not theology – *theos-logos*, discourse about God – unless,’ she insists, ‘it proceeds in the mode of praise.’¹²⁷ She compares doxology favourably with language which relies on the use of ‘human concepts and attempts to capture the divine reality.’¹²⁸ Quoting Daniel Hardy and David Ford, she writes: ‘In doxology “We are freed from the fixations and obsessions of reason and are gently opened to being knit into a reality that is delightful as well as true.”’¹²⁹ LaCugna devotes a chapter of *God for Us*, Chapter 9, ‘Trinity, Theology, Doxology,’ to the idea that ‘the form of language that best serves and illumines God’s economy is *theology in the mode of doxology*.’¹³⁰ Not surprisingly, the notion of doxology is embedded within LaCugna’s key text from Ephesians, which she quotes below in the context of the destiny and fulfilment of humanity in Christ:

We are most fully human when we praise God, since it is the purpose for which we were made: ‘We who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of God’s glory.’ This vocation to glory is rooted in God’s providential plan, our election before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before God’ (Eph. 1:4).¹³¹

E. Byron Anderson crystallises LaCugna’s dual soteriological and doxological focus in his maxim, ‘soteriology becomes doxology’ – a maxim also well captured, he suggests, by the

¹²⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 360. LaCugna sees doxological language, more specifically, as a means of holding in apophatic and kataphatic speech in tension. According to LaCugna and McDonnell, apophatic and analogical speech coincide in doxology, such that ‘[b]oth methods are pursued in order to make it possible to open up to the ever greater reality of God, the one by entering into the “unknowing which is knowing”, the other by denying the inadequacy of all predications made of God.’ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 199.

¹²⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 348.

¹²⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 348 quoting Daniel W. Hardy and David F. Ford, *Praising and Knowing God* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1985), 113.

¹³⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 320. LaCugna’s italics.

¹³¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 342.

Methodist hymnist, Charles Wesley who concluded the hymn ‘Love divine, all loves excelling,’ with the words ‘lost in wonder, love, and praise.’¹³²

However, LaCugna’s interpretation of the role doxological language plays in upholding divine freedom and transcendence has been questioned. Sanders, for example, contends (as noted in Chapter 1 of this thesis) that doxology should not function as a ‘replacement for the doctrine of the immanent Trinity,’ claiming that both LaCugna and Moltmann introduce it as ‘a diversionary tactic.’¹³³ Although, in the context of a study of the immanent and economic Trinity, it is not unreasonable that he should interpret LaCugna’s ideas on doxology in this way, I will argue that a simple replacement is not her intention. I consider LaCugna’s reference to a ‘condescension’ in the following quotation to be apt in light of Sanders’ comments. She states, ‘Liturgy is not a *locus theologicus*, one source among others that systematic theologians have at their disposal and that may be approached “with a certain condescension.”’¹³⁴ Her writing on doxology is inextricably related to her ‘insight’ that the economy of salvation is just as ineffable as is the eternal mystery of God (*theologia*).¹³⁵ In this chapter section I will explore, informed by her ‘insight,’ LaCugna’s understanding of doxology and divine transcendence, examining, in turn, the idea of the doctrine of the Trinity as ‘grammar’; the tension between the philosophical and doxological ‘logic’ in theological discourse; and the idea of the retelling of the acts of God as a means of offering a ‘sacrifice’ of praise.

¹³² E. Byron Anderson, “The Trinitarian Grammar of the Liturgy and the Liturgical Practice of the Self,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 34, no. 2 (1999): 160. An important section within LaCugna’s Chapter 9 is entitled, ‘Soteriology and Doxology.’ She notes that many of the basic ideas in this section are contained in LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 191-215.

¹³³ Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 117, n. 39.

¹³⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 357, quoting from Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology: The Hale Memorial Lectures of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, 1981* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1984), 90. Similarly, Marmion notes that there is ‘always a temptation for theology to move out of the doxological mode, and to consider systematic concepts to be superior to religious images, symbols, and metaphors.’ Declan Marmion, “Trinity and Relationships,” *The Way* 43, no. 2 (2004): 117.

¹³⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 230.

The Doctrine of the Trinity as the 'Grammar' of Doxology

Grammar, according to LaCugna, is 'a set of rules that govern a language,' that ensure 'precision and [make] it possible to convey meaning.'¹³⁶ She observes that rules apply to language itself rather than necessarily conveying content, an understanding of the function of linguistic rules also attributed to Kathryn Tanner in the introduction to this thesis.¹³⁷ LaCugna engages with the work of one of Tanner's mentors from Yale Divinity School, George Lindbeck. The points of connection and distinction LaCugna makes between Lindbeck's and her own ideas reflect their common interest in linguistics as well as their differing approaches to doxology and to the broader question of how much can be said to be 'true' in Christian discourse. She accepts, for example, Lindbeck's definition of doctrine as 'second-order guidelines for Christian discourse rather than first-order affirmations about the inner being of God or of Jesus Christ.'¹³⁸ Differences emerge where LaCugna suggests that 'Lindbeck perhaps does not sufficiently emphasize the doxological character of doctrinal statements.'¹³⁹ This divergence of opinion may be related to her judgment that doctrine is a matter of *both* second-order guidelines for Christian discourse *and* first-order affirmations. Given LaCugna's focus on the *oikonomia*, these affirmations would centre not so much on 'the inner being of God or of Jesus Christ' (as stated by Lindbeck), as on the triune God *as revealed in the recounting of the acts of God*. This latter approach will be discussed below in conversation with Karen Kilby, a former doctoral student of Tanner and Lindbeck.

At first glance, Karen Kilby's article "Perichoresis and Projection" (which is critical of 'some social theories of the Trinity' and of the inappropriate pressing into service of the concept of *perichoresis*) may not seem a promising source for interaction with LaCugna. However, while Kilby and LaCugna have each interpreted the meaning of 'relevance' in a different

¹³⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 374, n.76.

¹³⁷ See also LaCugna's and McDonnell's affirmation of the 'view taken by some theologians (especially, it seems, in Great Britain) that trinitarian doctrine is best viewed as serving a *grammatical* rather than descriptive function. The notion of "person", for example, does not tell us who or what God is, but secures the idea that God is "someone" rather than "something."' LaCugna and McDonnell, "Far Country," 215, n. 58. LaCugna's and McDonnell's italics.

¹³⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 374, n. 76. Lindbeck provides the example of Athanasius' rule: 'whatever is said of the Father is said of the Son, except that the Son is not the Father.' George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1984), 94.

¹³⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 374, n. 76. She suggests a comparison between Lindbeck's approach and that of Pannenberg, referring the reader to: Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1977), 184-88.

way, an encouraging point of connection exists. Kilby questions the need for the doctrine of the Trinity to be ‘relevant,’ explaining, ‘The doctrine of the Trinity arose in order to affirm certain things about the divinity of Christ, and, secondarily, of the Spirit, and it arose against a background assumption that God is one.’¹⁴⁰ She queries, then, why ‘many theologians [in search of relevance] are wanting something in addition to this, something beyond this, some one particular insight into God that this particular doctrine is the bearer of.’¹⁴¹ She concludes, ‘It is therefore (though few would quite admit it directly) the abstraction, the conceptual formula, the three-in-oneness, that many theologians want to revivify.’¹⁴²

LaCugna is keen for trinitarian doctrine to be relevant; however, her idea of relevance aligns with Kilby’s proposal for a move *away* from a focus on relevance as she (Kilby) perceives it. Kilby suggests ‘not that one should move from the social back to, say, a psychological approach to the Trinity – this would simply be to look for a different insight – but rather that one should renounce the very idea that the point of the doctrine of the Trinity is to give insight into God.’¹⁴³ The parallel with LaCugna’s call to renounce such speculation is clear. The second part of Kilby’s proposal also resonates with LaCugna’s views on the grammatical role of trinitarian doctrine. Kilby writes:

The doctrine of the Trinity ... does not need to be seen as a descriptive, first order teaching – there is no need to assume that its main function must be to provide a picture of the divine, a deep understanding of the way God really is. It can instead be taken as grammatical, as a second order proposition, a rule, or perhaps a set of rules, for how to read the Biblical stories, how to speak about some of the characters we come across in these stories, how to think and talk about the experience of prayer, how to deploy the ‘vocabulary’ of Christianity in an appropriate way.¹⁴⁴

Kilby has not referred to the immanent Trinity in this passage. This is not to say that she does not recognise its role elsewhere.¹⁴⁵ However, the passage’s ‘practical’ focus on Christian life resembles LaCugna’s reframing of the doctrine in terms of the *oikonomia*. While the issues of

¹⁴⁰ Karen Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity,” *New Blackfriars* 81, no. 956 (2000): 443.

¹⁴¹ Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection,” 443.

¹⁴² Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection,” 443.

¹⁴³ Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection,” 443.

¹⁴⁴ Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection,” 443.

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, Kilby, “Apophatic Trinitarianism,” 70.

divine transcendence and freedom are not specifically addressed in Kilby's passage, neither are they undermined. Similarly, when LaCugna suggests that Rahner's axiom on the identity of economic and immanent Trinity operates as a 'grammatical rule' that 'guides theology toward doxology,'¹⁴⁶ she too, is not undermining divine freedom. Her statement on Rahner's Rule and doxology – 'If the economic trinity [*sic*] is the immanent Trinity and vice versa, then worshipping God for us is indistinguishable from worshipping God'¹⁴⁷ – needs to be considered in the context of Christian worship and not with the intention of providing 'a picture of the divine.'¹⁴⁸

Philosophical and Doxological 'Logic'

The language of philosophy and the language of praise each have rules dictating their use. Doxological language is not beholden to deductive reasoning or, as LaCugna states, in the context of Christian praise (and as she and McDonnell noted above regarding models), 'God, Christ and the Spirit are not presented to us as premises for a syllogism.'¹⁴⁹ Even within a philosophical-linguistic understanding of religious language, in which this fundamental difference is recognised, a gulf between the nature of philosophical and doxological language exists. Orthodox theologian Constantine Scouteris, for example, compares Ludwig Wittgenstein's writing on the expression of mystical experience with the approach traditionally taken in the orthodox biblical and patristic tradition. Scouteris acknowledges that Wittgenstein is aware not only that 'there exists an inexpressible theological language,' but also that there is room in his approach to express 'what is known as mystical experience.'¹⁵⁰ He writes, however, that 'by Wittgenstein's inability to explain how the mystical can be made evident, we observe that his entire system is based on an absolutely anthropocentric structure.'¹⁵¹ The basis of difference between Wittgenstein's philosophical religious language and doxological language, Scouteris suggests, lies in the fact that 'Wittgenstein can easily accept a language of faith, or even a religious language; but in his philosophy there is no

¹⁴⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 360.

¹⁴⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 360-61.

¹⁴⁸ Kilby, "Perichoresis and Projection," 443.

¹⁴⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 363.

¹⁵⁰ Constantine Scouteris, "Doxology, the Language of Orthodoxy," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 38 (1993): 157.

¹⁵¹ Scouteris, "Doxology," 157.

room for language which is given to men [*sic*] as grace.’¹⁵² The alternative point of view is one in which

all processes concerning the communication of divine truths are closely interwoven. Speech, contemplation, and even communion with God through mystical experience constitute an indivisible unity. This unity is summarized, to a great extent, in the term ‘logos.’ This term, a Greek term par excellence, is multi-sensed.¹⁵³

Scouteris refers to the incarnate Logos who ‘spoke to man about God in a human way, [doing so] using words, images, parables, and concepts, in order that men might be able to speak of God in a way worthy of him.’¹⁵⁴ For LaCugna, the images of the bible and the story of salvation revealed in the *oikonomia* through Christ constitute the ‘grammatical rules’ for doxological speech. She sees the language of praise and worship as a ‘type of *theologia*, a way of speaking of God by speaking to God,’ and notes that in ‘the early church, especially in the East, liturgy was understood as source and norm of doctrine.’¹⁵⁵ She compares philosophical with doxological language, suggesting that, based on her ‘grammatical rules,’

the theological mode of speaking of God is far more proscribed than any other way of speaking about God, for example, philosophically, because the theologian is bound by the actual details of God’s self-revelation in the economy. The economy places limits on the conclusions that theology may draw.¹⁵⁶

LaCugna also draws a distinction between the empirical sciences and theology in the form of doxology. ‘When theology is understood as a form of doxology,’ she explains, ‘then conformity of statements about God to the reality of God – will need to be redefined in terms of doxology.’¹⁵⁷ While the empirical sciences achieve objectivity ‘when the scientist distances himself or herself from the object being studied,’ in theology, ‘objective statements

¹⁵² Scouteris, “Doxology,” 158.

¹⁵³ Scouteris, “Doxology,” 158.

¹⁵⁴ Scouteris, “Doxology,” 159.

¹⁵⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 357. LaCugna and McDonnell quote Dietrich Ritschl who accentuates the inextricable relationship between doxology and the economy of salvation: ‘[A]ny reference to the Trinity is originally doxological in nature. ... But, as the Eastern Fathers made clear, all such doxological references to [the] inner life [of God] must be checked by reference back to the biblical message concerning God’s activity and presence with his people.’ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 191-92, quoting Dietrich Ritschl, “Historical Development and Implications of the *Filioque* Controversy,” in *Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ*, ed. Lukas Vischer (London: SPCK, 1981), 64.

¹⁵⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 365.

¹⁵⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 360.

come about when the theologian, through his or her own thoughts and words, intends the living God.’ LaCugna continues, ‘This requires not distance but involvement with the God whose relationship with all of creation is the proper “object” of theological study.’¹⁵⁸ Connecting this understanding of doxology with her ‘insight,’ she makes the claim, ‘Objective statements about *theologia* will be possible only if they are doxological, that is, only if we speak about *theologia* on the basis of *oikonomia*.’¹⁵⁹ It is to statements made on the basis of *oikonomia* that the discussion now turns.

Retelling of the Acts of God as a Means of Offering Praise

In the section, ‘Soteriology and Doxology’ in Chapter 9 of *God for Us*, LaCugna looks to the idea of retelling the acts of God as a form of doxology: ‘Even if we cannot see the face of God directly, we are invited to enter into the saving act, to accompany God in history, to see and hear and recount the wonderful works of God (*magnalia Dei*) and in this way to offer praise and thanksgiving to God.’¹⁶⁰ Reflecting her preference for biblical images over the negative divine attributes, she turns to the psalms and canticles of the Hebrew Bible and the doxologies of the New Testament to propose that, in Scripture, ‘the occasion for praise is always what God has done,’ rather than what God is in an abstract sense, ‘on the basis of speculative attributes such as immutability.’¹⁶¹

LaCugna refers to the work of Pannenberg, noting his concern that ‘analogical language for God says too much about God,’¹⁶² and his preference for doxology ‘as a noetic category’ over ‘the *analogia entis* tradition.’¹⁶³ Expanding on LaCugna’s observations, I will briefly examine Pannenberg’s thought on doxological language, with a view to supporting my claim

¹⁵⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 360.

¹⁵⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 360.

¹⁶⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 335. These delightful words first appear, in a slightly different form, in LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 198-99, then again in Catherine Mowry LaCugna, “Can Liturgy Ever Again Become a Source for Theology?,” *Studia Liturgica* 19, no. 1 (1989): 12. They will reappear in their original form in my Conclusion.

¹⁶¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 337. She makes this point earlier in *God for Us*, in her chapter, ‘Christian Prayer and Trinitarian Faith,’ stating: ‘Praise is never rendered to an abstract unity of three coequal divine persons. Praise is given in the recounting of *what God has accomplished in redemptive history*.’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 120. LaCugna’s italics.

¹⁶² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 372, n. 54 and n. 56. LaCugna also notes Edmund Schlink’s concern.

¹⁶³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 372, n. 54.

that such language serves to uphold the notion of divine transcendence. In his essay, “Analogy and Doxology,” Pannenberg reflects on the right way to speak about God. What matters most is ‘the place where the reality of God may be encountered.’¹⁶⁴ He observes two perspectives evident in Scripture: one in which the divine reality can appear directly in our world of experience, and another where ‘the reality of God manifests itself in the world only indirectly, through the mediation of other things and beings.’¹⁶⁵ The former perspective is seen in the older traditions of Israel, in which God himself intervenes in the events of the world and humanity. The latter, where God no longer appears directly, leads to a new way of speaking of God – through analogy, where ‘one speaks of God by speaking about something else, but in such a way that this other being is viewed in its relation to the reality of God.’¹⁶⁶

Pannenberg looks to biblical statements about God, noting the ‘often astonishing abandon and picturesqueness with which God is spoken of through transferring words whose meaning is established in other contexts.’¹⁶⁷ He observes that statements made about God on the basis of his deeds describe ‘the reality of God by analogy with a human act,’¹⁶⁸ adding, though, that it is ‘not the intention of such words to provide theoretical definitions of the being of God, in the sense of knowing the unknown through the known.’¹⁶⁹ Rather, he suggests, ‘All biblical speech about God, to the extent that it is to designate something beyond a particular deed, namely God himself and what he is from eternity to eternity, is rooted in adoration and is in this sense doxological.’¹⁷⁰ He articulates the distinction between speaking of God in adoration and analogy as one of intention. When analogy is used, there exists a ‘common logos’ between creation and the divine which ‘permits the attributes in question in any given instance to be ascribed to God himself. In the act of adoration, by contrast, the one who brings his [*sic*] praise sacrifices the “I” and thereby, at the same time, the conceptual univocity of his speech.’¹⁷¹ Our words are thus sacrificed to the ‘sublime infinity of God.’¹⁷²

¹⁶⁴ Pannenberg, “Analogy and Doxology,” 211.

¹⁶⁵ Pannenberg, “Analogy and Doxology,” 211.

¹⁶⁶ Pannenberg, “Analogy and Doxology,” 212.

¹⁶⁷ Pannenberg, “Analogy and Doxology,” 215.

¹⁶⁸ Pannenberg, “Analogy and Doxology,” 215.

¹⁶⁹ Pannenberg, “Analogy and Doxology,” 215.

¹⁷⁰ Pannenberg, “Analogy and Doxology,” 15-16.

¹⁷¹ Pannenberg, “Analogy and Doxology,” 216.

The idea of ‘sacrifice’ is significant here, as is the phrase ‘sublime infinity of God’ – the idea of ‘sacrifice’ for its connotations of relinquishment to the God who is worshiped, and the phrase ‘sublime infinity of God’ for its linguistic ‘oddness’ (as Ramsey would describe it), as it places its referent beyond the logic assumed in rational speech and thus beyond human comprehension. The word ‘sublime’ acts as a qualifier here for the unusually difficult-to-grasp model ‘infinity.’ Ramsey acknowledges that by themselves qualifiers describe nothing, and for that reason may be thought of as irrelevant theological jargon. He regards them, however, as ‘words or phrases whose relevance is to be found in the cosmic disclosure to which, when they have models to qualify, they point.’¹⁷³ In relation to doxological language, he writes, ‘Prayers and hymns of adoration are largely catenae of qualifiers and ... they depend on a mediation which, in supplying the models, relates the prayers and hymns to the life of the world.’¹⁷⁴ Ramsey advises the reader to be constantly on the lookout for language that is working oddly, recognising, for example, ‘that logical qualifiers are *not* further descriptions, but words which qualify models so as to do justice to what is “disclosed” in worship.’¹⁷⁵

Thus, divine transcendence is conveyed through this idea of ‘sacrifice’ and this ‘logically odd’ allusion to God. LaCugna captures something of the dynamic of the human surrender in the presence of the divine when she writes, ‘doxology ... accedes to the greater reality of God and lets go the self in the process.’¹⁷⁶ Quoting from “The Far Country,” she emphasises God’s glory as the recipient of human praise over any merit and ability on the part of the

¹⁷² Pannenberg, “Analogy and Doxology,” 217. This does not imply, as Pannenberg notes in a more recent work, that ‘the conceptual contours’ of Christian doxological speech ‘have to lose their sharpness.’ He suggests that while ‘our talk about God becomes doxology in which the speakers rise above the limits of their own finitude to the thought of the infinite God,’ doxology ‘can also have the form of systematic reflection.’ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2004), 55. Burrell argues that creative language (including poetry), analogical discourse *and* philosophical discourse play an important role in articulating the distinction between creator and creature. David Burrell, “Analogy, Creation, and Theological Language,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2005), 92-93.

¹⁷³ Ramsey, “Talking of God,” 138.

¹⁷⁴ Ramsey, “Talking of God,” 138. A catena is a connected series or chain.

¹⁷⁵ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 164. ‘Too often,’ he adds, ‘Christian doctrine has been needlessly confused, and controversies needlessly complicated, by refusing to give qualifiers their correct logical status, supposing them to be somehow descriptive; in which case they would be labels for certain extraordinary features of the theological countryside – describing sorts of procession, generation and so on. What unedifying and bewildering discussions such mistakes can foster.’ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 164-65.

¹⁷⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 361.

giver: ‘In the gesture of praise, preoccupation with “how well our speech is or is not doing” is relinquished; God is given the glory.’¹⁷⁷

Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter demonstrates the importance LaCugna places on appropriate speech about God. She presents the theological model as a vehicle for trinitarian discourse, noting the range of linguistic elements it can encompass, including metaphor, symbol, and analogy. More profound, though, is LaCugna’s understanding of doxology, articulated so beautifully from the time of her early academic publications through to her final years. In a speech delivered at the annual meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America in 1996, the year before she died, she stated, ‘Doxology is not one among several options within theology; it is the precondition of theological speech, particularly any speech about God.’¹⁷⁸

LaCugna views doxological language as a means of holding apophatic and kataphatic speech in tension, observing that ‘[t]he habitual practice and praise of the name of God nourishes in the theologian the proper balance between “two cardinal theological postulates: that God is ineffable and incomprehensible” and “dwells in light inaccessible”’; and, on the other hand, that we truly know God in Christ (Christ is “the radiant light of God’s glory and the perfect copy of God’s nature” [Heb. 1: 3]).¹⁷⁹ In doxology, Christians recount of the acts of God in the economy of salvation, seeking to convey the mystery of *theologia*. LaCugna’s writing on the Holy Spirit supports her ‘insight’ regarding the ineffability of the *oikonomia*:

The Spirit of God accomplishes the work of salvation: The Spirit enables us to see the glory of God passing before us, to confess Jesus Christ as Lord, to know, to love, and worship the true living God, to ‘become God’ (2 Pet. 1:4). The very same Spirit conforms theological statements to this ever-greater mystery. This is where the idea of God’s incomprehensibility becomes much more than a mere formality: The economy is ineffable because the economy is God’s life with us. This renders theology inherently practical but at the same time calls for a genuine modesty and humility on

¹⁷⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 361, quoting LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 199. For a critique associating LaCugna’s understanding of worship and salvation with Pelagianism, see Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, 238-39, 316-20.

¹⁷⁸ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, “Response to John R. Sachs,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 51 (1996), 43.

¹⁷⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 361, quoting from LaCugna, “Can Liturgy Ever Again Become a Source for Theology?,” 8.

the part of theologians who would place their words at the service of God's Holy Spirit.¹⁸⁰

Sanders sees LaCugna's portrayal of doxology as a diversionary tactic and an unsuccessful substitute for the immanent Trinity. I regard her portrayal more as a powerful means of honouring God's love for the world while not compromising the Christian understanding of God's glory and transcendence. Ramsey's concept of doxology has informed her understanding. He, like LaCugna, sees the value in engaging with disciplines such as philosophy and mathematics, attested to by his commentary on the illustration of the eternally elusive distinction between the polygon of infinitely increasing sides and the 'mathematical insight' of the circle. He engages with the notion of a 'leap of faith,' as discussed by Kierkegaard and Lessing. Referring to his example of the logical leap between seeing ' $1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{8} + \frac{1}{16} \dots$ ' and saying '2' (and he could as easily have chosen the polygon/circle as an example), Ramsey writes:

like Kierkegaard and Lessing before him, I too can talk of a leap. But for me there is no special reason whatever for thinking of that leap as a leap across what Lessing called a 'grim, broad chasm'. For me, it can be pictured not only just as well but I think rather better and more consistently with the rest of our language about God, as a leap into the arms of a loving Father, as a jump to an embrace, an embrace which cannot be wholly and aptly described in terms of muscular grippings with appropriate organic sensations.¹⁸¹

These are the words of a theologian keen to acknowledge both the power and the limitations of language. Ramsey demonstrates an acute awareness of the significance of the 'Christian distinction.' Yet he, like Pannenberg, looks to the language of the Gospel and to the biblical model of a loving heavenly Father who reaches out to embrace us. LaCugna has indeed been influenced by their work. For reasons already discussed, she has chosen not to focus on the mystery of the immanent Trinity and the intra-trinitarian processions. However, she, too, conveys an awareness of divine transcendence in her linguistically eclectic expression of the infinitely loving and personal triune God.

¹⁸⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 381.

¹⁸¹ Ramsey, "On Understanding Mystery," 72. Gotthold Lessing's 'grim broad chasm' between history and eternal truths has also been translated as 'ugly broad ditch.' See Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Lessing's Theological Writings: Selections in Translation*, trans. Henry Chadwick (London: A. & C. Black, 1956), 55.

Chapter Four

Catherine LaCugna and the God-World Relation: Connections with Pre-Modern Thought

Introduction

LaCugna draws, in the first part of *God for Us*, on the writings of a number of ancient Greek philosophers (for example, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus) and many theologians of the early church (for example, Irenaeus, the Cappadocian Fathers and Augustine). As she documents the demise of the doctrine of the Trinity, she introduces the reader to important figures, evaluating their role in the doctrine's defeat. I have selected four such figures. While the extent and nature of their connection with LaCugna differ in each case, the factor which unites them is their engagement with issues of divine transcendence and freedom.

The ideas of Greek philosopher, Plotinus, and theologians, John Scotus Eriugena, St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas Aquinas will be explored in this chapter,¹ each thinker introduced with an outline of the ways in which his understanding of the God-world relation intersects with LaCugna's. I will focus on two topics for each writer: Plotinus on the *exitus-reditus* schema and the related notions of emanation and necessity; Eriugena on pantheism and his use of Scripture; Bonaventure on the idea of the 'Good' as self-diffusive and on Elizabeth Groppe's suggestion that we approach LaCugna's writing along the lines of a Bonaventurian *itinerarium* rather than as a scholastic treatise; and Aquinas on real and logical relations as well as his ideas on emanation and necessity.

Each of these philosophers and theologians has produced an extensive and sophisticated body of writings and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine their work in detail, even within the topics I have selected. Thus, subtleties and distinctions will be identified but not explored in depth. For example, in the case of 'emanation,' Plotinus' use of the idea differs greatly from that of Bonaventure and Aquinas who, in the Christian context, make an important distinction between its application to the immanent Trinity and to creation. My treatment of this and other themes will reflect my purposes for this chapter which are: to

¹ For a detailed description of the meaning and variations of Eriugena's name, see John J. O'Meara, *Eriugena* (Cork: Published for the Cultural Relations Committee of Ireland by the Mercier Press, 1969), 1-2. O'Meara refers to his subject as 'Johannes Eriugena' or simply 'Eriugena' in order to avoid confusion with Johannes Duns Scotus. I will use the form 'Eriugena' unless quoting another author.

place LaCugna within the Christian tradition in which theologians have drawn on a range of sometimes seemingly incompatible ideas to produce a synthesis; to identify the ideas she selects and those she rejects from the figures studied; and to provide material with which to assess (in the next two chapters of this thesis) the extent to which, in bringing these ideas together, she has upheld the Christian understanding of divine transcendence. I will argue that her grasp of the issues faced by those before her, and her willingness to explore the subtleties of theological language, have led to a largely successful synthesis, a rich expression of God's relationship with the world, and one in which the notion of divine transcendence is surely upheld.

Plotinus

While Plotinus (204-270), the pre-eminent thinker of Neo-platonism, is regarded by some as 'one of the greatest philosophers of the ancient world,'² his writing can be dense and complex. Some commentators highlight his influence on a movement in which the 'tendency to make God transcendent was carried as far as it could go,'³ while others consider him a pantheist whose mystical expressions represent a failure of reason, and 'who thought the goal of spiritual life was the renunciation of clear distinctions ... in favour of our own extinction in the nothingness of pure Spirit.'⁴ Maria Luisa Gatti attributes to Plotinus the achievement of having gathered 'the legacy of nearly eight centuries of Greek philosophy into a magnificently unified synthesis.'⁵ Pertinent to this thesis is Plotinus' blending of Stoic and Platonic principles, a blending which led to the formulation of the 'famous triad (rest in God or the One, procession, and return to God) which attracted mystical Christians from Gregory of Nyssa to Thomas Aquinas and beyond.'⁶

² J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1972), 20.

³ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (London: Black, 1977), 20.

⁴ Kevin Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus: A Practical Introduction to Neoplatonism* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2005), 33.

⁵ Gatti notes that the following philosophers or philosophical schools are explicitly mentioned in the *Enneads*: Pherecydes, Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans, Heraclitus, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus. Maria Luisa Gatti, "Plotinus: The Platonic Tradition and the Foundation of Neoplatonism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 10.

⁶ John M. Rist, "Plotinus and Christian Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 390.

The *Exitus-Reditus* Schema

Plotinus receives the most attention in Chapter 3 of *God for Us*: ‘Augustine and the Trinitarian Economy of the Soul,’ in a section entitled ‘The Soul’s Journey Toward God.’⁷ Discussing Augustine’s soteriology, LaCugna writes, ‘In Plotinian fashion [Augustine] sought to show how the journey of the soul inward is at the same time a discovery that it is created in the image of the Trinity, and also that it must undergo transformation so that it can become a more perfect image.’⁸ In what is largely a descriptive passage, she outlines three aspects of Plotinian thought which influenced Augustine’s theology. Firstly, LaCugna notes that Augustine had speculated on the Trinity according to Plotinus’ triad of the One, Intelligence and Soul prior to his conversion in 386.⁹ She describes the Plotinian model as ‘patently emanationist, a hierarchical structure of being, ordered by descending grades,’ and as one which ‘emphasized the transcendence of God to an extreme degree.’¹⁰

Secondly, LaCugna writes of the dynamism of the three elements (the One, Intelligence, and Soul) proceeding ‘first in a downward motion (emanation; *prōdos*; *exitus*), and then upward (return; *epistrophē*; *reditus*).’¹¹ She notes the Plotinian association of ‘the One’ with the idea of ‘the Good,’ an association which was to grow in significance in the Christian tradition, where God (rather than the One) was understood as ‘Goodness.’

Thirdly, LaCugna refers to the mystical aspect of Plotinian cosmology, where the human soul longs for its source. She quotes Augustine’s well-known words, ‘Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.’¹² Like the notion of ‘the Good,’ the theme of mystical union has endured

⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 91-92. Earlier in *God for Us*, she also notes the Augustinian theme of the ‘theopsychology of the soul created in the image of the Trinity and longing to return to God.’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 82.

⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 91.

⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 91. LaCugna quotes from Gunton on Augustine’s Neo-platonic leanings: ‘In all this, Augustine is taking a clear step back from the teachings of the Cappadocian Fathers.’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 107, n. 40, quoting Colin E. Gunton, ‘Augustine, the Trinity and the Theological Crisis of the West,’ *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43, no. 1 (1990): 44. Gunton’s criticism of LaCugna’s use of Neo-platonic ideas is explored in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

¹⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 91.

¹¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 92.

¹² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 92. Themes of praise and desire for God are present in Augustine’s words leading into this quotation: ‘You arouse us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and draw us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you.’ Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 39. LaCugna also refers briefly to the ‘cyclic schema taken over from

in the Christian tradition.¹³ Concerns regarding pantheism, emanation and human absorption into the divine are inevitably raised in commentary on Christian mysticism, and indeed, LaCugna's incorporation of mystical themes into her writing leaves her vulnerable to criticism regarding the Creator-creature distinction.

LaCugna demonstrates, however, an awareness of the issues surrounding the aspects of her theology which have attracted criticism. Discussing the Arian debate in Chapter 1 of *God for Us*, for example, she notes (admittedly expounding on the views of the early church on emanation) that Arius presupposed that God is not subject to diffusion or emanation, given that nothing can exist eternally with God and be self-sufficient.¹⁴ Furthermore, writing of the Cappadocian approach, she contrasts Greek cosmology with Christianity, with specific reference to emanation, necessity and freedom. The Cappadocians, she writes, 'departed ... from Greek cosmology according to which the world originated from God out of necessity (Plato), or as a necessary emanation (Plotinus).'¹⁵ She accepts that theologians of the fourth century may have had little choice but to 'talk about the coequality of the divine persons ... by prescind[ing] from the subordination of the economy and appeal[ing] to a realm in which, it was claimed, there was no subordination.'¹⁶ She makes this concession recognising the incompatibility of the 'neo-Platonic ontology with its hierarchy of being'¹⁷ and the Christian understanding of creation as a free act of God. Her awareness of the unsuitability of a hierarchical concept of being in Christian discourse must be considered by those who accuse her of condoning such a hierarchy in her model.

While LaCugna, like many of her critics, rejects Neo-platonic concepts where they clearly threaten the Christian understanding of divine freedom, she is open to the idea of a careful synthesis of selected elements. This openness reflects some of the principles which underlie the idea of the theological model, such that different models can co-exist to highlight

Plotinus' in further discussion of Augustine's *De Trinitate*. She refers to both the cycle of emanation and return, and the 'reflexive cycle within the soul; the soul remembers, knows and loves itself.' *God for Us*, 95.

¹³ According to LaCugna, 'The threads of the mystical theology of the Cappadocians are found in their predecessors and in Middle Platonism.' *God for Us*, 57.

¹⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 31.

¹⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 244.

¹⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 229.

¹⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 229.

different aspects of doctrine, and that models should not be considered mutually exclusive. She refers, in this regard, to the Cappadocians and their brilliant synthesis of ‘elements of Neo-platonism and Stoicism, biblical revelation, and pastoral concerns to argue against both Arius and Eunomius.’¹⁸

The maxim *bonum diffusivum sui*, developed in Christian thought by theologians such as Pseudo-Dionysius and Bonaventure, is appropriated by LaCugna. John Rist notes that Plotinus was instrumental in developing this maxim beyond its Platonic origins. He describes Plotinus’ achievement as a synthesis of an imaginative application of ‘the Platonic principle of psychology, whether human or divine, that goodness is necessarily productive’ and of the ‘Stoic notion of a pantheistic universe.’¹⁹ Rist writes of Plotinus’ broadening of Plato’s ideas in his 1967 monograph, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*. Rist claims that ‘a germ of the Plotinian doctrine of emanation is to be found in Plato’s account of Eros and ... that this germ is supplemented by Plotinus’ turning Plato’s moral rule “Being good means doing good” into a law of the cosmos.’²⁰

Rist suggests that Plotinus’ *exitus-reditus* schema began to be integrated into Christian thought during the post-Nicene period. Indeed, the theological and historical circumstances which led to the condemnation of Arianism may have fostered interest among Christians in the Plotinian model. While there is some debate about the extent to which Arius was influenced by Plotinian notions of hierarchical beings, following Nicaea, ‘forms of Platonism which might look like (or be claimed to look like) the subordination of Arius were increasingly impossible for orthodox Christians.’²¹ Rist argues, however, that while the schema of hypostases was off limits, Athanasius’ interest in mysticism may have opened the way for his contemporaries to adopt some of the *ascetic* aspects of Plotinian thought. He writes:

for although Athanasius tends to despise philosophers as of vanishing importance in the new Christian world ... his love of the ascetic way to

¹⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 43. In a very similar passage in her Introduction, LaCugna includes ‘mysticism.’ 10. LaCugna notes, in both cases, that the Cappadocians’ concerns remained soteriological.

¹⁹ Rist, “Plotinus and Christian Philosophy,” 390.

²⁰ Rist acknowledges his debt to Jean Trouillard, author of “L’impeccabilité de l’esprit, selon Plotin,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 143, no. 1 (1953): 19-29. John M. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 66.

²¹ Rist, “Plotinus and Christian Philosophy,” 395.

holiness could only (unwittingly) encourage the Platonic and Plotinian asceticism (of which he himself appears to be ignorant or at least disdainful), to enter the Christian fold and receive a warm welcome. ... One result of that Council [Nicaea], then, was to ensure that negative theology, doctrines of asceticism and of the mystic way, combined with the general structure of cosmic rest, procession and return ... were to be the Plotinian themes most apparent in subsequent Christianity.²²

Emanation and Necessity

Even a brief reading of commentary on Plotinus' use of the concept 'necessity' reveals a range of interpretations. The definition of the word 'freedom' as 'having the ability to make choice,' and 'emanation' as 'acting out of compulsion' has resulted in an unfortunate narrowing of the parameters of what is, in reality, a rich and complex area of theology.²³ Rist argues that 'the difficulties faced in the traditional interpretation of emanation [in Plotinian commentary] arise because the commentators have not faced the problem of whether the One is fully free in the sense of willing to be what it is, or whether it must be what it is because it could not be anything else.'²⁴ He turns to Plotinus' own words in the *Ennead*, looking to clarify his use of the terms 'necessity' and 'freedom.' The freedom of the One does not lie in an ability to make choices, as this would compromise its unity:

It is therefore in a sense determined – determined, I mean, by its uniqueness and not in any sense being under compulsion ... ; compulsion did not co-exist with the Supreme, but it has place only among secondaries and even there can exercise no tyranny; this uniqueness is from outside. ... We cannot think of it as a chance existence; it is not what it chanced to be but what it must be – and yet without a 'Must.'²⁵

Rist gleans from this densely-worded and somewhat disjointed passage that not only is the 'necessity' of the One's existence different from other necessities, but that 'necessity' is not even the right word. He also dismisses the word 'compulsion' as unsatisfactory in its connotation of the One's need of something external to its essence.²⁶ LaCugna takes up this

²² Rist, "Plotinus and Christian Philosophy," 395-96.

²³ For discussion on the metaphorical use of the term 'emanation' in Plotinus, see Lloyd P. Gerson, "Plotinus' Metaphysics: Emanation or Creation?" *The Review of Metaphysics* 46, no. 3 (1993): 559-60 and Rist, *Plotinus*, 71.

²⁴ Rist, *Plotinus*, 68.

²⁵ Rist, *Plotinus*, 77-78, quoting Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.8.9.10-17. Rist uses the 'MacKenna-Page' translation: Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna, 3rd ed. revised by B. S. Page (London: Faber and Faber, 1962).

²⁶ For an account of the measures taken by Clement and earlier apologists to uphold the concept of divine freedom (in response to the appropriation by theologians of the Platonic idea of the Good), see Wolfhart

idea that the word ‘necessity’ must be applied with care and nuance in theological discourse: ‘The necessity that Good overflows is not a constraint in the ordinary sense of the word; the “ecstasis”, the going-forward of Good is out of super-abundance, plenitude, perfection, fecundity, not lack or need or desire.’²⁷ Here, again, Ian Ramsey’s claim that we must expect religious language to have a distinctive logical behaviour is pertinent.²⁸

LaCugna’s use of the concepts of emanation and return to assist in explaining her model of *oikonomia*, is, as noted above, not intended to portray a hierarchical structure of being. Similarly, her use of emanationist imagery to express the abundance and overflow of divine love in creation is not meant to convey any sense of lack or remoteness in God. Her ontology of the person locates the excess of love within the divine persons rather than in the divine substance which unites them. LaCugna’s use of the concept of emanation, thus, serves a different purpose from that of Plotinus. She identifies the fundamental difference between Neo-platonic and Christian mysticism as being that in the former, ‘the soul attains union with the One without any assistance from the One.’²⁹ As such, there is an absence of loving relationship in the Neo-platonic schema. Not surprisingly, LaCugna notes Louth’s observation that ‘Plotinus’ One cares nothing for the soul [and that] there is no personal character to the contemplative and unitive experience.’³⁰

The introduction of the God of love and grace in the writings of the Christian theologians to which the discussion now turns radically changes the dynamics of the relationship between the human and the ‘transcendent.’ Nevertheless, Plotinus’ influence on Christian philosophy and on mysticism, particularly through his development of the *exitus-reditus* model must be acknowledged, as should the nuanced (albeit complex and, at times, problematic) thinking which accompanies much of his writing on emanation, necessity and freedom.

Pannenberg, “The Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God as a Dogmatic Problem of Early Christian Theology,” in *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 2 (London: SCM Press, 1971), 175-76.

²⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 161. LaCugna argues for a nuanced interpretation of Rahner’s use of the term ‘necessity’ when she writes: ‘Rahner cannot mean necessity as a limit upon God’s freedom, rather, necessity as conformity to self or to nature. If God *by nature* is self-communicating, then God, who necessarily is what God is, *must* communicate Godself.’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 235, n. 12. LaCugna’s italics.

²⁸ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 49-50.

²⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 92.

³⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 92, drawing on observations by Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 36-51.

John Scotus Eriugena

Eriugena (c. 815 – c. 877), an Irish theologian and philosopher, is known for his translation of a manuscript of the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, given to Louis the Pious of France by Byzantine Emperor, Michael II. Undertaken at the request of Charles the Bald, Eriugena's translation, although considered deficient in places, 'ensured that the principles of negative theology embedded in the writings of the Areopagite [Pseudo-Denys] would become part of the heritage of Western scholarship.'³¹ In his main work, the *Periphyseon* or *De divisione naturae*, probably written between 862 and 866, Eriugena brings together 'a number of different adaptations of Neoplatonic systems and ideas.'³² Like Plotinus, his ability to achieve a synthesis of diverse ideas has been acknowledged by scholars. Deirdre Carabine, for example, writes, 'It is a testimony to the genius of Eriugena that his philosophical system united Greek East and Latin West at a time in intellectual history when learning had reached a low point.'³³ At times, however, the diversity of Eriugena's sources leads to some incongruity in the presentation of his ideas. His writing received papal condemnation. Bernard McGinn writes, 'In the wake of the 1210 condemnation of Amaury of Bene and his followers for pantheism, Pope Honorius III ordered the bishops of France and England to send all copies of the *Periphyseon* to Rome to be burnt.'³⁴

LaCugna refers only briefly to Eriugena in *God for Us*. Commenting on the influence of apophaticism of the Greek Fathers and Pseudo-Dionysius on medieval scholasticism, she observes that theologians of this period preferred 'the way of affirmation built around the method of analogy.'³⁵ She adds in a footnote that the apophatic tradition continued in the Latin West with Scotus Eriugena, Meister Eckhart and others.³⁶ Writing on the negative

³¹ Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God: Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition: Plato to Eriugena* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1995), 301.

³² Carabine, *The Unknown God*, 302.

³³ Carabine, *The Unknown God*, 302. Copleston describes Eriugena's philosophical system as 'the first great system of the Middle Ages' which 'stands out like a lofty rock in the midst of a plain.' Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, *Mediaeval Philosophy, Augustine to Scotus* (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1950), 112.

³⁴ Bernard McGinn, "Do Christian Platonists Really Believe in Creation?" in *God and Creation: An Ecumenical Symposium*, ed. David B. Burrell and Bernard McGinn, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 205.

³⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 330.

³⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 370, n. 22.

theology of some mystics, she cites Meister Eckhart and not Eriugena; however, her description of the negation of negation applies also to the approach of the Irish theologian:

The radical negative theology of some mystics, for example, Meister Eckhart, denies not only every attribute of God (God is not good, not wise, and so forth) but also negates negation itself (*negation negationis*) so that the soul may pass into pure mystical union with God, pure ignorance, unimpeded by any concepts or images of God. This way of knowing is called ‘divine ignorance’ and is not cognitive but unitive knowledge. Its goal is communion with God or Godhead ‘beyond’ the Trinity.³⁷

The strongest link between LaCugna and Eriugena is what could be described as a relatively ill-considered remark by Colin Gunton in his review of *God for Us*,³⁸ in which he identifies as a crucial passage her offering of a ‘chiastic model of emanation and return.’³⁹ He questions ‘whether Professor LaCugna’s approach finally escapes the pantheism which results from any attempt to bring God and the world too close,’ adding that ‘the author sounds as though she owes more to John Scotus Eriugena, one of the fountainheads of modern pantheism, than the Cappadocian Fathers.’⁴⁰ Gunton concludes this part of his critique with the following assessment: ‘The source of the malaise can be found in the principle of self-communication, with its emanationist and neoplatonic – and thus ultimately pantheistic – overtones.’⁴¹ While LaCugna is critical of the contribution of some aspects of the application of apophatic language to the process of the separation of *oikonomia* and *theologia*, I nonetheless consider it worthwhile to examine Eriugena’s writings, along with scholarly commentary, for the insights they bring to the debate on her expression of the God-world relationship.

Pantheism

Bernard McGinn offers a more measured assessment than Gunton of Eriugena’s vulnerability to the charge of pantheism. While he recognizes that Eriugena’s ‘dialectical understanding of how God is related to the world led him to formulae which seem to compromise the distinction between the two and to suggest that the universe is an eternal and necessary part

³⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 369, n. 11.

³⁸ Gunton, review of *God for Us*, 136-37.

³⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 223.

⁴⁰ Gunton, review of *God for Us*, 137.

⁴¹ Gunton, review of *God for Us*, 136.

of God,' he also acknowledges that it can be argued 'that John's teaching on creation is more subtle and complex than such easy generalizations allow.'⁴²

Eriugena is well known for his four species or divisions of the *genus natura* introduced in the *Periphyseon*.⁴³ The Neo-platonic schema of *exitus* and *reditus* underpins the four divisions.⁴⁴ McGinn highlights a passage from the *Periphyseon* in which Eriugena places strong emphasis on God's omnipresence in creation: 'So when we hear that God makes all things we ought to understand nothing else than that God is in all things, that is, that He is the essence of all things.'⁴⁵ He notes that '[t]o many interpreters the characterization of God as the *omnium essentia*, something John took over from Pseudo-Dionysius and communicated to many subsequent thinkers ... has seemed pantheistic.'⁴⁶ McGinn paraphrases the following counter perspective on behalf of Eriugena:

The Irishman insists that although God is the essence of all things, we cannot reverse the formula to say that all things are the divine essence, because the absolute simplicity of the unknown divine nature remains transcendently distinct from its composite created manifestation.⁴⁷

McGinn asks whether the potentially pantheistic statement 'God is in all things' is still considered such when followed dialectically by the claim, 'God is not in all things.' He observes, 'The Eriugenic dialectic ... manages to combine outrageous expressions of identity between God and the world with ringing affirmations of the absolute difference between the two,' but questions whether 'this is a form of verbal subterfuge or a true *docta ignorantia*.'⁴⁸ Carabine refers to another such assertion: 'that God is both the maker of all things and he is made in all things'⁴⁹ and notes that Eriugena is 'careful to stress the fact that to speak of God

⁴² McGinn, "Christian Platonists," 206.

⁴³ McGinn lists the four species and provides a brief explanation of each: 'the nature that creates and is not created is God as the efficient cause of all, the nature that both creates and is created is the unity-in-multiplicity of the Divine Causes or Ideas (*rationes*) in the Logos, the nature that is created and does not create is the world understood as the divine manifestation, and the nature that neither creates nor is created is the hidden God, the final cause of all things.' McGinn, "Christian Platonists," 206.

⁴⁴ Carabine, *The Unknown God*, 305.

⁴⁵ McGinn, "Christian Platonists," 206-07, citing Eriugena *Periphyseon* 518A. McGinn's translation.

⁴⁶ McGinn, "Christian Platonists," 207.

⁴⁷ McGinn, "Christian Platonists," 207.

⁴⁸ McGinn, "Christian Platonists," 207.

⁴⁹ Carabine, *The Unknown God*, 308, quoting Eriugena, *Periphyseon* 650C-D. Carabine's translation.

“being made” in all things is to be understood as metaphorical speech.⁵⁰ As such, his language should not be interpreted in a strictly literal manner as a matter of course.

Etienne Gilson argues that pantheistic interpretations of Eriugena’s work may result from a misinterpretation of the word ‘division.’ ‘We should not,’ he argues, ‘imagine “nature” as a whole of which God and creatures would be parts; or as a genus of which God and creatures would be a species. God is not all things, nor are all things God.’⁵¹ The word ‘division’ must be interpreted in such a way as to prevent the misunderstanding that creatures exist in the same ontological realm or on the same continuum as God. Similarly, Frederick Copleston, while seeking to defend Plotinus, acknowledges that if the divisions were interpreted as divisions of God and creatures within the species of nature, it could be concluded that Eriugena’s system was monistic, and concedes that ‘his philosophic explanation or rationalisation of the egress of creatures from God and their return to God may, taken by itself, imply pantheism and a denial of the distinction.’⁵²

Also addressing concerns about the seeming lack of distinction between God and creation in Eriugena’s writing, Sheldon-Williams argues for a distinction in the following passage:

God contains all things: but that which contains cannot be identical with that which it contains for the latter is defined or localized while the former is not. All things which after God are endowed with being possess not simple but particularized being.⁵³

While Eriugena leaves himself open to the charge of pantheism by not qualifying some of his statements (in the way Sheldon-Williams does in the example above), care must be taken in the interpretation of his language, and the assumption should not be made that he is speaking literally in every instance.

⁵⁰ Carabine, *The Unknown God*, 308.

⁵¹ Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 116-17.

⁵² Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 117.

⁵³ I. P. Sheldon-Williams, “Johannes Scottus Eriugena,” in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 529.

Scripture

Eriugena sought to ground his speculation in Scripture. Copleston reasonably argues that the fourth stage of nature, *Deus omnia in omnibus*, is based on the words of St. Paul in I Cor. 15:28: 'And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.'⁵⁴ Again, Copleston defends Eriugena's position:

Now John Scottus' general system demands that creatures should return to God and that God should be all in all. Regarding both truths as founded on divine teaching, John Scottus had to reconcile them rationally, in such a way that the *reditus in Deum* does not lead to the conclusion to which it might seem to lead, namely pantheistic absorption, and that the presentation of the distinction between God and creatures does not contradict the Pauline statement that God will be all in all.⁵⁵

Of course, it could be argued that basing a system of thought on selected passages of Scripture is highly inadvisable, and that some of the problematic aspects of Eriugena's theology stem from such a methodology. However, it could also be the case that Eriugena himself has been the victim of selective quotation. Copleston observes on this matter: '...if you take statements in isolation he can be an atheist or a pantheist.'⁵⁶

The parallels with LaCugna are clear. The passage on which she bases her model of *oikonomia* and *theologia* (Eph 1:3-14) speaks of God's plan in which, in 'the fullness of time, all things are to be gathered up in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth.'⁵⁷ The Neoplatonic model of emanation and return lends itself to this biblical theme. However, LaCugna does not limit her understanding of creation to the ideas expressed in this one passage. She refers, for example, to Genesis 1: 3, alluding to the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 131. King James Version. He suggests, furthermore, that Eriugena draws on the Pauline notion that the risen body is a spiritual body, on the Johannine concept of the Logos by whom all things were made, and on the Fathers' commonly discussed theme of deification. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 131-32.

⁵⁵ Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 134.

⁵⁶ Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 135.

⁵⁷ Eph 1:10.

⁵⁸ LaCugna asks, 'How ought the theologian speak about a God who does not remain self-sufficient and self-enclosed, but whose ecstatic self-expression caused there to be, for the very first time, anything at all (Gen. 1:3)?' LaCugna, *God for Us*, 319. For further discussion of LaCugna's use of Scripture, see Chapter 5 of this thesis.

When LaCugna introduces a model designed to revitalise the theology of God in Chapter 7 of *God for Us*, she emphasises the idea of the self-communicating, self-expressing God who seeks union with humanity. She draws attention to this idea as it appears in biblical revelation and to the Dionysian image of overflowing abundance. The Neo-platonic and Dionysian influence on LaCugna is undeniable; and her trinitarian theology is further enriched through her engagement with Bonaventure.

Saint Bonaventure

LaCugna refers to Bonaventure (1221-1274) throughout *God for Us*, most often in relation to his use of the maxim *bonum diffusivum sui*.⁵⁹ She also names him as exceptional among Western theologians for his preference for the Eastern approach to trinitarian theology.⁶⁰ She observes that ‘Rahner’s theology of self-communication appears to have its roots in Bonaventure’s vision of the self-diffusive God,’⁶¹ and considers Rahner’s understanding of the relationship between the trinitarian life of God and creation to have been influenced more by Bonaventure than Aquinas.⁶² LaCugna would have been attracted to Bonaventure’s strong trinitarian focus. Anne Hunt states that while he ‘treats God in terms of being ... his theology is thoroughly and consistently from a trinitarian perspective, and it is the love of God,

⁵⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 161, 164, 165, 353. She locates Bonaventure within the tradition leading back to Pseudo-Dionysius and including Richard St. Victor (161, 306, n. 11, 353). For a survey of the development of this maxim, see Julien Peghaire, “L’axiome ‘Bonum est diffusivum sui’ dans le néo-platonisme et le thomisme,” *Revue de l’Université d’Ottawa*, section spéciale (1932): 5–30. See also LaCugna’s acknowledgement of Pseudo-Dionysius’ contribution to this important theme in trinitarian theology. LaCugna, *God for Us*, 161, 164.

⁶⁰ LaCugna writes, ‘Most theologians in the West ... replaced the monarchy of the Father with the idea of a divine substance as the ultimate principle. In the Latin tradition Bonaventure was a notable exception.’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 414, n. 55. For further references by LaCugna to Bonaventure’s emphasis on aspects of Eastern trinitarian theology, see LaCugna, *God for Us*, 164, 248, 272, 306, n. 11, 399. For her favourable comparison of Bonaventure with Aquinas in this regard, see LaCugna, *God for Us*, 161, 174, n. 56. Delio suggests that Bonaventure ‘opted for the Greek Cappadocian model’ because ‘he saw this model operative in salvation history and the one most compatible with the life and experience of Francis of Assisi.’ Ilia Delio, “Bonaventure’s Metaphysics of the Good,” *Theological Studies* 60, no. 2 (1999): 231.

⁶¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 233, n. 4. She cites Karl Rahner, “La Doctrine des ‘sens spirituels’ au Moyen-Âge en particulier chez Saint Bonaventure,” *Revue d’ascétique et de mystique* 14 (1933): 263-99 and Karl Rahner, “Der Begriff der ekstasis bei Bonaventura,” *Zeitschrift für Askese und Mystik* 9 (1934): 1-19. Delio argues, however, that there is little evidence for LaCugna’s claim linking Rahner’s theology of self-communication with Bonaventure. She writes: ‘Although Rahner published two articles on Bonaventure, one on the spiritual senses, the other on mystical ecstasy, neither article examined divine self-communication.’ Ilia Delio, “Theology, Metaphysics, and the Centrality of Christ,” *Theological Studies* 68, no. 2 (2007): 256.

⁶² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 236, n. 19.

revealed in Scriptures, made manifest in the Crucified One, and communicated to loving souls through grace, that captivates Bonaventure.’⁶³

Like Plotinus and Eriugena, Bonaventure is commended in the literature for his production of a theological synthesis of a diverse range of influences. Of his place in the history of Western spirituality, Ewert Cousins writes:

Viewed within the religious context of the Middle Ages as a whole – when Islamic, Jewish and Christian spirituality were flourishing – he produced one of the richest syntheses of Christian spirituality. ... Living at a time when the rift between the Greek East and the Latin West was not yet so radical, he integrated the distinctively Greek spirituality of the Pseudo-Dionysius with the emerging Franciscan devotion to the humanity and passion of Christ, which was to give a decisive direction to the spirituality of Western Europe for centuries.⁶⁴

The ‘Good’ as Self-Diffusive

Bonaventure’s theological vision is based on ‘the doctrine of the Trinity as the mystery of the self-diffusion of the Good,’⁶⁵ and, as noted above, LaCugna has integrated this concept into her relational theology. Central to both LaCugna’s and Bonaventure’s trinitarian theology, too, is the idea of the Father as divine *archē*. Hayes describes this focus on the Father as ‘the pivotal point of Bonaventure’s entire metaphysics of *exitus* and *reditus*, for it is the Father who is source and goal of all created reality; in Him is found ultimately the status in which the entire creative process finds fulfilment.’⁶⁶ Ilia Delio writes of Bonaventure’s understanding of the rule of the Father as the basis of a shared rule:

Because the Spirit is the gift of self-donation between the Father and the Son, the Spirit, too, shares in the rule of self-giving and, indeed, is the gift par-excellence. Thus we see that patriarchy, or the rule of the Father, is self-gift, which is the basis of the shared rule of the three divine persons based on the nature of the good as relational.⁶⁷

⁶³ Anne Hunt, *The Trinity: Insights from the Mystics* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 57.

⁶⁴ St. Bonaventure, *The Soul’s Journey into God; The Tree of Life; The Life of St. Francis*, trans. and with an introduction by Ewert Cousins (London: SPCK, 1978), 1.

⁶⁵ Bonaventure, *The Soul’s Journey into God*, 24.

⁶⁶ Zachary Hayes, *Saint Bonaventure’s Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity: Introduction and Translation*, ed. George Marcil, Works of St. Bonaventure, vol. 3 (New York: St. Bonaventure University, 1979), 41.

⁶⁷ Delio, “Bonaventure’s Metaphysics of the Good,” 238.

Delio claims that LaCugna comes to the same conclusion as Bonaventure in this regard through LaCugna's understanding of the Cappadocian model of the Trinity.⁶⁸

The notion of *exitus* and *reditus* is central to Bonaventure's theology. Hunt, speaking of 'the esteemed place in Christian iconography' of the symbol of a circle, notes that for Bonaventure, it 'well symbolizes that dynamic circular movement of exit (*exitus*) and return (*reditus*), the going forth from and returning to the source of all things that is the key to all reality.'⁶⁹ The Plotinian notion of emanation which 'considers the production of the world as a gradual and hierarchical descent from God'⁷⁰ is used by Bonaventure alongside the Christian concept of creation *ex nihilo*. Bonaventure adopts the latter notion in order to uphold the Christian understanding of God creating in perfect freedom.⁷¹ This acceptance of creation *ex nihilo* enables him to use the language of emanation to refer to ideas other than the eternal trinitarian processions. Hayes writes of Bonaventure's use of the image of water: 'The God of fecund love is compared with a vast and living fountain of water. Flowing from that fountain as something willed and loved by God is the immense river of creation.'⁷² The language of emanation, as Hayes suggests, 'appears to Bonaventure as the most fitting expression of God as living, active, productive, loving goodness *as well as* of His relation to the world.'⁷³ While LaCugna rejects the idea of a hierarchy of being (see discussion above on Plotinus) her use of the language of emanation has been subjected to criticism by Weinandy and Gunton in particular, a criticism which will be addressed in the next chapter of this thesis.

⁶⁸ Delio, "Bonaventure's Metaphysics of the Good," 238, n. 38. Delio refers to LaCugna, *God for Us*, 391 and LaCugna, "God in Communion with Us," 87-88.

⁶⁹ Hunt, *Insights from the Mystics*, 48.

⁷⁰ Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, trans. Iltyd Trethowan and F. J. Sheed (London: Sheed & Ward, 1938), 197.

⁷¹ Gilson rightly claims that the Neo-platonist principle of emanation 'rests upon an erroneous principle, namely that the perfect simplicity of a cause prevents it from producing more than a single effect.' Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, 197. Furthermore, Bowman argues that Bonaventure's world view is set 'apart from a Neoplatonic exemplarism which sees the universe as a hierarchical chain of being ordered by degrees of participation in being, so that the farther down the hierarchy one goes the weaker and dimmer the reflection of being. For Bonaventure, every single creature from the angel to the grain of sand has its direct mode and foundation in the Word himself, in the eternal reasons.' Leonard J. Bowman, "Cosmic Exemplarism of Bonaventure," *Journal of Religion* 55, no. 2 (1975): 187.

⁷² Zachary Hayes, *The Hidden Center: Spirituality and Speculative Christology in St. Bonaventure* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 13.

⁷³ Hayes, *The Hidden Center*, 13. My italics.

Some parallels between Bonaventure's and LaCugna's understanding of theology as 'practical' are worthy of note.⁷⁴ According to Hayes, Bonaventure 'views theology as a practical science whose basic purpose is to help human beings achieve their ultimate goal in life.'⁷⁵ The goal of speculation, for both theologians, is 'loving union with God.'⁷⁶ Hayes' reference to Bonaventure's thought as 'concerned not with knowledge for its own sake, but with a saving knowledge'⁷⁷ and Cullen's reference to Bonaventurian theology as 'a whole way of life' with a principal aim to 'make us good,'⁷⁸ resonate strongly with the practical and soteriological emphasis in LaCugna's trinitarian theology.

While these parallels exist, LaCugna alludes to the tension she experiences in drawing on the ideas of theologians such as Bonaventure. She writes, 'Theology that is soteriological ... shifts the focus from seeing the doctrine of the Trinity as a speculative conundrum about simultaneous oneness and threeness, toward contemplation of God's ecstatic self-expression in history and personhood.'⁷⁹ She continues, 'This is not to speak against the usefulness and brilliance, both meditative and intellectual, of classical speculative theologies.'⁸⁰ LaCugna's re-conception of the immanent-economic Trinity stems from a reluctance to speak of the immanent Trinity which arises, in turn, from her concern that such speech conveys an image of God as remote and unrelated to creation and persons. Bonaventure does not share this reluctance, and engages (as noted above) in speculation on the idea of God as 'being itself,' identifying the first phase of the *inner life of the Trinity* as the perfect self-diffusion or emanation.⁸¹ LaCugna is aware of the importance of the trinitarian processions in

⁷⁴ Allowances must be made for significant differences in their approaches to the idea of theology as a 'science.' The place of science and philosophy in Bonaventure's theology will be discussed below in the section on his *Itinerarium*. For an insight into LaCugna's approach, see LaCugna, "Philosophers and Theologians."

⁷⁵ Hayes, *Bonaventure's Disputed Questions*, 28.

⁷⁶ Hayes, *Bonaventure's Disputed Questions*, 28.

⁷⁷ Hayes, *Bonaventure's Disputed Questions*, 30.

⁷⁸ Christopher M. Cullen, *Bonaventure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 23.

⁷⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 367.

⁸⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 367.

⁸¹ Christopher Cullen names essential attributes, some dialectical in nature, of this greatest self-diffusion: 'actual and intrinsic, substantial and hypostatic, natural and voluntary, free and necessary, lacking nothing and perfect.' Cullen, *Bonaventure*, 119. Wawrykow effectively articulates Bonaventure's treatment of the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity in the following passage: 'Through his careful rendering of the divine emanation in terms appropriate to God, Bonaventure is able to allege the parallel between the inner life of the triune God and God's work *ad extra*, without confusing the two. In both, love and good predominate; and

Bonaventure's metaphysics. Yet, even as she explains Bonaventure's understanding of the *exitus-reditus* model, she moves away from discussion of the immanent Trinity to the language with which she articulates her own re-conceived model (which does not make so clear a distinction between immanent and economic Trinity) of 'return to God through Christ in the Spirit.'⁸² She includes Bonaventure among the theologians she respects and with whom, along with her co-writer Kilian McDonnell, she considers herself to be in continuity. LaCugna and McDonnell 'honour the bridge [of scientific ontology] but do not pass over it.'⁸³ In the section below, however, I will explore further points of connection between LaCugna and Bonaventure.

Bonaventurean *Itinerarium*

In her article "Creation *ex nihilo* and *ex amore*," Elizabeth Groppe defends LaCugna's 'axiomatic position on the unity of *oikonomia* and *theologia*' against its possible interpretation as 'a form of monism and an abrogation of divine freedom.'⁸⁴ She likens LaCugna's speculation on the identity of *oikonomia* and *theologia* to a 'spiritual exercise' or a Bonaventurian *itinerarium*.⁸⁵ Clearly, Groppe's main purpose in doing so is to support the claim that LaCugna's theological writing cannot be interpreted solely as 'a series of propositional statements.'⁸⁶ What does this 'likening' mean, though, for a study such as this

God's work in the creation mirrors and is rooted in the inner dynamic life of the triune God.' Joseph Wawrykow, "Franciscan and Dominican Trinitarian Theology (Thirteenth Century): Bonaventure and Aquinas," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Giles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 188.

⁸² LaCugna writes of Bonaventure's trinitarian theology: 'The consummation of creation is its return to God through Christ in the Spirit.' LaCugna, *God for Us*, 178, n. 118. See also LaCugna, *God for Us*, 164, 179, n. 129. LaCugna's classic statement, previously quoted, is: 'This chiasmic model of emanation and return ... expresses the one ecstatic movement of God outward by which all things originate from God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and all things are brought into union with God and returned to God.' LaCugna, *God for Us*, 223.

⁸³ LaCugna and McDonnell, "Far Country," 215. LaCugna and McDonnell argue that this bridge of 'scientific ontology' took their scholastic predecessors on 'a journey which became one-sidedly rationalistic.' LaCugna and McDonnell, "Far Country," 215.

⁸⁴ Groppe, "Creation *Ex Nihilo*," 472.

⁸⁵ Groppe, "Creation *Ex Nihilo*," 472. Robert Imbelli also makes this connection: 'It is not surprising ... to find [LaCugna] showing a predilection for the theology of Saint Bonaventure, as much for its spiritual affectivity as for its Trinitarian acumen. In a lovely sentence, redolent of Bonaventurian sensibility, she writes, "Praise is the creature's mode of ecstasis, its own self-transcendence, its disinclination to remain self-contained.'" Imbelli, review of *God for Us*, 24, quoting LaCugna, *God for Us*, 350.

⁸⁶ Groppe, "Creation *Ex Nihilo*," 472. LaCugna makes this point herself in an early article: '... theological formulations about the trinity are not readily translatable into clear, determinate propositional propositions

on LaCugna and divine transcendence? One could be tempted to categorise (or some might say, dismiss) as ‘spiritual’ and ‘exploratory in character’ any of the problematic or contradictory ideas she presents. Groppe notes that ‘LaCugna explicitly critiques what she terms a “deductive” approach to trinitarian theology and describes trinitarian speculation as a form of discernment.’⁸⁷ Groppe’s only other reference to the idea of the Bonaventurian *itinerarium* is to an article by Kevin Hughes which she describes as ‘a very insightful account of Bonaventure’s approach to theology.’⁸⁸ This avenue will be explored below, and connections will be made with LaCugna’s theology. Before doing so, however, I will sketch the background to both the term ‘itinerarium’ and Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium*.

The Latin word ‘itinerarium’ has a number of meanings. Philotheus Boehner defines it as pertaining ‘to a journey in general; a plan for, or a description of, a journey; in ecclesial terminology either a prayer for a safe journey, or a pilgrimage to, or a description of a pilgrimage to, the Holy Land.’⁸⁹ Ewart Cousins suggests that Bonaventure intended all these meanings to be valid, as all meanings are conveyed somewhere over the course of the work.⁹⁰ Its full title is *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* and is usually translated as either ‘The Mind’s Journey into God’ or ‘The Journey of the Soul into God.’⁹¹ Hughes considers both translations to be accurate but warns that ‘both carry a certain modern / postmodern baggage around with them,’ and suggests that ‘at least for heuristic purposes, “The Speculative Journey into God” may convey a more precise if less mellifluous sense of his intent.’⁹²

whose consistency, coherence and truth can be determined by first order predicate logic.’ LaCugna, “Philosophers and Theologians,” 177.

⁸⁷ Groppe, “Creation *Ex Nihilo*,” 491, n. 53, quoting LaCugna, *God for Us*, 230. Groppe also adds, ‘One must also bear in mind that her theological career was tragically interrupted by her death at a young age, and that she did not have the opportunity to further develop, clarify, and refine her theological positions.’ Groppe, “Creation *Ex Nihilo*,” 491, n. 53.

⁸⁸ Groppe, “Creation *Ex Nihilo*,” 491, n. 53. See Kevin L. Hughes, “Remember Bonaventure?: (Onto)Theology and Ecstasy,” *Modern Theology* 19, no. 4 (2003): 529-45.

⁸⁹ Philotheus Boehner, “Notes and Commentary” in St. Bonaventure, *The Works of Bonaventure*, vol. 2, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, trans. Philotheus Boehner (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1956), 105.

⁹⁰ Bonaventure, *The Soul’s Journey into God*, 21. For discussion on the translation of the term *mentis*, see Cullen, *Bonaventure*, 21

⁹¹ Hughes, “Remember Bonaventure?,” 542, n. 10.

⁹² Hughes, “Remember Bonaventure?,” 542, n. 10.

The work dates from 1259. It sets forth a method in which the mind can ascend to God in six steps, through the contemplation initially of sensible things and eventually of God. The six stages of the journey correspond to the ‘six wings of the seraph,’ which Bonaventure explains in his preface, ‘signify the six phases of mystical illumination by which the soul, as if by six steps or grades, is helped to reach peace through the ecstatic rapture of Christian wisdom.’⁹³ The ‘figure of St. Francis of Assisi and his journey back to God’⁹⁴ provides the model for the sojourner. The *Itinerarium* draws heavily on metaphysics, and while, according to Cullen, ‘its depth is really only revealed when read with an eye open to its metaphysical doctrines ... it is one of the most popular works in spiritual theology in the entire history of Christian thought.’⁹⁵

Dillard explores this rare mix of accessibility and complexity. He finds the work’s style direct and humble, and yet, he continues, it articulates an ‘extremely sophisticated speculative system addressing a number of fundamental questions in epistemology, metaphysics, the philosophy of mind, dogmatic theology, and contemplative mysticism.’⁹⁶ Commentators differ as to the appropriateness of identifying and separating the various philosophical and theological influences that shape Bonaventure’s theology in general, and his *Itinerarium* in particular. Turner notes the influence of the ‘two great streams of Christian Neoplatonism’⁹⁷ (Augustinian and Dionysian), yet warns that ‘an analysis which did no more than to fragment [the integrity and coherence of the *Itinerarium*] into the multiplicity of its “influences” ... would miss the point, more particularly in this work than many another, less integrated text.’⁹⁸

⁹³ St. Bonaventure, *The Mind’s Journey to God*, trans. Lawrence S. Cunningham (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1979), 24.

⁹⁴ Timothy B. Noone, “St. Bonaventure: *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*,” in *Debates in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Jeffrey Hause (New York: Routledge, 2014), 205.

⁹⁵ Cullen, *Bonaventure*, 17.

⁹⁶ Peter S. Dillard, *A Way into Scholasticism: A Companion to St. Bonaventure’s The Soul’s Journey into God* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2012), x. For further discussion on the philosophical, theological and mystical aspects of Bonaventure’s writings see Cullen, *Bonaventure*, xiii and Noone, “St. Bonaventure,” 205.

⁹⁷ Denys Turner, “Hierarchy Interiorised: Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*,” in *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*, ed. Denys Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 102.

⁹⁸ Turner, “Hierarchy Interiorised,” 103. Turner does call for a compromise, however: ‘For if the modern reader may not know Bonaventure’s sources, Bonaventure most certainly did and he expected his reader to know them.’ Turner, “Hierarchy Interiorised,” 103.

Hughes looks to defend Bonaventure against those who have categorised him (along with Plato, Aristotle, Philo, Plotinus, Aquinas and Descartes, to name a few) as an ‘onto-theologian.’ He defines the term ‘onto-theology,’ as used in post-Heideggerian philosophy, as ‘the conflation of God with Being without remainder,’⁹⁹ and also offers Richard Kearney’s definition: ‘a tendency to reify God by reducing Him to a being (*Seinde*) – albeit the highest, first, and most indeterminate of all beings ... to equate God with a modality of Being while safeguarding His ultimately ineffable and transcendent nature.’¹⁰⁰ Hughes questions the ‘sort of Cartesian vivisection that modern readers, friend and foe, have given to [Bonaventure] and many of his peers,’¹⁰¹ and suggests that, ‘lurking [in such a reading] is a sort of mechanistic anatomy of intellectual argument, the sense that the various elements of Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium* can be cut out and laid bare on the tray.’¹⁰² As Groppe does in the case of LaCugna, he questions whether beginning from ‘a propositional understanding of theological argument, as one finds in neoscholastic theology manuals, and [applying] it to a text that has a narrative and pedagogical unity’ does anything other than ‘violence to the text and to the theological vision presented before it.’¹⁰³ Instead of dissecting the text, he chooses to view it as a whole: ‘We have to re-member Bonaventure to remember him well.’¹⁰⁴

The pilgrim’s journey up to the Temple of Jerusalem is summarised by Hughes thus: ‘Each step along the journey ... takes one closer to the Holy of Holies, until one finds oneself *as the Cherubim* gazing at the Mercy Seat of God.’¹⁰⁵ Bonaventure writes of the two Cherubim who stand over the Ark:

1. ... By these Cherubim we understand the two kinds or degrees of contemplating the invisible and eternal things of God: the first considers the essential attributes of God; the second, the proper attributes of the Persons.

⁹⁹ Hughes, “Remember Bonaventure?,” 530.

¹⁰⁰ Hughes, “Remember Bonaventure?,” 530, quoting Richard Kearney, “The God Who May Be: A Phenomenological Study,” *Modern Theology* 18, no. 1 (2002): 77.

¹⁰¹ Hughes, “Remember Bonaventure?,” 533.

¹⁰² Hughes, “Remember Bonaventure?,” 533.

¹⁰³ Hughes, “Remember Bonaventure?,” 533.

¹⁰⁴ Hughes, “Remember Bonaventure?,” 533.

¹⁰⁵ Hughes, “Remember Bonaventure?,” 533. Hughes’ italics.

2. The first method fixes the soul's gaze primarily and principally on Being Itself, declaring that the first name of God is *He Who is*. The second method fixes the soul's gaze on the Good Itself, saying that this is the first name of God. The former looks especially to the Old Testament, which proclaims chiefly the unity of divine essence. Hence it was said to Moses, *I am Who I am*. The latter looks to the New Testament, which determines the plurality of the Divine Persons by baptizing *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*. Thus it is that Christ, our Master, wishing to raise up to the perfection of the Gospel the youth who had observed the Law, attributed to God principally and exclusively the name *Goodness*. For He says, *No one is good but only God*. Hence St. John Damascene, following Moses, says that *He who is* is the first name of God; whereas Dionysius, following Christ, says that *Good* is the first name of God.¹⁰⁶

In his re-membering, Hughes looks to dissociate Bonaventure from the understanding of ontotheology as the 'conflation of [yhwah] with the supreme Being of the philosophers.'¹⁰⁷ He acknowledges that the 'ladder' of the itinerary 'would seem to deposit us neatly at the top, in possession of knowledge of the "First Principles", that philosopher's stone which makes all of being intelligible.'¹⁰⁸ He offers, however, an alternative interpretation of Bonaventure's understanding of 'being.' 'In the logic of the text,' he writes, 'the meditation on Being is the gaze of one Cherub, the confession of the Old Testament, the God of Exodus. However, to be aware of God in this way alone would be to look through one eye, and thus to perceive no real depth.'¹⁰⁹ The cherub of the next step, as Bonaventure has explained, is the confession of the New Testament, 'the God of Love, the supremely self-diffusive Good.'¹¹⁰ Hughes looks, at this point, beyond propositional logic:

the liturgical logic of the text places both cherubs within the Holy of Holies, at equal remove from the Ark of the covenant and the Mercy Seat of God. Being and the Good represent two angles of approach to the one God, giving a certain stereoscopic vision. Or, to shift the metaphor, the perception

¹⁰⁶ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium* 5.1-2. Unless otherwise indicated, translation will be taken from Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, trans. Philotheus Boehner (cited above).

¹⁰⁷ Hughes, "Remember Bonaventure?," 531, again quoting Kearney, "The God Who May Be," 77. Hughes also refers to Caputo who describes ontotheology as 'a kind of philosophical virus.' John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 113.

¹⁰⁸ Hughes, "Remember Bonaventure?," 532.

¹⁰⁹ Hughes, "Remember Bonaventure?," 533.

¹¹⁰ Hughes, "Remember Bonaventure?," 534. Delio observes that the idea of incorporating first principles into the context of a spiritual journey 'was not foreign to the medieval mind, and that it went back to the 'early Fathers for whom contemplation of first principles and the spiritual journey were intertwined.' Delio, "Bonaventure's Metaphysics of the Good," 230, n. 10.

of God is entailed as dialogical, suspended between the gaze of the cherubs.¹¹¹

Hughes asks what lies between this empty space of holiness: ‘Standing in the Holy of Holies, the itinerant soul sees [Christ on the cross] the apophatic image of the broken *Logos*, and, beyond seeing and speaking, celebrates the paschal feast with Christ, thus sharing in his abjection.’¹¹² The journey is now interpreted as ‘a remembered whole.’ Hughes concludes that ‘[p]hilosophical and speculative theological moments within [the *Itinerarium*] are transitional, part of a journey, the destination of which lies beyond them in the embrace of holiness itself.’¹¹³ In comparing scholastic with patristic texts, Hughes notes that the latter are ‘less doctrinal treatises than “spiritual exercises”, where literal and allegorical scholarship flow seamlessly into tropology and anagogy, into a way of life and into prayer, in the service of the mystery of faith.’¹¹⁴ He is scathing in his assessment of scholasticism:

Scholasticism, as a method that moves toward clarity and harmony, is parasitic, or, more generously, dependent on the lived mystery that it clarifies. If it is allowed to dispel the mystery or stand in place of it, it will kill it (or at least render it invisible to the mind or ear.) Independent of the mystery and paradox of faith, scholastic method becomes a rigid propositionalism which offers a God to whom ‘man [*sic*] can neither pray nor sacrifice, can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before ...’¹¹⁵

Also looking to avoid ‘rigid propositionalism,’ Dillard and Noone¹¹⁶ suggest that the reader follow Bonaventure’s own advice:

I entreat the reader to weigh the intention of the writer rather than the work, the meaning of the words rather than the uncultivated style, the truth rather than the adornment, and the exercise of the affections rather than the instruction of the mind. He [*sic*] who would achieve this ought not to run hurriedly through these considerations, but rather take his time and mull them slowly.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ Hughes, “Remember Bonaventure?,” 534.

¹¹² Hughes, “Remember Bonaventure?,” 534.

¹¹³ Hughes, “Remember Bonaventure?,” 535.

¹¹⁴ Hughes, “Remember Bonaventure?,” 536.

¹¹⁵ Hughes, “Remember Bonaventure?,” 536-37, quoting at end of passage, Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 72.

¹¹⁶ Dillard, *Way into Scholasticism*, 9; Noone, “St. Bonaventure,” 207.

¹¹⁷ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium*, Prologue, part 5. Michael Downey takes a similar approach in the final chapter of a book on trinitarian spirituality which he and Catherine LaCugna had planned to write together. Following LaCugna’s illness and eventual death, Downey wrote the book himself. He acknowledges LaCugna in his

Dillard adds, ‘the linear presentation of philosophical theology in the form of premises, conclusions, sections, stages, chapters, and so forth belies the typically circuitous route of speculative inquiry’ and suggests the ‘best approach combines linearity with a kind of relaxed engagement.’¹¹⁸ Turner makes an interesting observation regarding the metaphor of the ladder, suggesting that ‘we conceive of it not as a rigid structure of successive steps, but as a rope ladder which the climber pulls up with herself as she climbs.’¹¹⁹

Jay M. Hammond’s ideas on ‘symbolic theology’ in the *Itinerarium* provide an appropriate means of moving the discussion from Bonaventure to LaCugna. He notes the ubiquity of symbols in the *Itinerarium* and includes among them the journey itself, the Seraph, the Temple with its Mercy Seat and the ladder.¹²⁰ He claims that Bonaventure

does not employ symbols to prove anything, rather, he resorts to the effusive nature of symbols to demonstrate ineffable mysteries that elude easy description ... symbolic thinking, in its most authentic form is not a second-best mode of grasping reality but a penetration of its most profound metaphysical structure and dynamics.¹²¹

Hammond suggests that Bonaventure ‘uses symbols to provide the imagination with powerful images with which one may ponder the deepest and highest levels of knowing.’¹²²

The symbol of the journey looms large in LaCugna’s trinitarian theology. God as ‘a walking God’ accompanies a pilgrim people on a journey,¹²³ and, for LaCugna, the economy is the

Introduction with the words, ‘This book began as someone else’s idea.’ Michael Downey, *Altogether Gift: A Trinitarian Spirituality* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 11. Downey’s final chapter consists of fifteen points for prayerful reflection. He explains, ‘This chapter is not to be read like the other chapters of this book. Rather, each point for reflection is to be considered slowly, carefully. In the spirit of *lectio divina*, sacred reading, select one point for prayer. Read it aloud. Chew over the syllables, each word, every phrase. Let the words sink into your deepest heart.’ Downey, *Altogether Gift*, 130.

¹¹⁸ Dillard, *Way into Scholasticism*, 9.

¹¹⁹ Turner, “Hierarchy Interiorised,” 113.

¹²⁰ For an extensive list of symbols, see Jay M. Hammond, “Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium*: A ‘Respondeo,’” *Franciscan Studies* 67, no. 1 (2009): 301, n. 1.

¹²¹ Jay M. Hammond’s appendix entitled, “Order in the *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*,” in *Divine and Created Order in Bonaventure’s Theology*, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, trans. and ed. Jay M. Hammond (New York: Franciscan Institute Press, 2001), 198, quoted in Hammond, “Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium*: A ‘Respondeo,’” 302.

¹²² Hammond, “Order in the *Itinerarium*,” 198, quoted in Hammond, “Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium*: A ‘Respondeo,’” 304.

¹²³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 321.

path of God's glory.¹²⁴ She and McDonnell write, 'Knowledge of God is journey with God.'¹²⁵ In the spirit of Hughes' interpretation of Bonaventure's two cherubs representing 'being' and 'good' as 'angles of approach'¹²⁶ to God, I suggest that LaCugna's model of *oikonomia* can be interpreted as one 'angle of approach' to 'the God who dwells in light inaccessible.'¹²⁷ She writes, 'If we adhere to the principle that economy and theology belong together as two aspects of one mystery, then *the economy of salvation is as ineffable as is the eternal mystery of God (theologia)*.'¹²⁸

This 'insight' of LaCugna, like the images and narrative of Bonaventure's *Itinerarium*, should not be rushed over, but reverently meditated upon. Her insight is not intended to express identity between God and world or even between 'God as God' and 'God for us,' and, thus, does not require or even invite a response explaining the function of the doctrine of the immanent Trinity with regard to divine freedom. What LaCugna is communicating here is that humanity, by the grace of God, is invited to 'approach' the 'ineffable mystery of God' through the lens (to use Sanders' metaphor) of the *oikonomia*. 'God's mystery is grasped as transcendent precisely *in* the economy of salvation.'¹²⁹ Groppe's metaphorical use of the term 'lens' reaffirms my point:

LaCugna's theology ... calls us to contemplate the mysteries of Christianity with new eyes, to see them not through the lens of the language of the immanent and economic Trinity nor the categories of a substance metaphysics. Instead, she invites us to see reality through the ancient paradigm of *oikonomia* and *theologia* and through the categories of a relational ontology.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 377.

¹²⁵ LaCugna and McDonnell, "Far Country," 198-99.

¹²⁶ Hughes, "Remember Bonaventure?," 534.

¹²⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 321.

¹²⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 322. LaCugna's italics.

¹²⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 322. LaCugna's italics.

¹³⁰ Elizabeth T. Groppe, "Catherine Mowry LaCugna's Contribution to a Relational Theology," in *Theology and Conversation: Towards a Relational Theology*, ed. Jacques Haers and P. De Mey (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 254. In her study of the trinitarian insights of selected mystics, Anne Hunt looks to probe, 'through their witness, the mystery of the Trinity.' Such an approach, she suggests, 'has the advantage of avoiding the philosophical issues that have proved so problematic in trinitarian theology in recent times, such as the relationship between the immanent and the economic Trinity...' Hunt, *Insights from the Mystics*, ix.

LaCugna and McDonnell see their journey as an *itinerarium*. though, they add, ‘not *in mentis Deum*’ but ‘*in mysterius salutis*’ and ‘*in doxologicum*.’¹³¹ I would not make so clear a distinction. While LaCugna and McDonnell look to emphasise that they have chosen a way other than scholasticism, I suggest that their *itinerarium* and Bonaventure’s may be more closely intertwined than they imply, each one grounded in soteriology, sustained by doxology, and looking forward to ‘loving union with God.’¹³²

Saint Thomas Aquinas

In this chapter section, the discussion focuses on what LaCugna considers to be some of the most problematic and most admirable aspects of Aquinas’ work. The concepts of ‘real’ and ‘logical’ relations are explored, initially, through examination of LaCugna’s structural analysis of ‘De Deo Uno’ and ‘De Deo Trino’ and, subsequently, through discussion of both her concerns with Aquinas’ methodology and her proposal for an alternative paradigm. The section will close with a brief study of Aquinas’ understanding of the idea of necessity and his use the metaphor of emanation.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) authored, in the *Summa Theologiae*, the most comprehensive synthesis of ancient Greek philosophical concepts and early Christian thought in the medieval era. According to Thomas F. O’Meara, Aquinas saw theology as

[a] reflection of deeper human life and destiny [beyond mere problem-solving based on a single perspective] revealed in Christ ... not a search for shocking theories or a condemnation of people but a sharing in God’s view of earth. With a special gift for borrowing, arranging, and evaluating, out of multiple intellectual pieces and despite difficult problems, he fashioned a harmonious totality.¹³³

The *exitus-reditus* structure of the world and history provides a framework for Aquinas’ doctrine of Creation and of Salvation in the *Summa*. LaCugna notes that the overall plan of the work is ‘*exitus-reditus* characteristic of Neo-platonism: everything comes from God and everything returns to God.’¹³⁴ O’Meara names Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius as possible

¹³¹ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 215, quoted in LaCugna, *God for Us*, 375, n. 91.

¹³² Hayes, *Bonaventure’s Disputed Questions*, 28.

¹³³ Thomas F. O’Meara, *Thomas Aquinas, Theologian* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), xx.

¹³⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 146. The connection was made much earlier by Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, trans. A.-M. Landry and D. Hughes (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery, 1964).

influences on Aquinas in this regard.¹³⁵ He refers to monastic writers who used this pattern to describe prayer, noting also Bonaventure's use of the pattern for his 'journey of consciousness to God.'¹³⁶

LaCugna observes that Aquinas' doctrine of God is 'frequently held out as the paradigm instance of the separation of *theologia* and *oikonomia*.'¹³⁷ She notes Rahner's blunt criticism of Aquinas and 'scholasticism in general for developing a doctrine of the Trinity that is focused on intradivine life, to the virtual exclusion of the activity of the persons in the economy of salvation.'¹³⁸ She identifies medieval Latin theology (which reached its zenith in Thomas Aquinas) as the culmination of the 'trend toward separating the theology of God from the economy of salvation.'¹³⁹ Along with many, she also identifies Aquinas' treatment of 'De Deo Uno' and 'De Deo Trino' as two *separate* treatises in his *Summa* as the high point of this disjunction. LaCugna names as more problematic, however, his 'placement of *De Deo* at the beginning of dogmatic theology,'¹⁴⁰ as this placement directs the focus of the *Summa* to 'God in himself.' She considers this approach to be a 'clear departure from the Bible, early creeds, liturgy, and Greek patristic theology, all of which begin with the Unoriginate Father who comes to us in salvation history in the person of Christ.'¹⁴¹ She writes of the *Summa*:

The essential attributes of God's nature are covered in *De Deo Uno*, and the tract on the Trinity treats only the formal aspects of the divine persons and relations. Trinitarian theology thus appears to be added on to consideration of the one God. Moreover, the treatise on the Trinity is unrelated to the doctrine of creation and, indeed, unrelated to the rest of theology.¹⁴²

¹³⁵ For a discussion on the influence of Dionysius on Aquinas see Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992). O'Rourke writes, 'This universal panorama and cyclic scheme becomes in turn the organic and architectonic structure of Aquinas' vision of God and the world.' O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 215.

¹³⁶ O'Meara, *Thomas Aquinas, Theologian*, 57.

¹³⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 145. Weinandy defends Aquinas on this matter, arguing that LaCugna 'fails to give full significance to the fact that, for Aquinas, the whole discussion of the immanent Trinity is bracketed, and thus sustained, within the economy.' Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit*, 60, n. 14.

¹³⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 145.

¹³⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 10.

¹⁴⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 149.

¹⁴¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 147-48.

¹⁴² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 6.

Despite her unease with some aspects of his methodology, LaCugna acknowledges Aquinas' achievements. While claiming that 'one of the fruits of his theology was the marginalization of the doctrine of the Trinity,' she concedes that he would have 'protested vigorously' against her allegations as 'contrary to his intention and to his own religious experience.'¹⁴³ She admits that 'it would be a great exaggeration to say that *oikonomia* plays no role whatsoever in the early part of the *Summa*,' and that '[o]*ikonomia* is found more explicitly in the *Tertia*.'¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, she defends him against the commonly held charge that his theology is 'static,' commenting, 'There is no doubt that Thomas was very interested in the essence or substance of God, the "in-itself" nature of God, but this charge is more properly directed to Thomas' neo-scholastic and baroque interpreters than to his own work.'¹⁴⁵ In a response similar in intent to that found in the closing paragraphs of "The Far Country," LaCugna graciously commends Aquinas' approach to the God-world relationship, while at the same time stating her preference to take another approach: '... in fact Thomas' theology is rich and profound, utterly centered on God's relationship with the creature through grace – even if in the end we do not choose to adhere to its method or some of its content.'¹⁴⁶

Real and Logical Relations

LaCugna's criticism of Aquinas in her early article, "The Relational God" and her chapter on Aquinas in *God for Us* focuses, as noted above, not only on his separation of the two treatises 'De Deo Uno' and 'De Deo Trino' at the beginning of the *Summa*, but also on his ordering of these treatises. Her objection to the idea of God considered as a subject to be studied 'in itself,' along with her insistence that all trinitarian reflection take place on the basis of the *oikonomia*, sets her at odds with Aquinas, who takes as his point of departure God *in se*. LaCugna engages in detailed and technical analysis of the *Summa*, and her explanation of his use of the terms 'real' and 'logical' relations demonstrates an acute awareness of the principles of divine freedom Aquinas was looking to uphold.

Frustrating, in view of this awareness, is her inconsistent usage of the term 'really related,' which can shift from an Aristotelean to a more contemporary, less technical register. It seems

¹⁴³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 167.

¹⁴⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 148.

¹⁴⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 150.

¹⁴⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 150.

that she is, at times, torn between admiration for Aquinas' brilliance and dismay at some of his methods. Despite such tensions, which will be discussed below, LaCugna's article and chapter on Aquinas give a useful insight into her theology of creation and divine freedom.

Aquinas' debt to Aristotle's theories of relation is evident in the significant place held by the concept of the real and logical relations in the theologians' metaphysics of God.¹⁴⁷ As explained by LaCugna: 'Relations may be "real" or "logical". A real relation belongs to the very nature of something (mother-daughter), whereas a logical relation is an accidental feature of something (location). God's relation to creation is *logical*, not real, because being related to creatures is not part of God's nature.'¹⁴⁸ She examines Aquinas' understanding of real and necessary relations in her structural analysis of 'De Deo Uno' and 'De Deo Trino' in Part I of the *Summa*,¹⁴⁹ and divides each of Thomas' two treatises into three parts, with each of the three clusters of questions in the first treatise corresponding to, or mirroring, those in the second.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ For an overview of responses by scholars (including David Burrell, William Norris Clark and William J. Hill) to the challenge of Process Theology, seeking to clarify what Aquinas says on the topic of relations, see Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Change?: The Word's Becoming in the Incarnation* (Still River, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1985), 95, n. 110.

¹⁴⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 153. Aquinas' notion of asymmetry between God's relation to the world and the world's relation to God is also evident in his theology of divine immanence and transcendence. Gregory Rocca notes four interlocking claims made by Aquinas that 'together amount to his treatment of God's immanence in creation: God exists in all things, God is everywhere, God conserves the being of creatures, and God is active in all the activities and operations of creatures.' Gregory Rocca, "'Creatio Ex Nihilo' and the Being of Creatures: God's Creative Act and the Transcendence-Immanence Distinction in Aquinas," in *Divine Transcendence and Immanence in the Work of Thomas Aquinas: A Collection of Studies Presented at the Third Conference of the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht, December 15-17, 2005*, ed. Harm Goris, Herwi Rikhof, and Henk Schoot, (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 13. Rocca highlights the asymmetry within the immanence/transcendence relation, noting that while we can say that God is transcendently immanent and immanently transcendent, for Aquinas, the 'formal cause vectors go only one way, namely that God is immanent because he is transcendent, not transcendent because he is immanent.' Rocca, "Creatio Ex Nihilo," 13.

¹⁴⁹ This analysis first appears in her 1985 article, "The Relational God," and is included, with some additions and alterations, in the chapter on Aquinas in *God for Us*.

¹⁵⁰ LaCugna, "The Relational God," 651.

De Deo Uno		De Deo Trino	
qq. 2-11	the divine to-be	qq. 27-28	the divine to-be-related
qq. 12-13	knowing and naming God	qq. 29-32	naming and knowing divine persons
qq. 14-26	divine operations	qq. 33-43	the divine persons ¹⁵¹

LaCugna describes the themes of the three clusters as the following: the nature of divine being, the theological language appropriate to that being, and additional metaphysical and theological characteristics of the manner of that being.¹⁵² Question 3, on the divine simplicity, proposes that God lacks composition of any kind. She writes, ‘In q. 3, a. 4 we are told the implication of this, namely, that God’s essence and existence are identical. “To be God is to be to-be.”’¹⁵³ This concept, the identity of God’s essence and existence, is one of great significance in Thomistic theology, and influential in subsequent Christian thought:

Following Aristotle, Thomas had a fundamentally dynamic understanding of being as actual. According to Thomas, God’s being-itself, or being what it is (*essential*), and God’s act-of-being (that it is; *esse*) are identical. ... Strictly speaking only God *is*; everything else exists by participation in God’s act of being.¹⁵⁴

Aquinas’ task in ‘De Deo Trino,’ according to LaCugna, is ‘to show how God’s simplicity – an ontological requirement – was not compromised by the trinity of persons – the Christian theological requirement.’¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 147.

¹⁵² LaCugna, “The Relational God,” 651.

¹⁵³ LaCugna, “The Relational God,” 651

¹⁵⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 150. This concept and the associated expression (To be God is to be to-be) is discussed at length by David Burrell, not only in the work LaCugna refers to at this point (*Aquinas: God and Action*, 1979, quoted in LaCugna, “The Relational God,” 651, n. 17), but in his earlier publication, *Exercises in Religious Understanding* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1974), 80-106. Kathryn Tanner takes up the concept as an example of conformity to her rules for talk about God as transcendent. ‘God’s identity with what is affirmed only predicatively of finite beings now takes the doubly odd form of a substantive use of “to be”... God’s transcendent nature can be identified with reference to the very peculiarity of rules for talk about it ... God is identified by rules for discourse that announce the general inadequacy of the language we use for talk about the world.’ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 60-61. LaCugna writes of this odd linguistic construction: ‘Since our language is drawn from a world of beings whose essence is not the same as its existence, when we come to use the same language for God, our efforts must fall short.’ LaCugna, “The Relational God,” 651.

¹⁵⁵ LaCugna, “The Relational God,” 652.

The questions in the first cluster of ‘De Deo Trino,’ qq. 27-28, correspond to those in the first cluster of ‘De Deo Uno.’ Thus, while the first questions, qq. 2-11, treat the divine to-be, qq. 27-28 ‘show the divine *esse* to be intrinsically fruitful: to be God means necessarily to-be-related.’¹⁵⁶ LaCugna’s intention, in comparing the first clusters in each of the two treatises, is to show that the ‘parallels in structure between the first two parts of the *Summa* reveal that God’s to-be is understood by Aquinas to be a relational-to-be.’¹⁵⁷ Her main argument in “The Relational God” is that ‘from the point of view of both the structure of the *Summa* and from its theological positions ... being-related is the very heart of what it means for God to be God.’¹⁵⁸

LaCugna acknowledges that the ‘distinction between real and logical relations is nothing more than a device which enables Aquinas to uphold divine freedom.’¹⁵⁹ She recognises that Aquinas ‘establishes the metaphysical basis for God’s intrinsic relatedness without having to worry about whether creation is a necessary emanation from God.’¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, she defends Aquinas against those who take his views on God’s lack of ‘real’ relationship to the world out of context: ‘The well-known fact that Thomas denied that God has a “real” relation to creation counts as evidence for the mind-set of our highly psychological and anthropological age, that Thomas’ God does not care for the creature, or at least is rather distant from it.’¹⁶¹ However, even as LaCugna identifies, explains and defends the theological tenets Aquinas is seeking to uphold,¹⁶² her disquiet about his initial emphasis on the ‘immanent divine life’ remains. And as she does so eloquently elsewhere in her writings, LaCugna articulates these concerns in a series of questions:

If God is not God because of God’s relationship to the world, if God is not triune because of the economy of Christ and the Spirit, and if God is not ‘affected’ in any way by the existence or annihilation of the world, why does God create? And who is this God, what kind of God is not necessarily related to the world? Is this portrait of God consistent with the God revealed

¹⁵⁶ LaCugna, “The Relational God,” 652.

¹⁵⁷ LaCugna, “The Relational God,” 654.

¹⁵⁸ LaCugna, “The Relational God,” 649.

¹⁵⁹ LaCugna, “The Relational God,” 660.

¹⁶⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 153.

¹⁶¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 150.

¹⁶² LaCugna, “The Relational God,” 656.

in the saving history of Covenant, Christ and Spirit? And is this God recognizable as the God into whose name and reality Christians are baptized and whom they address in prayer?¹⁶³

Before attempting a response, LaCugna warns that Aquinas' treatment of creation as relation 'draws us into a cluster of intricate theological questions having to do with divine freedom, divine goodness, divine immutability, and trinitarian theology.'¹⁶⁴ She also acknowledges that divine freedom is 'a particularly difficult topic, full of pitfalls,' and although not beyond the scope of her chapter, not one that can be treated comprehensively within its pages.¹⁶⁵

LaCugna is prepared to suggest, however, that 'for Thomas, the methodological separation of the One God and the Triune God in *De Deo* carries over into the treatise on creation and produces a chasm between the triune God and God the creator,'¹⁶⁶ a chasm of which she clearly disapproves.

In her essay responding to Tanner's *Christ the Key* presented in a "Book Forum" in *Theology Today*,¹⁶⁷ Janet Soskice begins by affirming the theological importance of creation *ex nihilo*, which she describes as a 'central and ... neglected or misrepresented notion' and one which 'puts human beings properly in their place.'¹⁶⁸ Of the Creator-creature distinction, she writes, "All that is" is created freely by God and held continuously in being by God. There is thus no necessary relation between God and creatures. Or, rather, all necessity is on the side of the creature, for the creature is dependent on the Creator.'¹⁶⁹ Elizabeth Johnson responds negatively to this understanding of the Creator-creature relationship. She writes, 'The

¹⁶³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 161.

¹⁶⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 161.

¹⁶⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 161. LaCugna demonstrates caution and acknowledges the enormity of the topic of divine freedom in "The Relational God," 660, n. 31.

¹⁶⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 161. Robert Letham is particularly scathing of LaCugna's assessment of Aquinas at this point. He sees her view to be due, 'in part, to [her] almost pantheistic relational idea of the Trinity, in which God is to be understood only in relation to his creatures.' He concludes, 'By this yardstick, the vast majority of past theology is deficient.' Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004), 228, n. 45.

¹⁶⁷ Janet Martin Soskice, Hilda P. Koster, Ian A. McFarland, Steffen Lösel, Joy Ann McDougall and Kathryn Tanner, "Christ the Key Book Forum," *Theology Today* 68, no. 3 (2011): 310-47.

¹⁶⁸ Soskice, "Christ the Key Book Forum," 312. For a detailed study of Bonaventure and Aquinas and their use of personalist and emanationist language to uphold the Christian understanding of divine transcendence, see Kathryn Tanner, "Creation *Ex Nihilo* as Mixed Metaphor," *Modern Theology* 29, no. 2 (2013): 138-55.

¹⁶⁹ Soskice, "Christ the Key Book Forum," 312.

effective history of theological speech about this nonrelational God, supported by rigorous philosophical argument in a patriarchal system, invites widespread repugnance today.’¹⁷⁰

Like LaCugna, Johnson acknowledges the historical justification for the idea of the God of no real relation (the upholding of divine freedom),¹⁷¹ but concludes that the notion has ‘outlived whatever usefulness it might have had.’¹⁷²

LaCugna considers it possible to ‘rethink God as having a real relation to creation when the framework is the trinitarian self-relating of God.’¹⁷³ Here, it seems, she discards the technical usage of the term ‘real’ and speaks of God only in terms of the *oikonomia*:

If it is the very nature of God to be related (to-be-toward, to-be-for), then it is difficult to see that God can be *God* without creation. ... If we could abstract from creation for a moment (which it is, of course, impossible to do completely) and consider God altogether apart and without creation, the being to which this word ‘God’ refers would not really be God, for something can be God only in relation to what is other than God.¹⁷⁴

LaCugna considers the understanding of God as not having a real relation with the world to compromise our understanding of God-for-us. She concludes “The Relational God” with a statement not only emphatically in favour of relationality, but also dismissive of unfounded concerns for the preservation of God’s freedom and transcendence:

The religious mind has no real interest in a God who is one-sided, self-sufficient, and not ‘really related.’ But the religious mind becomes ecstatic upon discovering that the name of the God who is so deeply involved with creation amounts to a promise always to-be-there. For relationality is at the heart of what it means for God to be God.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 225.

¹⁷¹ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 226.

¹⁷² Johnson, *She Who Is*, 227. While Johnson and LaCugna share similar views in this regard, they differ in the significance they attribute to the immanent Trinity. Patricia Fox observes that while Johnson quotes (the ‘God who saves – this *is* God’) from LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 13, in *She Who Is*, 201, there is, nonetheless ‘... a distinction between Johnson’s position and LaCugna’s. LaCugna resists speaking of God *in se*.’ Patricia A. Fox, *God as Communion: John Zizioulas and Elizabeth Johnson and the Retrieval of the Symbol of the Triune God* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 136, n. 6.

¹⁷³ LaCugna, “The Relational God,” 661.

¹⁷⁴ LaCugna, “The Relational God,” 661. LaCugna acknowledges that the reason for saying that ‘God would have been triune apart from the creation, that is, God does not need the world ... seems to be the desire to say something about creation, namely, that it is altogether free and proceeds out of the love of God and not out of metaphysical or moral necessity.’ She maintains, however, that the ‘only basis for belief in the triune God is the concrete, actual history of God with us as revealed in Christ and the Spirit. LaCugna, *God for Us*, 175-76, n. 93.

¹⁷⁵ LaCugna, “The Relational God,” 663.

LaCugna's and Aquinas' understanding of the God-world relation stand in stark contrast. LaCugna claims that in the sense that 'God comes to be (called) God in relation to creation and in the ongoing activity of creation ... it is correct to say that God is constituted *as God* by having a real relation to creation.'¹⁷⁶ Aquinas, on the other hand, claims that 'real relations are ... based on activity immanent in God, not actions outside God such as creation and that the four "relations of opposition" (fatherhood, sonship, spiration, procession) are real, that is, they are constitutive of God's being.'¹⁷⁷ LaCugna supports her position, arguing (as noted in Chapter 2 of this thesis) that '[t]aking refuge in an intratrinitarian self-communication that is altogether unrelated to creation, as a way of upholding divine freedom, rests on questionable presuppositions about divine immutability in relation to divine freedom.'¹⁷⁸ She refers at this point to the two-directional requirement of Rahner's axiom and makes a more nuanced claim: 'God is to be understood to be self-related as love from eternity, a love which then becomes embodied in creation and its history.'¹⁷⁹ Her relational trinitarian theology, grounded in salvation history, 'leads us to think of divine freedom as the freedom of relationship, the freedom of love, not freedom conceived as autonomy and self-sufficiency.'¹⁸⁰

LaCugna brings clarity to her expression of God's relation to creation as she compares Aquinas' Aristotelian use of the term 'real relation' with her 'recast' usage:

The question of whether God has a real relation to creation is clarified when it is considered in the context of trinitarian theology. Recast in the light of a relational metaphysics, the question reads, whether the *triune* God has a real relation to creation. In its nontrinitarian form, the question must be answered in the negative (as Aquinas does). In its revised form, however, the question must be answered in the affirmative and the first question must be rejected as reflecting a theologically inadequate doctrine of God.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ LaCugna, "The Relational God," 661. LaCugna's italics.

¹⁷⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 154.

¹⁷⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 168.

¹⁷⁹ LaCugna, "The Relational God," 661. LaCugna notes the distinction Michael Scanlon makes between the concept of divine 'self-enactment' in Rahner's and Hegel's thought: 'M. Scanlon brings out an important distinction when the idea of self-enactment is applied to God. Whereas Hegel required God's self-enactment in order for God to be God, Rahner, by contrast, requires God's self-enactment in order for God to be our God. In Rahner's view, God enters history, not to know Godself as God, but to know Godself as God *pro nobis*.' LaCugna, "The Relational God," 662, referring to Michael J. Scanlon, "Systematic Theology and the World Church," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 39 (1984), 18.

¹⁸⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 168-69.

¹⁸¹ LaCugna, "The Relational God," 662. LaCugna's italics.

Emanation and Necessity

LaCugna makes a distinction between Bonaventure and Aquinas with regard to their interpretation of the Dionysian concept of *bonum diffusivum sui*. She writes, ‘While Thomas agrees that goodness is self-diffusive, this plays little or no role in his views on why God creates. God creates by an act of will, not because God is good.’¹⁸² She qualifies this statement by acknowledging that the ‘distinction between the will to create and divine goodness should not so sharply be distinguished that goodness appears to be incidental to God’s act of creation.’¹⁸³ The point she subsequently makes, however, is that, for Thomas, ‘[a]bsolute goodness and absolute perfection amount to absolute self-sufficiency.’¹⁸⁴ My intention, in the remainder of this section, is to explore Aquinas’ use of the metaphor of emanation in his theology of creation. The reason for doing so is not so much to question LaCugna’s interpretation of Aquinas, as to illustrate that his judicious use of metaphors enhances his ability to articulate complex theological concepts.

The metaphor of emanation has often been avoided in Christian discourse on creation due to its association with the Plotinian divine intermediaries and the concept of divine necessity. Certainly Aquinas goes to great lengths to exclude any hint of divine necessity in the act of creation. David Burrell contrasts Aquinas’ concept of divine freedom in creation with the example of divine beings ‘who necessarily emanate or who create in response to felt need or compulsion to do so precisely because they are not transcendent but in fact are an integral part of some bigger picture.’ He concludes, ‘Given a genuinely transcendent God, divine freedom in creation is the only possibility, for transcendence and freedom stand or fall together.’¹⁸⁵ Aquinas states on several occasions that ‘Deus produxit creaturas, non ex necessitate, sed per intellectum et voluntatem.’¹⁸⁶ He writes, ‘the infinite essence of the first cause cannot express itself with natural necessity in any finite creature.’¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 161-62.

¹⁸³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 162.

¹⁸⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 162.

¹⁸⁵ Burrell, “*Creatio Ex Nihilo* Recovered,” 17.

¹⁸⁶ ‘Therefore God does not act from necessity of nature, but defined effects proceed from his infinite perfection by the resolution of his intelligence and will.’ *ST I*.19.4; ‘However, we have shown that God does not act from necessity of nature, but that his will is the cause of all things, and there is no natural drive that necessitates and determines and makes his will produce them.’ *ST I*.25.5; ‘For he does not make creatures because his nature compels him to do so, but by mind and will, as we have said already.’ *ST I*.28.1.3.

The only instance of natural self-expression permitted by Aquinas, according to Rudi Te Velde, is the natural generation of the Son by the Father in God himself.¹⁸⁸ This is not, however, the only instance. In certain circumstances, Aquinas uses the metaphor of emanation to assist in *explaining* creation rather than providing a contrast with it. He writes, for example, ‘As therefore the begetting of a human being is out of that non-being which is non-human-being, so creation, the introduction [or emanation] of being entirely is out of the non-being which is nothing at all.’¹⁸⁹

As David Burrell and Isabelle Moulin suggest in their co-written article, Aquinas found in the Neo-platonic works ‘a return to Plato’s robust insistence on the centrality of “the Good” as drawing our human intellects beyond what we can properly conceive to the very source of our understanding.’¹⁹⁰ Also, referring specifically to Aquinas’ use of an emanation metaphor, they observe that while he rejected the metaphor when used in the sense of mediating creation, ‘in the end [Aquinas] came to feel emanation offered the best metaphor for the *sui generis* activity of creation, even of a free creator.’¹⁹¹ In a more recent article Burrell, referring to *ST* I.45.1, observes that Aquinas felt no ‘compunction at defining creation as the “emanation of all of being from its universal cause.”’ Burrell continues, ‘Indeed, once he had emptied the emanation scheme of any mediating role, he could find no better way of marking the uniqueness of the causal relation of creation than using the term “emanation” to articulate it.’¹⁹²

Thus, careful use of the emanation metaphor does not imply a pantheistic worldview. This point will be developed in Chapter 5 of this thesis where LaCugna’s use of the model of emanation and return (which admittedly differs from Aquinas’ use) is examined, critiqued and defended. Douglas Hedley discusses the use of the metaphor by theologians looking to

¹⁸⁷ Rudi A. Te Velde, “God and the Language of Participation,” in *Divine Transcendence and Immanence in the Work of Thomas Aquinas: A Collection of Studies Presented at the Third Conference of the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht, December 15-17, 2005*, ed. Harm Goris, Herwi Rikhof, and Henk Schoot (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 28.

¹⁸⁸ Te Velde, “God and the Language of Participation,” 28.

¹⁸⁹ *ST* I.45.1.

¹⁹⁰ David B. Burrell and Isabelle Moulin, “Albert, Aquinas, and Dionysius,” *Modern Theology* 24, no. 4 (2008): 638.

¹⁹¹ Burrell and Moulin, “Albert,” 639.

¹⁹² Burrell, “*Creatio Ex Nihilo* Recovered,” 9-10.

avoid a univocal interpretation of the language of ‘person,’ defending Aquinas, in particular, against any potential accusations of pantheism: ‘... through the transmission of Proclus’ theory of causality in the *Liber de Causis*, Albert Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhart, and Nicholas of Cusa all use the concept of emanation in order to explain creation in terms which are not hopelessly anthropomorphic. St. Thomas is nonetheless a most unlikely pantheist!’¹⁹³

Conclusion

Aquinas is, indeed, an unlikely pantheist. His limiting of the concept of real relations to those within the immanent Trinity ensures a clear ontological distinction between God and world. Although aware of his purpose in doing so, LaCugna looks for an alternative paradigm in order to give greater priority to soteriology and her understanding of ‘the relational God.’ In the process, she lays herself open to criticism regarding the God-world relation. Is this the price she must pay for her re-conceived relational ontology grounded in the economy of salvation? Many of the criticisms levelled at LaCugna are not without merit, as is acknowledged in Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis. I have argued in Chapter 3, however, that her judicious use of language has rendered many of her critics’ concerns less sustainable.

In the course of this chapter, I have shown LaCugna’s ideas to be drawn from a tradition which extends into the past and beyond the Christian era. Like many of her predecessors, she has taken an eclectic approach, yet has integrated her sources into a unified whole.¹⁹⁴ While she forges a different path from Bonaventure and Aquinas (largely due to her reluctance to engage with the idea of trinitarian processions in isolation from the economy), she seeks to remove from her language of emanation all connotations of mediation, so that the *exitus-reditus* schema may be used to convey the idea of the divine path of glory in her model of the *oikonomia*. By taking up a meditative Bonaventuran style, she brings an element into her

¹⁹³ Douglas Hedley, “Pantheism, Trinitarian Theism and the Idea of Unity: Reflections on the Christian Concept of God,” *Religious Studies* 32, no. 1 (1996): 63. For a study of their use of metaphor, see Kevin Corrigan, “Light and Metaphor in Plotinus and St. Thomas Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 57, no. 2 (1993): 187-99. See also Oliva Blanchette, “Aquinas’ Conception of the Great Chain of Being: A More Considered Reply to Lovejoy,” in *Philosophy and Theology in the Long Middle Ages: A Tribute to Stephen F. Brown*, ed. Kent Emery, Russell L. Friedman, and Andreas Speer (Leiden: Brill, 2011) for a defence of Aquinas in response to criticism of his ‘emanationist’ tendencies by Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).

¹⁹⁴ Hilbert comments on the diversity of LaCugna’s theological method and the integration she achieved: ‘What adjectives best describe her unique way of doing theology: systematic, speculative, contemplative, constructive, liturgical, philosophical, feminist, pastoral, doxological? No one of those adjectives is adequate in itself; rather her work was a unique combination of all of them.’ Hilbert, “The Vocation of the Theologian,” 340.

writing far removed from the rigours of propositional logic. As is the case with Eriugena, the nature of the scriptural references on which she centres her theology can lead to statements which, when quoted out of context, appear monistic. Even a brief attempt to interpret Eriugena's use of the word 'division,' however, indicates that his (and, I will argue in Chapter 6, LaCugna's) ideas warrant, in some instances, careful re-examination. In her discussion of creation *ex amore*, LaCugna turns to the Dionysian concept of *bonum diffusivum sui* and the Plotinian metaphor of emanation. As she has acknowledged, the associated issues of freedom and necessity are, and have always been, complex. Discernment and care are required in the interpretation of Plotinus, Eriugena, and contemporary theologians alike.

LaCugna consistently grounds her trinitarian theology in the economy of salvation. She incorporates concepts, metaphors and styles of writing from philosophy, mystical and even scholastic theology, yet never loses sight of the Christian understanding of God as gracious and transcendent. Her renewed theology is 'consistent with the biblical images of a God who is alive, who is ineluctably oriented "other-ward," who is plenitude of love, grace, mercy overflowing.'¹⁹⁵ In the remaining two chapters of the thesis I will address specific concerns of Finan, Weinandy and Gunton (focusing mainly on Theme 1) and will engage with Kathryn Tanner's rule (Themes 2 and 3) in order to present a new perspective on LaCugna's theology of divine transcendence.

¹⁹⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 230.

Chapter Five

Catherine LaCugna, Model and Metaphor: A Conversation with Her Critics

Introduction

The theological model, as discussed in Chapter 3, can provide an epistemological framework from which to explore the nature of the relationship between God and creation. As Ramsey explains, the model, in more general terms, takes ‘a situation with which we are familiar’ and uses it to throw light on ‘another situation with which we are not so familiar.’¹ LaCugna refashions the Neo-platonic model of emanation and return in a bid to recapture a sense of the broad sweep of salvation history arising from the mystery of God’s eternity. Drawing on Scripture, and through the creative use of metaphor, she seeks to breathe new life into what she considers to have become a doctrine with little relevance to Christian life.

In the first section of this chapter, I examine in detail LaCugna’s ‘chiastic model of emanation and return,’ and the metaphor of a ‘walking God,’ with particular reference to the Christian understanding of divine transcendence, applying information gathered from previous chapters to these examples. LaCugna affirms Rahner’s Rule and applauds his call to ground trinitarian doctrine in soteriology, proposing, however, a revised framework for the doctrine. Her prime motivation for ‘parting ways’ with Rahner is his continued reference to ‘the undeniable distinctions of persons in the economy to posit an intradivine self-communication, *intradivine* relations, God in Godself.’²

The doctrine of the immanent Trinity plays an important role in safeguarding divine freedom, as LaCugna herself attests. She argues, however, that it is possible to address the concerns customarily allayed by the economic-immanent and essence-energies *distinctions*, with the biblical, creedal, ante-Nicene vision of the economy, by means of the following principle: ‘*theologia* is fully realized and bestowed in *oikonomia*, and *oikonomia* truly expresses the ineffable mystery of *theologia*.’³ This ‘insight’ of LaCugna, introduced in this thesis in Chapter 2, is revisited in this chapter with particular reference to her model in which she

¹ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 61.

² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 222. LaCugna’s italics.

³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 221.

approaches trinitarian doctrine through the economy as ‘God’s concrete existence in Christ and as Spirit.’⁴

The second part of this chapter takes the form of a ‘conversation’ in which I ‘participate’ (again drawing on information gathered to this point in the thesis) with Barbara Finan, Thomas Weinandy and Colin Gunton, who raise concerns about LaCugna’s re-conceived doctrine of the Trinity. I also engage with Catherine LaCugna and Elizabeth Groppe as they seek to defend and clarify key points LaCugna had made in *God for Us* prior to the criticism.

The Neo-Platonic Model of Emanation and Return

LaCugna has chosen the biblical passage, Ephesians 1:3-14 as a summary statement of the *oikonomia*, and has incorporated its themes into her reconceived model. Accordingly, I will structure this section around four facets of her use of this passage. These facets are, firstly, the visual aspect of the model and its capacity to convey the movement toward the eschaton; secondly, LaCugna’s references to the Ephesians passage in the context of her engagement with Scripture more broadly; thirdly, a brief study of Australian theologian Brian Edgar’s quest to convey the eschatological nature of trinitarian doctrine by means of an ‘enhanced’ model; and finally, an exploration of the notion of doxology as expressed in the Ephesians passage and conveyed in the model.

Visual Aspects of the Model

Introducing her readers to her model of emanation and return, LaCugna includes the word ‘crudely,’⁵ in anticipation of, and as protection against, I assume, the indignant reactions which her proposal does in fact elicit. While she seeks, in this way, to defend her adoption of a simple parabolic shape, the visual aspect of the descending and ascending line and its forward-pointing arrow significantly contributes to LaCugna’s ability to communicate her soteriological and practical agenda.

LaCugna refers to the ‘shape’ of salvation history as that described in the liturgical hymn of thanksgiving from Ephesians 1:3-14. This parabolic shape serves, at the most fundamental level, as a model for the trinitarian expression of God’s plan of salvation. She observes that a

⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 222.

⁵ ‘The dynamic shape of the economy could be represented (crudely) as a point moving along a parabola.’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 222.

‘certain order (*taxis*) marks the economy that expresses the mystery of God’s eternal being (*theologia*).’⁶ She notes that this ‘taxonomy gave rise to a kind of “formula” used in Patristic theology,’ and she refers to Cyril of Alexandria and Basil, who often wrote that ‘everything is from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.’⁷

The downward then upward swoop of the parabola with the arrow at its right-hand end indicates, above all, movement. The purpose of the model, for LaCugna, is to convey the truth, to which Rahner also attested, that there is no hidden God, no God remote from the living God revealed to us in the economy. While she acknowledges that Aquinas’ theology of God has been unfairly described as static,⁸ she identifies some vulnerability in the model of the economic and immanent Trinity (and in the Aristotelian concepts of real and logical relations when applied to God and world) to claims of divine stasis and detachment. LaCugna and McDonnell suggest that ‘Rahner’s axiom does not well convey that God is God in a new way.’⁹ In LaCugna’s framework, the doctrine of the Trinity ‘encompasses so much more than the immanent Trinity, envisioned in static ahistorical and transeconomic terms.’¹⁰

LaCugna and McDonnell turn to the metaphors of ‘fixing,’ ‘locking’ and ‘freezing’ to more creatively express this sense of separation: ‘... redemptive history is not frozen in time but moves forward in the rhythm of exodus and return.’¹¹ They observe that ‘[t]raditional trinitarian theology tends to fix or freeze divine self-relatedness as something which happens inside God but does not immediately touch the world. When developed along such lines trinitarian doctrine remains of little religious interest.’¹² Their model ‘From God to God

⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 25. LaCugna observes, ‘With the exception of baptism into the threefold name of God, the earliest forms of Christian prayer were directed to God (Father) through the Mediator, Jesus Christ. This practice fittingly expressed the order of salvation history, the *exitus* and *reditus* of all things from God to God, *a Patre ad Patrem* (cf. Rom. 8:15; John 14:6; Eph 2:18).’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 114. LaCugna and McDonnell write of a ‘trinitarian pattern to the Christian knowledge of God. It ineluctably follows the order of salvation history: from God through Christ in the Holy Spirit, back in the Spirit through Christ to God (Father).’ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 200. See also, however, Raith’s claim that LaCugna’s strict adherence to the formula ‘from the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit’ is ‘in fact more reminiscent of the Cappadocians’ opponents than that of the Cappadocians themselves.’ Raith, “*Ressourcing the Fathers?*,” 273.

⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 25.

⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 150.

⁹ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 204.

¹⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 223.

¹¹ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 193.

¹² LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 203.

through Christ in the Spirit'¹³ recognises, in a way that the economic-immanent trinitarian model conveys less clearly, 'the fact that history is not yet finished or consummated.'¹⁴ They see eschatology as 'the trinitarian movement of God in history' and suggest that all theology be 'tested against trinitarian doctrine to gauge whether the (trinitarian) eschatological dynamic of exodus and return is given expression.'¹⁵ The idea of God's dynamic involvement in the world is again expressed metaphorically in the statement, 'God does not remain locked up in heaven; God's movement is ever-outgoing, outward toward intimacy and involvement with [God's people].'¹⁶

One of the strengths of LaCugna's visual model of the *oikonomia* lies in its ability to allow room for God's transcendence and freedom within a single framework. While the economic-immanent model presents two ways of looking at the one reality, a visual depiction of that model (one part showing God's intradivine self-communication and the other showing God's self-communication *ad extra*) inevitably gives the impression of the existence of two Trinities. LaCugna, on the other hand, is able to visually affirm that 'economy and theology are two aspects of the one reality'¹⁷ by actually *depicting one reality*. However, the fact that she chooses to incorporate the idea of God's transcendence and ineffability within the model should not be seen as limiting that transcendence. She locates the true mystery, defying explanation, in the fact that 'God should be so intent on union with what is other than God.'¹⁸

What does LaCugna's visual model of emanation and return contribute to the successful 'linguistic' expression of her re-conceived doctrine of the Trinity? She sees the function of this doctrine as specifying 'the conditions under which we may speak of God,'¹⁹ and, from her perspective, these conditions dictate that every interpretation of our understanding of God must be measured against that which is revealed in the economy. It then follows that

¹³ LaCugna and McDonnell, "Far Country," 200.

¹⁴ LaCugna and McDonnell, "Far Country," 204.

¹⁵ They give the example: 'then comes the end, when he (Christ) delivers the kingdom of God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power (I Cor. 15:24).' LaCugna and McDonnell, "Far Country," 211-12. English Standard Version (ESV).

¹⁶ LaCugna and McDonnell, "Far Country," 194.

¹⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 222.

¹⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 324.

¹⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 380.

apophatic language can be appropriately used both of the economy and of its ‘parabolic’ aspect. Referring to the biblical and Greek patristic understanding, LaCugna writes, ‘*oikonomia* is the self-revelation of God through Christ and the Spirit. The economy is a descent (*katabasis*) or, as Athanasius put it, God’s condescension to us. *Theologia*, knowledge of God through Christ in the Spirit, is ascent (*anabasis*) through the *oikonomia*.’²⁰ When *oikonomia* and *theologia* are considered inseparable, ‘theological knowledge, which is the ascent through the economy, cannot abandon the condescension of God in the economy and still reach *theologia*.’²¹

LaCugna’s approach is one in which ‘apophasis serves both the positive and negative dimensions of knowledge of God in the economy of Christ and the Spirit.’²² In the following claim, she draws attention to the important role of apophatic language with regard to her ‘insight’ on the ineffability of *oikonomia*: ‘Because the economy is the self-revelation of ineffable divine persons, and because the economy itself is ineffable, our knowledge of the divine persons must continually be submitted to the discipline of apophasis.’²³ Thus, her model of the *oikonomia* provides, in its parabolic (visual) form, an additional way of conveying her ‘insight’ and of interpreting the doctrine, commensurate with her ‘economic’ focus and with the linguistic conditions she has set.

LaCugna’s awareness of divine transcendence and of human contingency extends to her discussion of the model’s origins. The Neo-platonic understanding of emanation and of a hierarchy of being is, as has been noted by LaCugna herself, incompatible with the traditional Christian understanding of creation. Her adaptation should not, therefore, be seen as a model of ‘creation,’ but rather as an expression of God’s *plan*, conveyed in terms of movement along a path from eternity to eternity. LaCugna writes of ‘the biblical and pre-Nicene sense of the economy [as] the one dynamic movement of God (Father) outward, a personal self-sharing by which God is forever bending toward God’s “other.”’²⁴ There is no evidence that this one movement implies a merging or a collapsing of the distinction between God and

²⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 333.

²¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 333.

²² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 333.

²³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 333-34.

²⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 222. My italics.

world. Indeed, she emphasises our contingency upon God: ‘We are in right relationship to ourselves when we accept that our origin, existence and destiny belong not to ourselves but to God.’²⁵

LaCugna’s Engagement with Scripture

LaCugna has been criticised for not sufficiently grounding her trinitarian theology in the biblical witness, given her insistence that it be so grounded. In his largely positive review of *God for Us*, Kilian McDonnell states that ‘the task of the theologians is to send persons back to the Scriptures,’ and acknowledges that LaCugna could have done this ‘more forcefully.’²⁶ Like McDonnell, I concede that there is room in *God for Us* for a more intentional engagement with Scripture. Mark Medley, also sympathetic to much of LaCugna’s work, examines this perceived shortcoming in some detail.²⁷ Noting that she argues that a proper doctrine of the Trinity must be firmly christological and pneumatological, he observes that ‘LaCugna makes little reference to Jesus of Nazareth [six pages, according to Medley] or the activity of the Spirit [four pages] in *God for Us*,’ but also highlights the fact that she makes ‘constant reference to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit through out [sic] the book’s 434 pages.’²⁸ I consider Medley’s comments to be accurate, although it should be noted that LaCugna’s call for us to live as Jesus [Christ] lived is clear and powerful. She makes reference to his earthly life, stating, for example, that we, like Jesus Christ, should be ‘preaching the Gospel; relying totally on God; offering healing and reconciliation; rejecting laws, customs, conventions that place persons beneath rules; resisting temptation; praying constantly; eating with modern-day lepers and other outcasts; ... dying for the sake of the gospel if it is God’s will.’²⁹

²⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 347.

²⁶ Killian McDonnell, review of *God for Us*, by Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *Worship* 69, no. 2 (1995): 165-67.

²⁷ Others noting limitations in her use of Scripture include Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity*, 192; Muller, “The Science of Theology,” 323; Gerald O’Collins, “The Holy Trinity: The State of the Questions,” in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 19-21; Susan Wood, “*God for Us* Review Symposium,” *Horizons* 20, no. 1 (1993): 129. The topic of ‘the place of Scripture’ in *God for Us*, is also raised, though the discussion is not documented, in Kirk, “Women’s Seminar in Constructive Theology,” 176. For similar criticism of Rahner, see Anatólios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 5.

²⁸ Medley, *Imago Trinitatis*, 49.

²⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 400-01.

Furthermore, I seek to defend LaCugna for her focus on the biblical material Medley describes as ‘originally liturgical or creedal texts and fragments (e.g., Matt. 28:19; Rom. 4:24; 8:11; 8:15; 2 Cor. 4:14; 13; 14; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:3-14) with either triadic or binary constructions.’³⁰ Referring to J. N. D. Kelly’s *Early Christian Creeds*,³¹ LaCugna notes that in ‘the search for texts that contain three names, Father, Son and Spirit, Kelly overlooks other important texts, for example Eph. 1:3-14, which narrate the shape of the economy.’ She again emphasises soteriology: ‘Since the chief concern of the doctrine of the Trinity is to name the God who redeems us in Christ and deifies us through the Holy Spirit, every biblical reference to the mystery of redemption is ultimately important for a trinitarian theology of God.’³²

The Pauline writings provide for LaCugna the language of the eternal mystery of *theologia* revealed in *oikonomia*. Referring to LaCugna’s key text, Anthony Kelly writes of both the eternal mystery of the loving God and the profound effect of this salvific love on humanity through the Incarnation:

the original Mystery remains one of Love: God is eternally Love, turned toward the world of creation (Eph 1:4-6). It is at work throughout history in the Spirit. It appears for what it is in the incarnation of the Word. And this is not a surface appearance: it occupies all the dimensions of human experience, the height and the depth, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.³³

Moreover, Paul’s trinitarianism leads to the realisation, according to Gordon Fee, ‘that if Rahner is right, that the economic and immanent Trinity are one, then our trinitarianism is terribly defective if we spend our labours on the ontological questions in such a way as to lose the essential narrative about God and salvation.’³⁴ Fee also recommends that rather than simply using Paul as ‘the quarry for later theological reflection, something might be said for

³⁰ Medley, *Imago Trinitatis*, 49.

³¹ Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*.

³² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 130. Hilbert observes: ‘Both LaCugna’s reading of the historical tradition of the Trinity and her proposal for a retrieval of the doctrine are rooted in liturgical sources. She highlights the liturgical roots of biblical passages that are foundation for trinitarian theology such as Matt 28:19 and Eph 1:3-14 ...’ Hilbert, ‘The Mystery of Persons in Communion,’ 242.

³³ Kelly, *The Trinity of Love*, 177.

³⁴ Gordon D. Fee, ‘Paul and the Trinity: The Experience of Christ and the Spirit for Paul’s Understanding of God,’ in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 72.

keeping Paul's form of trinitarian expression as part of the final equation.'³⁵ LaCugna's use of the Pauline narrative as the basis of her model of the *oikonomia* thus demonstrates her commitment to ensuring that Scripture remains integral to trinitarian doctrine.

Brian Edgar's Trinitarian Model

A text from Ephesians is significant also for Australian theologian Brian Edgar. In his article, "The Consummate Trinity and Participation in the Life of God," he refers to Ephesians 1:10 ('as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth'), and presents a trinitarian model which, I suggest, would both please and concern LaCugna. Emphasising the notion of eschatology in Christian theology, he notes Pannenberg's comment that 'it is only 20th century theology that has come to see the significance of the theme of eschatology for all Christian doctrine.'³⁶

Edgar writes of three 'Trinities' (accompanied by a table-style three-levelled model)³⁷ and, while he clarifies that the three refer to the one Trinity, one imagines LaCugna would be unimpressed with the idea of a *third* level of trinitarian speculation to consider. To the immanent and economic Trinity, Edgar adds the consummate Trinity, a notion inspired by Paul's description of God's plan for the fullness of time in Ephesians: 'The term consummate Trinity is a reference to the Trinity of completion with emphasis on doxology and the integration, the "bringing together" of all life in God that takes place *after* the world.'³⁸ Of LaCugna, Edgar writes, 'Her language sometimes suggests that God's immanence is dissolved. I think that she can be defended against this claim although her language could possibly be refined at this point.'³⁹ He considers that the notion of the consummate Trinity unites some of the issues relating to the economic and immanent Trinity:

³⁵ Fee, "Paul and the Trinity," 72. Fee rightly acknowledges that this was LaCugna's approach to trinitarian doctrine, making particular reference to Chapter 7 of *God for Us*. Fee, "Paul and the Trinity," 72, n. 34.

³⁶ Brian Edgar, "The Consummate Trinity and Participation in the Life of God," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 38, no. 2 (2014): 112, quoting Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 532.

³⁷ Edgar, "Consummate Trinity," 114.

³⁸ Edgar, "Consummate Trinity," 113. For an earlier example of a proposal for three trinitarian categories – economic, immanent and essential – see "Appendix A" of Claude Welch, *In This Name: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (New York: Scribners, 1952).

³⁹ Edgar, "Consummate Trinity," 123.

It takes one beyond soteriological thinking which is focused on the individual to its proper end at the consummation and it also takes reflections on the inner relationships of God beyond a focus solely upon God in God's self to see God as a God who has taken up the cosmos into God's life.⁴⁰

I suggest that little is gained by the introduction of the 'three-tiered' model.⁴¹ Edgar's association of the economic Trinity with 'personal,' the immanent Trinity with 'social' and the consummate Trinity with 'cosmic' dimensions of life is questionable.⁴² I agree that there is, at times, room for further refinement in LaCugna's language, but maintain that her model conveys more successfully than Edgar's the eschatological and doxological aspects of trinitarian doctrine.

Doxology

LaCugna's writing on doxology as the form of language that 'best serves and illumines God's economy'⁴³ is a vital aspect in her trinitarian theology. When discussed within the framework of her model of emanation and return – the model now based upon a foundation of Scripture and imbued with a call to participation in Christian life – her doxological theology presents an inspiring vision of God's glory, mystery and transcendence. Informed by Pannenberg's notion of the person who brings praise sacrificing both their 'I' and the conceptual univocity of their speech to the 'sublime infinity of God,'⁴⁴ she incorporates the image of 'the path of glory' into the dynamic Neo-platonic model. She and McDonnell write:

The path of glory is the path of God's own personal exodus and return *through* history. The personal exodus of God through history is also our own way back to God. The personal exodus of God has a threefold pattern: from God through Christ in the Spirit; as does our return: in the Spirit through Christ to God.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Edgar, "Consummate Trinity," 124.

⁴¹ For reservations expressed regarding other recent multi-tiered attempts, see Sanders' critique of Coffey, *Deus Trinitas*, in Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 5, n. 13; and Kilby's critique of R. Kendall Soulen, *The Divine Name(s) and the Holy Trinity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), in Karen Kilby, "Too Many Trinities?: Kendall Soulen's Trinitarian Trinitarianism," *Pro Ecclesia* 23, no. 1 (2014): 28-32.

⁴² Edgar, "Consummate Trinity," 114.

⁴³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 320.

⁴⁴ Pannenberg, "Analogy and Doxology," 216-17. Unlike Pannenberg, LaCugna and McDonnell suggest that 'apophatic and analogical theology coincide in doxology. Both methods are pursued in order to make it possible to open up to the ever-greater reality of God, one by entering into the "unknowing which is knowing", the other denying the adequacy of all predications made of God.' LaCugna and McDonnell, "Far Country," 199.

⁴⁵ LaCugna and McDonnell, "Far Country," 195. LaCugna's and McDonnell's italics. In renouncing the speculative tradition's bi-passing of redemptive history, LaCugna and McDonnell frame the doctrine of the

Here LaCugna's reference to the grace of God is entirely congruent both with the idea of God as transcendent and with the model and metaphors she offers:

God's economy is not the austere distribution of meagre resources but lavish grace, a glorious inheritance, bestowed in prodigal good pleasure, foreordained to be consummated. The economy is the path of God's glory: God's glorification through every creature, and the creature's ecstatic reply of praise.⁴⁶

LaCugna considers soteriology and doxology to be intrinsically related to each other. She refers to verse 12 from Ephesians 1 to illustrate this close relationship: 'we, who were the first to set our hope in Christ, might live for the praise of God's glory.'⁴⁷ Soteriology and doxology provide 'not only the originating context of trinitarian doctrine but also the point to which it must always seek to return.'⁴⁸ Praise is a fitting response to the living God who saves, and the model of emanation and return very effectively conveys the soteriological and forward-looking aspects of the Christian faith.

A 'Walking God'

LaCugna's use of the model of emanation and return locates her work within a long tradition of Christians who have explored the idea of mystical union with the divine. As Rist observes, Plotinus' 'famous triad (rest in God or the One, procession, and return to God) ... attracted mystical Christians from Gregory of Nyssa and Thomas Aquinas and beyond.'⁴⁹ David Burrell, too, writes of Augustine's recasting of Neo-platonic elements in a Christian context: 'At one and the same time, Augustine must acknowledge his debt to the Neo-Platonists and seek to enlarge the pattern for understanding which they offered him.'⁵⁰

Trinity in terms such that 'Christ was seen to be the face of God turned toward the world so that in the power of the Spirit, Christ might be the path back to God.' LaCugna and McDonnell, "Far Country," 212.

⁴⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 377.

⁴⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 356. LaCugna also refers to Isa 43:7 and Phil 1:11.

⁴⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 349.

⁴⁹ Rist, "Plotinus and Christian Philosophy," 390.

⁵⁰ David Burrell, "'The Confessions' of Augustine: An Exercise in Theological Understanding," *The Journal of Religion* 40, no. 4 (1970): 338.

Burrell quotes a passage from *The Confessions* which demonstrates both the Neo-platonic influence on Augustine and his incorporation of patently Christian concepts, such as the notion of grace:

By the gift of grace he is not only shown how to see you, who are always the same, but is also given the strength to hold you. By your grace, too, if he is far from you and cannot see you, he is enabled to walk upon the path that leads him closer to you, so that he may see you and hold you.⁵¹

The path returning to God is clearly Neo-platonic in inspiration and, like LaCugna, Augustine has made metaphorical use of the verb ‘walk’ within the model of emanation and return.

LaCugna and McDonnell speak of God’s glory as a saving glory, referring to Romans 6:4, where Paul writes, ‘Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father so that we too might walk in new life.’⁵² Their first use of the metaphor, a ‘walking God,’ occurs in their jointly written article, and LaCugna both refers to and expands upon it in *God for Us*:

The doctrine of the Trinity points beyond itself to the mystery of God who is alive and whose ongoing relationship with creation and persons cannot be frozen or fixed in time. God is a ‘walking God’ who accompanies a pilgrim people, according to a providential plan administered (economized) throughout time.⁵³

The initial reference to a ‘walking God’ by LaCugna and McDonnell is from Samuel Terrien’s book, *The Elusive Presence*.⁵⁴ They explain, ‘Although Terrien is writing about the nearness of God in the Israelite context, we are adapting his image to the experience of God’s nearness in Christ.’⁵⁵ In *The Elusive Presence*, Terrien discusses the development in the Old Testament of a theology of presence. The Hebrews ‘worshipped a God whose disclosure or

⁵¹ Burrell, “The Confessions,” 338, quoting Augustine, *Confessions* 7.21. Burrell uses the translation by R. S. Pine-Coffin (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1961).

⁵² LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 199. Fee refers to the ‘walking’ metaphor in Paul’s theology: ‘It is clear from a number of passages that for Paul “knowing God” comes by way of “knowing Christ” (cf. 2 Cor 4:6); and “knowing Christ” comes by way of “the Spirit’s wisdom and revelation” (Eph. 1:17). At the heart of all this is Paul’s conviction that Christian life means to “live by, walk in, be led by” the Spirit.’ Fee, “Paul and the Trinity,” 71.

⁵³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 321.

⁵⁴ Samuel L. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 170, 234.

⁵⁵ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 199, n. 18. The image of a walking God, used here to convey God’s nearness, appears also in the writing of Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama who, in “Three Mile an Hour God,” reflects on God’s speed and patience: ‘God walks slowly because he is in love. ... It is the speed we walk and therefore it is the speed the love of God walks.’ Kosuke Koyama, “Three Mile and Hour God,” in *Three Mile an Hour God: Biblical Reflections* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979), 7.

proximity always had a certain quality of elusiveness.’⁵⁶ In the first passage from Terrien’s book to which McDonnell and LaCugna refer, he provides background to a development in the biblical narrative from 2 Sam 7, where the prophet Nathan has been called upon by David to give advice on the building of a permanent home for the Ark of the Covenant. Following a nocturnal vision, Nathan feels compelled to communicate to David a message implying ‘a theology of presence which is strictly compatible with the nomadic character of the ark’:

Thus says Yahweh: Wouldst thou build for me a house to sit in? I have not sat in a house since the days I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been walking about in a tent and in an encampment. In all the places where I have walked about with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, Why have you not built for me a house of cedar? (2 Sam 7:5-8)⁵⁷

Terrien identifies this oracle as ‘one of the most important statements of the Hebraic literature on modes of presence’⁵⁸ as it alludes to the tensions between two understandings of history.

He writes:

Under the seemingly naive anthropomorphism of the image of a sitting or walking Godhead, the text indicates a polemic against the notion of a static Deity, attached to a temple built by man [*sic*], and therefore subject to the limitation of human worship. Nathan’s prophetic word defends the freedom of Yahweh. God is near, but his presence remains elusive. He is ‘a walking God.’⁵⁹

In exploring the image of a ‘walking God’ in their article, McDonnell and LaCugna emphasise the closeness of God, a God who is *worshipped and yet accompanies his people*. In Nathan’s prophetic word, God prefers to be the accompanying yet elusive ‘walking God’ rather than the more remote God bound by the ‘limitation of human worship.’

⁵⁶ Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, 1.

⁵⁷ Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, 170.

⁵⁸ Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, 170.

⁵⁹ Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, 170. Risto Saarinen refers to an agreed statement of the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue, *The Church of the Triune God* (2008): §§ 34, 35, 38, which raises the issue of anthropomorphism in trinitarian language: ‘The statement acknowledges that “analogies, metaphors and symbols are among the common tools of theology.” At the same time the statement distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate uses of metaphors, especially when they aim at illustrating divine reality. According to the statement, the risk of dogmatic misunderstanding is smaller when God is compared to an inanimate object (rock) or to an animal (flock of birds). Symbols taken from human activities, on the other hand, carry a greater risk of mediating a mistaken insight into God’s life.’ Risto Saarinen, ‘The Trinity, Creation, and Christian Anthropology,’ in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Giles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 418.

LaCugna and McDonnell may be drawing a parallel here between the limitation of human worship in the temple and the limitation of human thought and philosophy inherent in the philosophical approach to trinitarian doctrine taken by Aquinas and his contemporaries. It is what they consider to be the problematic notion of intradivine relations (developed in the post-Nicene period and present in the framework of Rahner's axiom) that prompts LaCugna and McDonnell to follow a different path.

While LaCugna and McDonnell refer to a 'walking God' to convey 'nearness in Christ,' I contend that, in doing so, they have no intention of diminishing the notion of the 'walking God' as transcendent. Terrien, writing later in *The Elusive Presence* of the 'ancient ideal of "walking with God" associated with the antediluvian figure of Enoch (Gen 4:24) ... [and] revived by Amos," emphasises the prophet's sense of awe in the presence of the divine, even as prophet and God travelled as companions in the desert:

Long-sustained acquaintance with this companionship, however, never deteriorated to casual familiarity. The God-prophet relation could not become a mere 'fellowship,' as if the Deity were reduced to the finite status of a 'fellow being.' The psychological mode of presence never cancels out the element of awe and even terror which is inherent in the proximity of holiness.⁶⁰

Weinandy suggests that for the 'Hebrew people God's transcendence does not take away from his immanence, but gives meaning and value to his immanence. The God who is wholly other than they is the God who walks, talks, listens, weeps, judges, and loves.'⁶¹ The notion of 'walking' with God or the 'walking God,' can thus convey a sense of intimacy without denying the experience of awe. It may bring to mind Gospel accounts such as the walk to Emmaus. It may enrich our reflection on God's journey along the path of glory as expressed in LaCugna's model of emanation and return. Indeed, the 'walking God' metaphor, like the story of the happenings on the road to Emmaus, adds a richness to LaCugna's 'insight' that the mystery, transcendence and glory of God is present, undiminished, in the *oikonomia*.

⁶⁰ Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, 264.

⁶¹ Weinandy, *Does God Change?*, xx.

A Conversation with LaCugna's Critics

This second part of Chapter 5 comprises a 'conversation' between Finan, Weinandy, Gunton, LaCugna, Groppe and me. A number of factors prevent a convivial flow of dialogue, not least the seriousness of some of the accusations levelled against LaCugna. Other challenges include the fact that LaCugna directly addresses only Finan's concerns, and that Groppe's extensive defence of LaCugna refers only briefly to the particular issues raised by Weinandy and Gunton. Nevertheless, I welcome the opportunity for more detailed engagement with their arguments. Both LaCugna and Groppe have reiterated and expanded upon the important point (made in *God for Us*) that the economic and immanent Trinity is not the equivalent of *oikonomia* and *theologia*, and Groppe, in particular, stresses that the distinction between the economic and immanent Trinity is not equivalent to the distinction between God and world. It is telling that these points have required such reinforcement in response to the critics. I will include and expand upon Groppe's and LaCugna's defence in this regard. The clarifications thus gleaned will inform my later engagement with Weinandy and Gunton.

Five articles will form the basis of this discussion. The first is a "Review Symposium on *God for Us*," published in 1993 in *Horizons*, the Journal of the College Theology Society. The perspectives of four theologians are presented in this "Symposium," and Finan's is the last of the four.⁶² As is customary, the article ends with a response from the author of the book under scrutiny – LaCugna in this case.⁶³ The second article is Weinandy's "The Immanent and Economic Trinity," which was first published in 1993 in *The Thomist*,⁶⁴ and reappeared two years later as "Excursus Two" at the end of his book, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship*.⁶⁵ The third is Gunton's 1993 review of *God for Us*,⁶⁶ much of which is reworked into the Foreword to the second edition of his book, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, published in 1997.⁶⁷ Groppe's article, "Catherine Mowry LaCugna's Contribution to Trinitarian Theology,"⁶⁸

⁶² Barbara A. Finan, "God for Us Review Symposium," *Horizons* 20, no. 1 (1993): 134-35.

⁶³ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "Author's Response, *God for Us* Review Symposium," *Horizons* 20, no. 1 (1993): 135-42.

⁶⁴ Thomas G. Weinandy, "The Immanent and Economic Trinity," *The Thomist* 57, no. 4 (1993): 655-66.

⁶⁵ Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit*, 123-36. I will refer to this later publication hereafter.

⁶⁶ Gunton, review of *God for Us*, 136-37.

⁶⁷ Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997).

⁶⁸ Groppe, "LaCugna's Contribution," 730-63.

published five years later, revisits issues raised by critics. Finally, LaCugna's review⁶⁹ of the first edition of Gunton's *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (that is the edition *without* his critique of *God for Us* in its Foreword)⁷⁰ is discussed toward the end of this chapter.

Barbara Finan

As noted above, the "Review Symposium on *God for Us*," provides the opportunity for questions and responses between reviewer and author. Of the four reviews comprising this "Symposium," I have selected Finan's due to her focus on the key concerns which initially prompted LaCugna to offer a new model.⁷¹ As discussed in Chapter 2 of my thesis, LaCugna considers Rahner to be 'caught in the stranglehold of the post-Nicene problematic.'⁷² In her response in the "Symposium" article she considers Finan to be similarly 'unable to escape the stranglehold of Latin scholasticism.'⁷³ LaCugna expresses anew her wariness of substance metaphysics and a reluctance to speak of the intra-trinitarian processions. Finan is justified in questioning LaCugna on these points. However, it becomes clear that not only are the two theologians arguing from very different positions, but also that Finan does not give due attention to the reasons behind LaCugna's reframing of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Finan opens her critique of *God for Us* with measured praise: 'Students of theology can be rightly indebted to [LaCugna] for the wealth of historical material she has organized in her retrieval and critique of classical trinitarian doctrine – whether or not they agree with her analysis of the problematic and her model for reconceiving the doctrine.'⁷⁴ She asks a question posed by many of LaCugna's critics: 'Theological focus on the mystery of salvation as the starting point for all language about the being of the Christian God cannot be denied. Whether the point of entry also defines the terms of the discussion about God's being is

⁶⁹ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, review of *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, by Colin E. Gunton, *Modern Theology* 9, no. 3 (1993): 307-09.

⁷⁰ Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991).

⁷¹ These issues are, firstly, the separation of *oikonomia* and *theologia* which led to the perception of distance and separation between God and the world, and, secondly, the resulting irrelevance of the doctrine of the Trinity to Christian life.

⁷² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 222. For further discussion on the post-Nicene 'stranglehold,' see section below: 'Weinandy's Concerns Regarding Subordinationism and Neo-Platonic Emanation.'

⁷³ LaCugna, "Author's Response," 139.

⁷⁴ Finan, "God for Us Review Symposium," 134.

obviously the critical point.⁷⁵ She is in agreement with LaCugna's reading of Rahner, such that Rahner's 'theology as a whole is a profound meditation on the essential unity of "theology" and the economy, premised on the idea that God is by nature self-communication.'⁷⁶ However, she makes an extraordinary claim about what she considers to be LaCugna's view on divine self-communication:

But LaCugna is turning Rahner on his ear when she follows with the claim that Rahner's 'incomprehensible God is God by sharing, bestowing, diffusing, expressing Godself' (210) in the sense that the economy is the means of God's being God. In saying this I may be misinterpreting Rahner and (in the process) suggesting that the self-communicating activity of God for us 'creates' the tripersonal reality of God, rather than affirming that the tripersonal and self-communicating being of God creates us in a manner capable of being in gracious communion with the mysterious Other who can be said to exist in the fullness of intrapersonal communion prior to (or without reference to) the non-divine.⁷⁷

LaCugna justifiably responds sharply to Finan's claim, making it clear that she neither believes nor states that the economy 'creates' the Trinity.⁷⁸ Alluding to the 'stranglehold' in which she considers Finan to be caught, she suggests that the terms Finan uses such as 'radical distinction' and 'infinite difference' are 'too philosophically imprecise to mean anything.'⁷⁹

LaCugna proceeds to address this matter by making a comparison between the expression of God's transcendence in the East and West: 'the Aristotelian idea of ontological discontinuity between God and creation is particularly Western – and yet one would hardly accuse the Orthodox of not preserving God's absolute sovereignty over creation.'⁸⁰ She refers to Zizioulas' description of the distinction between *oikonomia* and *theologia* as nothing 'but a

⁷⁵ Finan, "Review Symposium," 134.

⁷⁶ Finan, "Review Symposium," 134, quoting LaCugna, *God for Us*, 210.

⁷⁷ Finan, "Review Symposium," 134-35.

⁷⁸ LaCugna, "Author's Response," 139.

⁷⁹ LaCugna, "Author's Response," 139. LaCugna is referring to the following two comments by Finan: 'I fear that she may be too close to abandoning the radical distinction between God and us in her efforts to affirm that God is for us.' Finan, "*God for Us* Review Symposium," 134; and 'A theology which takes seriously the infinite difference between God in the person of Jesus and the presence of the Spirit requires a relational ontology that affirms the intrapersonal reality of the Godself as revealed (but not created) in the *oikonomia*.' Finan, "*God for Us* Review Symposium," 135.

⁸⁰ LaCugna, "Author's Response," 139.

device created by the Greek Fathers to safeguard the absolute transcendence of God without alienating Him from the world,⁸¹ and explains:

God's transcendence must be understood to entail at the same time a real, not just a logical involvement with the world; even so, God's involvement remains uncreated, incomprehensible, and ineffable. Thus it is entirely possible to hold both a trinitarian doctrine of God and a doctrine of God's sovereign freedom, without resorting to the metaphysics of substance or to the one-sided and murky notion of 'radical distinction.'⁸²

LaCugna's expressed preference for a 'real, not a logical involvement with the world' is indicative of her opposition to a Thomistic and ultimately Aristotelian understanding of the notion of 'relation,' as was discussed in my previous chapter. While she acknowledges Aquinas' reasons for distinguishing between real and logical relations, LaCugna nonetheless has proposed a recasting of the idea of divine freedom in which she distances herself from the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* in favour of *creatio ex amore* (Theme 3). Finan is clearly arguing from within a Thomistic framework in her defence of creation *ex nihilo*: 'God's interpersonal being *pro nobis* is rooted in God's interpersonal being *in se*. Our difference from the other (whether divine or not) is just as important as our unity. We cannot afford to abandon the truth that God's triune being did not need our existence in order to be.'⁸³

LaCugna responds directly, questioning 'whether the communion between God and all creatures, which takes place through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, requires that God first exist as an eternal, intratrinitarian communion with Godself, to the degree that God would be a trinity of persons without or apart from creation.'⁸⁴ Displaying the agnosticism discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, she suggests that it is 'possible but not necessary to posit such an intradivine community of persons,' noting that we are 'lacking the information needed to make such a decisive claim.'⁸⁵ LaCugna turns to Aquinas to support her view: 'Even Thomas Aquinas was very cautious about questions like these. In answer to

⁸¹ John Zizioulas, "The Teaching of the Second Ecumenical Council on the Holy Spirit in Historical and Ecumenical Perspective," in *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983), 51, quoted by LaCugna, "Author's Response," 139-40.

⁸² LaCugna, "Author's Response," 140.

⁸³ Finan, "Review Symposium," 135.

⁸⁴ LaCugna, "Author's Response," 140, n. 2.

⁸⁵ LaCugna, "Author's Response," 140-41, n. 2. This point is made by LaCugna in *God for Us*, 175-76, n. 93, as noted in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

the question about whether creation could be eternal, he replied that there were no convincing philosophical reasons against the eternity of creation, since even an eternal creation would still be a creature. In the end he appealed only to the text of Genesis 1:1 against the idea of an eternal creation.’⁸⁶

LaCugna maintains that the ‘point of the doctrine of the Trinity is the relationship and communion among persons, divine and human, not their absolute distance from each other.’⁸⁷ She sees substance metaphysics as an inadequate means of upholding the Christian understanding of transcendence, and looks to other ways to uphold this notion. Her concern remains that the perpetuation of a doctrine of the Trinity grounded in substance metaphysics results in an understanding of God who is alienated from humanity. This concern manifests itself, in this particular conversation, with a show of frustration at Finan’s insistence on using a philosophical framework and terms which distracts from the soteriological and relational aspects of her trinitarian theology.

Catherine LaCugna and Elizabeth Groppe

LaCugna and Groppe seek to address issues of imprecise language for the pairings: ‘economic’ and ‘immanent’ Trinity; *oikonomia* and *theologia*; and ‘immanent’ (as in divine immanence) and ‘transcendent.’ Again, responding to Finan, LaCugna reiterates her own suggestion for ‘a moratorium on the terms “economic and immanent Trinity” as one step toward greater precision,’⁸⁸ and adds, ‘This is not because, as Finan fears, I do not believe in the immanent Trinity.’⁸⁹ She proceeds to outline five reservations she holds regarding the modern terminology of economic and immanent Trinity:

This terminology (1) is imprecise and misleading, and not equivalent to the distinction between *oikonomia* and *theologia*; (2) obscures the intuition at the heart of the doctrine of the Trinity: that personhood, not being, is primary; (3) inevitably suggests two trinities that are ontologically separate but whose real unity needs continually to be reasserted; (4) supports a highly questionable idea of God’s freedom; and (5) hinders the deeply practical implications of the doctrine of the Trinity from being realized.’⁹⁰

⁸⁶ LaCugna, “Author’s Response,” 140-41, n. 2.

⁸⁷ LaCugna, “Author’s Response,” 139.

⁸⁸ LaCugna, “Author’s Response,” 139. This proposal is first made in LaCugna, *God for Us*, 223.

⁸⁹ LaCugna, “Author’s Response,” 139.

⁹⁰ LaCugna, “Author’s Response,” 139.

Groppe's article, "Catherine Mowry LaCugna's Contribution to Trinitarian Theology," is the first of her two insightful extended essays on LaCugna. Following her brief introduction to the article is a substantial section entitled, "The Limitations of the Paradigm of the Economic and Immanent Trinity."⁹¹ Groppe prefaces this section (in which she identifies eight such limitations) with a quotation from a lecture given by LaCugna at Duke University in 1993: 'I was more and more convinced that the crucial aporia of the modern doctrine of the Trinity lay in or around the terms immanent and economic.'⁹² I include here a listing of Groppe's eight limitations (slightly edited to avoid repetition) to act as a reference point for the some of the debate later in this chapter on the use of these terms by Gunton and Weinandy.

The terminology of the immanent and the economic Trinity:

- (1) is imprecise and can be misleading or confusing;
- (2) can appear to suggest that there are two Trinities;
- (3) hampers the exercise of the doxological character of theology;
- (4) hampers the articulation of a nuanced theology of God's freedom;
- (5) hinders the articulation of a trinitarian theology that expresses the depth of the mystery of Incarnation and grace without subsuming God into a world process;
- (6) inhibits the realization of the practical and soteriological implications of the doctrine of the Trinity;
- (7) perpetuates the use of a metaphysics of substance; and
- (8) structures theological discourse with a distinction between God as immanent and economic which can eclipse or become confused with the more fundamental distinction between God and creature that should structure theological reflection.⁹³

The first point made by both LaCugna and Groppe is that the terms 'economic' and 'immanent' are considered imprecise and misleading in trinitarian discourse.⁹⁴ It is unfortunate that the word 'immanent' refers to both the indwelling of God 'permanently

⁹¹ Groppe, "LaCugna's Contribution," 731-41.

⁹² LaCugna, "Discussion of *God for Us*" (lecture at Duke University, November 11, 1993), 2, quoted in Groppe, "LaCugna's Contribution," 732.

⁹³ Groppe, "LaCugna's Contribution," 732-41. Groppe acknowledges LaCugna's identification of these issues where they coincide with those outlined in LaCugna, "Author's Response," 139.

⁹⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 211-12; LaCugna, "Author's Response," 139; Groppe, "LaCugna's Contribution," 732.

pervading and sustaining the universe,⁹⁵ and, when referring to the Trinity, the communion of the three divine persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, within their eternal life together. To confuse the situation further, there is a tendency in such discourse to (incorrectly) view divine immanence as the equivalent of the economic Trinity and divine transcendence as the equivalent of the immanent Trinity.

Both theologians use the word ‘precision.’ Their choice of word is interesting, as it can be used to support *and* to challenge their argument. Rahner emphasises the close relationship between the ‘economic’ and ‘immanent’ in order to maintain the crucial epistemological connection between the divine missions and processions. As such, his use of the terms can be seen as a step *toward* precision. In comparison, LaCugna takes an agnostic approach to God *in se*. Here, once again, the discussion returns to her reference to the post-Nicene ‘stranglehold’ in which she considers her arguing partners to be caught. LaCugna considers *oikonomia* and *theologia* to convey more precisely and effectively the soteriological import of the doctrine of the Trinity. Moreover, as discussed in the first part of this chapter, her single visual model more convincingly communicates the Christian understanding of God’s immanence and transcendence, whereby ‘God is transcendent because God’s nearness to us in history does not exhaust the ineffable mystery of God.’ In LaCugna’s model ‘*both* immanence and transcendence must be predicated not just of *theologia* but also of *oikonomia*.’⁹⁶

LaCugna argues against an equivalence of meaning between the ‘economic/immanent’ Trinity and *oikonomia/theologia* terminology. Given the level of misunderstanding and misinterpretation surrounding her use of the term *oikonomia*, I consider it apt to refer to some of the reasons she gives for her choice of this term. She writes, ‘Although *oikonomia*, salvation history, can be translated as *Heilsgeschichte* [salvation history], I have avoided doing so to not add to the confusion over the meaning of *Heilsgeschichte*, as well as its dependence on various theories of history, historicity, and historical critical method.’⁹⁷

⁹⁵ *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “immanent .”

⁹⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 322. LaCugna’s italics.

⁹⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 17, n. 1.

LaCugna has selected the term *oikonomia* not only to avoid potential disagreement regarding theories of history, but for its prior use as a biblical and theological term and for what she considers to be its freedom from philosophical ‘baggage.’ ‘The term *oikonomia*,’ she explains, ‘is valuable not only because it is biblical and patristic and routinely used in theological literature, but also because it remains largely free of any particular philosophical or theoretical framework, which cannot be said for *Heilsgeschichte*.’⁹⁸ These comments, along with her description of the term *oikonomia* as ‘mercurial enough to work well within the theological problematic’⁹⁹ examined in her book, have not been sufficiently noted by some of LaCugna’s critics, including Gunton, who seem, at times, determined to work within the very parameters she questions. Furthermore, as Groppe emphasises, it is not LaCugna’s position that theologians should speak ‘only of the “economic Trinity” as some ... reviewers have stated – but rather that contemporary trinitarian theology would be enhanced by an alternative framework that prescind from the imprecise language of both the “immanent Trinity” and the “economic Trinity.”’¹⁰⁰

Groppe addresses the issue of the Creator-creature distinction in the fifth of her eight limitations of the terminology, ‘immanent and economic Trinity.’¹⁰¹ She acknowledges that Rahner’s Rule can be subject to misinterpretation, and refers to LaCugna’s Introduction to the 1997 edition of Rahner’s *The Trinity*: ‘Elsewhere [LaCugna] writes with respect to Rahner’s Grand Axiom: “if the axiom is taken to describe an ontological state of affairs, then the critics are correct to insist that there remains some essential difference between the being of the triune God and the being of the creature (though few have successfully maintained the distinction without abrogating the essential relatedness of God and creature).”’¹⁰² This quote is pertinent in that it demonstrates LaCugna’s awareness that even if the immanent and economic Trinity are identical in ontological terms, it is imperative that there be a clear articulation of the Creator-creature distinction. Groppe identifies and discusses the confusion

⁹⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 17, n. 1.

⁹⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 17, n. 1.

¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth T. Groppe, “From *God for Us* to *Living in the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ*: Catherine LaCugna’s Trinitarian Theology as a Foundation for Her Theology of the Holy Spirit,” *Horizons* 27, no. 2 (2000): 344, n. 2. Groppe’s italics.

¹⁰¹ Groppe, “LaCugna’s Contribution,” 737-38.

¹⁰² Groppe, “LaCugna’s Contribution,” 737-38, n. 34, quoting LaCugna in her ‘Introduction’ to Rahner, *The Trinity*, xv.

surrounding the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity and the more fundamental distinction between God and world. I will argue below that Weinandy and, to a lesser extent, Gunton have succumbed to this confusion.

Groppe observes that the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity is not uncommonly regarded as ‘the theological pillar that upholds the distinction between God and creature that should structure theological reflection.’¹⁰³ She names John Thompson as a theologian who assumes a functional equivalence between the two sets of distinctions. He writes that one must not identify the economic and immanent Trinity for ‘to do so would be to blur the very real distinction between God and humanity.’¹⁰⁴ Groppe continues, ‘It is, furthermore, a legitimate assumption given that there would be no economic Trinity had God never created the cosmos. Strictly speaking, however, the economic Trinity is not creation, but rather God as manifest in creation and redemption through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.’¹⁰⁵

Oikonomia and Theologia as ‘Distinct but Inseparable’

Groppe refers in her writing to LaCugna’s concept of *theologia* and *oikonomia* as ‘distinct but inseparable.’¹⁰⁶ Groppe’s use of this idea of ‘distinction yet inseparability’ requires further examination. Questions have been raised as to the extent to which this notion is articulated in LaCugna’s actual writing.¹⁰⁷ Groppe suggests that, for LaCugna, ‘*Theologia* and *oikonomia* are distinct but inseparable dimensions of trinitarian theology that cannot be divorced from one another,’¹⁰⁸ and adds in a footnote: ‘LaCugna speaks of the ‘essential unity’ and the ‘inseparability’ of *oikonomia* and *theologia* in [*God for Us*] 211, 229 and 4.’¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ Groppe notes that Sokolowski has identified ‘the difference between God and creature as the fundamental distinction that should structure Christian theological discourse.’ Groppe, “LaCugna’s Contribution,” 740.

¹⁰⁴ Groppe, “LaCugna’s Contribution,” 740, quoting Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives*, 26.

¹⁰⁵ Groppe, “LaCugna’s Contribution,” 740.

¹⁰⁶ Groppe, “LaCugna’s Contribution,” 735, 742, n. 58, 746; Groppe, “Creation *Ex Nihilo*,” 470, 471, 472, 473, 477, 491, n. 52, 495, n. 117. In another publication Groppe writes, ‘*Theologia*, [LaCugna] affirmed, is distinct from yet truly manifest in *oikonomia*.’ Groppe, “From *God for Us* to *Living in the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ*,” 345.

¹⁰⁷ See discussion on the claims of Eve Tibbs below.

¹⁰⁸ Groppe, “LaCugna’s Contribution,” 742.

¹⁰⁹ Groppe, “LaCugna’s Contribution,” 742, n. 58.

In the first passage, cited by Groppe from *God for Us*, LaCugna writes, ‘Using Rahner’s theology as a point of departure, and keeping in mind the doctrinal and liturgical developments examined above, this chapter reaffirms the essential unity between *oikonomia* and *theologia* as the fundamental framework for Trinitarian theology. The basic principle may be stated simply: Theology is inseparable from soteriology, and vice versa.’¹¹⁰ It could be debated whether or not LaCugna’s qualification of the term ‘unity’ with the adjective ‘essential’ is sufficiently close in meaning to Groppe’s attribution of ‘distinction’ between *oikonomia* and *theologia* in LaCugna’s theology.

Groppe acknowledges in her article, “Creation *ex nihilo* and *ex amore*,” that she has attributed to LaCugna this position of the simultaneous ‘distinction and inseparability’ of *theologia* and *oikonomia* in an attempt to clarify LaCugna’s principle.¹¹¹ She has restated LaCugna’s intention in proposing the alternative paradigm of *oikonomia* and *theologia* not only to avoid the perception that there are two Trinities¹¹² (one of which is completely unrelated to Christian life), but to move away from a model which runs the risk of subsuming God into a world process. However, as noted in my previous chapter, Groppe acknowledges that ‘LaCugna’s expression “the essential unity of *oikonomia* and *theologia*” could be read in a monistic manner if by “essential unity” one understands absolute identity.’¹¹³ She proceeds to argue, however, that, in her opinion, monism is ‘not precisely what LaCugna intends.’¹¹⁴

Groppe refers to LaCugna’s speaking of the ‘correspondence’ of *oikonomia* and *theologia*,¹¹⁵ and of ‘the basic correlation between the economy of salvation and the eternal being of God.’¹¹⁶ Groppe then observes that these are phraseologies that do not imply a strict

¹¹⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 211.

¹¹¹ Groppe, “Creation *Ex Nihilo*,” 491, n. 52.

¹¹² Kathryn Tanner does not always use the terms ‘economic’ and ‘immanent’ trinity or refer to the distinction between them (compare Chapters 4 and 5 of *Christ the Key*). Her reasons for not doing so, in the case of Chapter 4, resemble those given by LaCugna. Tanner writes, ‘the complicated controversies surrounding those terms might obscure the rather simple points I am making.’ She adds, ‘A distinction of that sort also easily misleads by suggesting the existence of two different trinities – exactly what I am trying to avoid.’ Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 174, n. 49.

¹¹³ Groppe, “Creation *Ex Nihilo*,” 491, n. 52. Groppe quotes from LaCugna, *God for Us*, 382.

¹¹⁴ Groppe, “Creation *Ex Nihilo*,” 491, n. 52.

¹¹⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 288.

¹¹⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 249.

identity.¹¹⁷ Reminding her readers of LaCugna's overriding agenda, Groppe adds, '[i]n *God for Us*, LaCugna's preponderant language is, in fact, that of the 'unity' of *theologia* and *oikonomia*, presumably because she is writing in a context in which she perceives a rift or even a chasm between these two dimensions of trinitarian theology, a breach that she wishes to bridge.'¹¹⁸

In her thesis entitled, "East Meets West: Trinity, Truth and Communion in John Zizioulas and Colin Gunton," Eve Tibbs questions Groppe's reporting of LaCugna's notion of the inseparability of *oikonomia* and *theologia* with reference to the God-world relationship.¹¹⁹ She argues that Groppe's description of LaCugna's position does not accurately reflect LaCugna's ideas. Tibbs claims, 'Groppe's insistence – that in LaCugna there is more to the being of God than is revealed in salvation history – is difficult to align with LaCugna's own words, amplified by the use of absolute terms such as "fully" and "truly" in this example: "Theologia is *fully* revealed and bestowed in oikonomia, and oikonomia *truly* expresses the ineffable mystery of theologia."¹²⁰ With Colin Gunton's reading of LaCugna as her focus, Tibbs states, 'Very simply, Groppe's reading is at odds with Gunton's reading, who appears to have grounds to suggest that for LaCugna, "ontology is the enemy."¹²¹ Tibbs concludes that, for Gunton, 'the personal otherness of LaCugna's God's [*sic*] is no longer distinct from the world.'¹²²

However, Groppe, correctly in my view, further justifies her attribution to LaCugna the idea of 'distinction and inseparability of *oikonomia* and *theologia*' by citing from *God for Us* the statement, 'The mystery of *theologia* exceeds or transcends what can be expressed in *oikonomia*.'¹²³ She could also cite, if further justification were called for, LaCugna's

¹¹⁷ Groppe, "Creation *Ex Nihilo*," 491, n. 52.

¹¹⁸ Groppe, "Creation *Ex Nihilo*," 491, n. 52.

¹¹⁹ Eve M. Tibbs, "East Meets West: Trinity, Truth and Communion in John Zizioulas and Colin Gunton" (Ph.D., Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Theology, 2006), 206-09.

¹²⁰ Tibbs, "East Meets West," 208, quoting LaCugna, *God for Us*, 221. Tibbs' italicisation.

¹²¹ Colin E. Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 41.

¹²² Tibbs, "East Meets West," 208.

¹²³ Groppe, "Creation *Ex Nihilo*," 491, n. 52, quoting LaCugna, *God for Us*, 304.

comments on the relationship between theology and soteriology in the Introduction to *God for Us*, where she writes:

To be sure, the doctrine of the Trinity is more than the doctrine of salvation. Theology cannot be reduced to soteriology. Nor can trinitarian theology be purely functional; trinitarian theology is not merely a summary of our experience of God. It is this, but it is also a statement, however partial, about the mystery of God's eternal being. *Theologia* and *oikonomia* belong together; we cannot presume to speak about either one to the exclusion of the other.¹²⁴

In her defence of LaCugna, Groppe expresses a hope that her reiteration of LaCugna's intention to develop an alternative trinitarian framework 'will assuage concerns of theologians such as Joseph Bracken, Colin Gunton, Paul Molnar and Thomas Weinandy, who express reservations about what appears to be her reduction of trinitarian theology to a merely economic plane.'¹²⁵ While her article is rich in detail, and while she mounts in it an admirable defence in the face of largely negative commentary, Groppe makes very brief and only general reference to the specific concerns raised by LaCugna's critics. She writes, for example, 'It is not, as Gunton fears, that LaCugna limits her theology to the economic Trinity and casts doubt on the necessity of a doctrine of an immanent or ontological Trinity.'¹²⁶ By evaluating Weinandy's commentary in more detail and by incorporating LaCugna's written communication with Gunton into the discussion, I intend to add to Groppe's defence of LaCugna, acknowledging, as Groppe does, where criticisms may be justified, but also further exposing some of the over-reactions and misinterpretations made by Weinandy and Gunton.

Thomas Weinandy

In his critique of *God for Us*, Weinandy blurs, at times, the boundaries of the two different paradigms discussed by LaCugna: the one traditionally expressed in the language of economic and immanent Trinity and the alternative paradigm proposed by LaCugna which uses the terms *oikonomia* and *theologia*. I contend that he also confuses the economic/immanent trinitarian distinction with the God-world distinction. He writes, 'Even if

¹²⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 4.

¹²⁵ Groppe, "LaCugna's Contribution," 741, n. 51. Later in the article, Groppe links commentators with other related issues. She refers to Molnar, Gunton, Benjamin Leslie and Weinandy on 'what appears to be a lack of ontological foundation,' Groppe, "LaCugna's Contribution," 747, n. 76; and to Finan, Bracken, Molnar and Gunton on the God-world relation with reference to LaCugna's ontology of person and relation. Groppe, "LaCugna's Contribution," 749, n. 84.

¹²⁶ Groppe, "LaCugna's Contribution," 741, n. 51.

one argues, as Rahner and many others including myself do, that the immanent Trinity *is* the economic Trinity, a gulf is still placed between God as he exists in himself and the God who exists for us.¹²⁷ I will argue that, given other comments by Weinandy on the ontological *identity* of the immanent and economic Trinity, this ‘gulf’ would lie between God and creation.

Weinandy’s Concerns Regarding the Ontological Distinction Between God and World

Weinandy presents LaCugna’s position (as set forth in *God for Us*) in some detail, and offers two reasons for doing so: ‘firstly it challenges my own position on the relation between the immanent and economic Trinity. But secondly, and more particularly, LaCugna’s stance, as a Christian view of God and his relation to us, is, I believe, fatally and disastrously flawed.’¹²⁸ One of his longer quotations from *God for Us* is worth repeating here, as it demonstrates LaCugna’s intention in bringing greater clarity and subtlety to the discourse with a new vocabulary and framework.

There is neither an economic nor an immanent Trinity; there is only the *oikonomia* that is the concrete realization of the mystery of *theologia* in time, space, history, and personality. In this framework the doctrine of the Trinity encompasses much more than the immanent Trinity, envisioned in static ahistorical and transeconomic terms; the subject matter of a Christian theology of God is the dynamic movement of God, *a Patre ad Patrem*. ... The existence of such an intradivine realm is precisely what cannot be established on the basis of the economy, despite the fact that it functioned within speculative theology ever since the late fourth century.

This revision of the basic Trinitarian framework obviates the need to adhere to the language of economic and immanent Trinity. These terms are bound inextricably to the framework that operates with a gap between *oikonomia* and *theologia*. The revision – more accurately, the return to the biblical and pre-Nicene pattern of thought – suggests not only that we abandon the misleading terms, economic and immanent Trinity, but also that we clarify the meaning of *oikonomia* and *theologia*. *Oikonomia* is not the Trinity *ad extra* but the comprehensive plan of God reaching from creation to consummation, in which God and all creatures are destined to exist together in the mystery of love and communion. Similarly, *theologia* is not the Trinity *in se*, but, much more modestly and simply, the mystery of God.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Weinandy, *The Father’s Spirit*, 124.

¹²⁸ Weinandy, *The Father’s Spirit*, 129.

¹²⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 223, quoted by Weinandy, *The Father’s Spirit*, 126-27.

Weinandy's response invites careful examination. He writes, agreeing with LaCugna, that she is 'absolutely correct that the God who is must be God-for-us. There is no other. There is no ontological difference between what God is in himself and what God is for us.'¹³⁰ He is claiming here, it would seem, that the only distinction between the God who is and the God who is for us is an epistemological one. One must ask then, what is the nature of the 'gulf' he claims to exist between the God who exists in himself and the God who exists for us?

Continuing his response, he states, '[h]owever, in order for there to be a God-for-us there must be "a" God.'¹³¹ He assures the reader that in speaking of 'a' God he does not want to 'imply that God is one of many beings, but precisely the opposite. God must exist ontologically distinct from all that is not God.'¹³² This emphatic statement by Weinandy suggests that the gulf he wants to emphasise is an ontological one between God and the world. He states:

In order for there to be a Trinity-for-us there must be a Trinity. While there is no ontological distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity – the Trinity which expresses itself in the economy must be one and the same Trinity that exists in itself – yet there is an ontological distinction between God and all else that exists.¹³³

Here he correctly distinguishes between the immanent-economic Trinity distinction and the God-world distinction. However, in his subsequent statement, he again confuses these relations:

The *oikonomia* is the realm where God, in all his wholly otherness as God – ontologically distinct from the *oikonomia* – is present and acts, and in the Incarnation actually abides, in the fullness of his wholly divine otherness, as man [*sic*]. For LaCugna, God, in his wholly ontologically distinct otherness as God, actually never is present to nor acts within the *oikonomia*. Rather God is reduced to the *oikonomia* itself so that we no longer live with God in his wholly otherness, but only experience a God who has receded into and subsists wholly within the ontological level of the *oikonomia* itself.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit*, 130.

¹³¹ Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit*, 130.

¹³² Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit*, 130, n. 19.

¹³³ Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit*, 130.

¹³⁴ Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit*, 130. The following statement is another instance where Weinandy does not sufficiently distinguish *oikonomia* and world: 'If God is not ontologically distinct and other than the *oikonomia*, one ends up with either a finite God or a "Christian" expression of atheism, both of which, in the end, may be equivalent.' Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit*, 131, n. 21.

Possibly unintentionally, Weinandy appears here to be almost equating the notion of *oikonomia* with ‘creation.’ LaCugna, on the other hand, describes *oikonomia* not only as different from the Trinity *ad extra* but as the ‘comprehensive *plan of God* reaching from creation to consummation, in which God and all creatures are destined to exist together in the mystery of love and communion.’¹³⁵ Thus the *oikonomia* is not an ‘ontological level’ into which God enters and from which God recedes. While God and creatures ‘exist together in the mystery of love and communion,’ the plan for the world and all creatures is *God’s* plan and thus, there is, in LaCugna’s trinitarian theology, as Weinandy insists there must be, ‘a’ God who has a plan for the world.

Weinandy quotes von Balthasar, whose observations, he suggests, are applicable to LaCugna’s position:

While, according to Christian faith, the economic Trinity assuredly appears as the interpretation of the immanent Trinity, it may not be identified with it, for the latter grounds and supports the former. Otherwise the immanent, eternal Trinity would threaten to dissolve into the economic; in other words, God would be swallowed up in the world process – a necessary stage, in this view, if he is fully to realize himself.¹³⁶

Weinandy develops this idea further, and although he acknowledges that he does not believe that she would hold the position, he questions ‘whether God, for LaCugna, is ultimately nothing more than the philosophical principle, inherent within reality, which gives rise to human relations and expresses “the more” contained within them.’¹³⁷ He adds, ‘In this case, LaCugna’s notion of God would be similar to Hegel’s “Spirit”, or Heidegger’s and Tillich’s “Ground of Being”, or Process Theology’s “Di-polar” God.’¹³⁸ He is correct in supposing LaCugna would not hold this view. She has addressed and dismissed the idea as untenable.¹³⁹ Again, this concern that God be ‘swallowed up in the world process’ is one of the reasons for LaCugna’s wariness of using the language of the immanent and economic Trinity.

¹³⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 126-27. My italics.

¹³⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 3, *The Dramatis Personae: The Person of Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), 508, quoted in Weinandy, *The Father’s Spirit*, 131.

¹³⁷ Weinandy, *The Father’s Spirit*, 132.

¹³⁸ Weinandy, *The Father’s Spirit*, 132, n. 22.

¹³⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 214, as discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

Weinandy's Concerns Regarding Subordinationism and Neo-Platonic Emanation

Weinandy refers several times to LaCugna's chapter section in which she introduces her alternative paradigm, raising concerns also about the Neo-platonic and emanationist character of LaCugna's trinitarian theology more broadly.¹⁴⁰ He writes:

LaCugna believes that her understanding of the Trinity is biblical and follows the pre-Nicene pattern; that is, that the Son and the Holy Spirit are conceived primarily as the manner in which God acts within the economy. The Son and Spirit emanate out from God only in relation to the economy of salvation – within creation and redemption. As the above shows, she believes such a notion sustains her premise that *theologia* and *oikonomia* are one and the same.¹⁴¹

Weinandy acknowledges that the pre-Nicene Fathers did stress the economic expressions of the Trinity.¹⁴² Their notion of the Son and Spirit as distinct subjects emanating out from the Father only at creation and in redemption was due to their reliance on Middle Platonic thought. He draws attention, however, to Irenaeus as an early theologian 'who pushed the economic expression of the Trinity well into the immanent nature of God,'¹⁴³ and also to Tertullian in the West and Origen in the East who were concerned to 'conceive of God in such a manner as to uphold the oneness of God and yet allow that the Son and the Holy Spirit are eternal subjects within that oneness.'¹⁴⁴ LaCugna's use of emanationist and Neo-platonic concepts is compared with the use of these concepts by the early Fathers:

The subordinationism and emanationism contained in the early Fathers were not expressions of their disbelief in the eternal divinity of the Son and the Spirit, nor expressions of a belief that the Son and the Spirit were only 'God' within the economy, but not 'God' apart from the economy; rather these were conceptual struggles and attempts to say exactly that – that the Son and the Spirit were God both within the being of God and within the economy of salvation.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit*, 125, 127, 134-35.

¹⁴¹ Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit*, 134.

¹⁴² Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit*, 134.

¹⁴³ Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit*, 135.

¹⁴⁴ Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit*, 135.

¹⁴⁵ Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit*, 135.

He argues that where ‘the pre-Nicene Fathers did not really want to say what they said, but could not express their ideas in any better way,’ LaCugna, has chosen ‘to say what they said because she believes this is the best way to express it.’¹⁴⁶

LaCugna acknowledges that the biblical and pre-Arian formulation on which she bases her model is subordinationist. Naming Irenaeus as the ‘distinguished theologian of the economy,’ for whom ‘there is one God and Father who created everything through the Son and the Spirit who were always with God,’ she notes his use of the image of Christ and the Spirit as ‘the two “hands” of God the Father who do God’s work in creation.’¹⁴⁷ Unlike Weinandy, who interprets Irenaeus’ theology as pushing ‘the economic expression of the Trinity well into the immanent nature of God,’¹⁴⁸ LaCugna highlights his focus on the economy: ‘Irenaeus’ theology of recapitulation (*anakephalaiōsis*) must be seen in light of his emphasis on *oikonomia*.’¹⁴⁹ She makes no apology for adopting a model which draws on the pre-Nicene understanding of the triune God and which thus bypasses the issues of the eternal co-equality of Father, Son and Spirit. As noted in my previous chapter, LaCugna and McDonnell have described this bypassing using the metaphor of a bridge (scientific ontology) which they ‘honor’ but ‘do not to pass over.’¹⁵⁰ They recognise the place of doctrine of the immanent Trinity, yet express their concerns that ‘ontology undisciplined and unchecked by the specifics of redemption history leads to the alienation of trinitarian doctrine from the whole of Christian theology and life.’¹⁵¹

Weinandy, also turning to metaphor, argues that ‘LaCugna’s venture ultimately runs aground on the rock of *homoousios*.’¹⁵² However, does ‘*homoousios*’ have the final word? Does her choice to move her focus from the doctrine of the immanent Trinity, so closely associated with this Greek concept, condemn her to the charge of constructing a ‘chasm between God

¹⁴⁶ Weinandy, *The Father’s Spirit*, 135.

¹⁴⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 26.

¹⁴⁸ Weinandy, *The Father’s Spirit*, 135.

¹⁴⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 26.

¹⁵⁰ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 215.

¹⁵¹ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 215, n. 58.

¹⁵² Weinandy, *The Father’s Spirit*, 136.

and us that is now unbridgeable’?’¹⁵³ It can be argued that LaCugna’s position regarding the co-equality of divine persons is difficult to discern. She does not dismiss the concept of the co-equality of divine persons.¹⁵⁴ She does however give greater priority to her concerns surrounding the separation of *theologia* and *oikonomia* than to those at the centre of the *homoousios* debate. Joseph Di Noia is critical of *God for Us* in this respect, observing, ‘The book contains no argument to show that its central thesis avoids ontological subordinationism, and plenty of language suggesting just the opposite.’ He continues, ‘The implication seems to be that this mistake is no longer a live option, or that since other mistakes are worse, this one is tolerable.’¹⁵⁵ I acknowledge Di Noia’s criticism, as there is an element of ambiguity in LaCugna’s stance on subordinationism. However, I am more sympathetic to the approach taken by McDonnell who is aware of the relevant theological issues at play, and yet appreciates the gravity of LaCugna concerns about the risks inherent in intra-trinitarian speculation:

LaCugna has a penchant for the pre-Nicene period. This is not a nostalgia for the unencumbered purity of pre-philosophical reflection. Rather she, and others aware of the historical development, do look back to the time when the mission of the Son and the Spirit in time and historical experience were the point of departure, instead of starting with a great unhistorical leap into the center of intra-divine life. Yet she appreciates all the gains at and after Nicaea and knows full well that you cannot really go back. There is no retreat, and ultimately no regrets.¹⁵⁶

Clearly, LaCugna’s concept of Neo-platonic ontology and Weinandy’s *portrayal* of her adaptation of a Neo-platonic *model* are very much at odds. She has, indeed, chosen such a model to present her new paradigm. However, not only does LaCugna acknowledge its limitations, she makes it clear that she is exploring a relational ontology as an *alternative* to an ontology in which ‘being-in-itself’ is foundational. Furthermore, when she uses the concept of emanation in a Christian context, she never fails to appropriately qualify such

¹⁵³ Weinandy, *The Father’s Spirit*, 131.

¹⁵⁴ See, for example, LaCugna, *God for Us*, 229.

¹⁵⁵ Joseph A. Di Noia, review of *God for Us*, by Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *Modern Theology* 9, no. 2 (1993): 216.

¹⁵⁶ McDonnell, review of *God for Us*, 167.

use.¹⁵⁷ A Neo-platonic ontology, in which being, or more specifically a ‘hierarchy of being’ is central, is far from her field of interest.

Colin Gunton

In his commentary on *God for Us*, Gunton makes several exaggerated claims about LaCugna’s thesis. He states her view to be that ‘any doctrine of an immanent Trinity, even one derived from an understanding of the economy, is to be rejected.’¹⁵⁸ This, clearly, does not take into account the subtleties of LaCugna’s argument.¹⁵⁹ Gunton is correct to the extent that LaCugna does, in fact, ‘part ways with Karl Rahner’ on the issue of the immanent Trinity. It must also be acknowledged that Gunton is in agreement with LaCugna to the extent that he considers the separation of the immanent Trinity from the economic Trinity in the theology of theologians such as Athanasius to be problematic.¹⁶⁰ However, his use of the terms ‘immanent’ and *theologia*, seemingly interchangeably, is indicative of his disregard for, or misunderstanding of, the distinction made by LaCugna between the meanings of the terms ‘immanent and economic’ Trinity on the one hand, and *oikonomia* and *theologia* on the other. In response to what can reasonably be described as Gunton’s polemic against LaCugna’s *God for Us*, it must be reiterated that he criticises her for using the very language she considers untenable. This practice also occurs in one of Gunton’s later publications, where he takes a ‘side-swipe’ at LaCugna, describing her as ‘one of the exponents of “economy alone” trinitarians.’¹⁶¹

Gunton is critical of what he identifies as ‘a marked feature of much liberal Catholic theology’ which ‘loses its grip upon the strictly negative features of Thomist analogy while accentuating those aspects of its heritage which stress continuity between God and the

¹⁵⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 91, 93. While in the following passage LaCugna is discussing Aquinas’ theology rather than her own, her reference to his emphasis on grace, and also to the importance (for Thomas) of ‘the divine person itself being sent,’ indicates that LaCugna is aware of the points at which the idea of *exitus-reditus* must be adapted to accommodate important aspects of Christian theology: ‘This question and this focus on grace is the bridge to all that follows in the *Summa*: By touching God and being touched by God directly the recipient of grace is returning to its origin. The *reditus* of the creature is made possible by God’s *exitus* in the missions of Son and Spirit.’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 158.

¹⁵⁸ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, xviii.

¹⁵⁹ See LaCugna, *God for Us*, 229 and related discussion in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

¹⁶⁰ Gunton, “Persons and Particularity,” 98.

¹⁶¹ Colin E. Gunton, “The Church as a School of Virtue?: Human Formation in Trinitarian Framework,” in *Intellect and Action: Elucidations on Christian Theology and the Life of Faith*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 105.

world.’¹⁶² He, like Weinandy, Finan, Molnar and other critics, is concerned that ‘by concentrating, in characteristically Western fashion, on the economy of salvation in relative abstraction from that of creation, [this type of liberal theology] runs the danger of losing the fundamental distinction between creature and creation.’¹⁶³ Given her reluctance to discuss God as ‘a communion of love prior to and in independence of the creation,’ Gunton asks ‘whether Professor LaCugna’s approach finally escapes the pantheism which results from any attempt to bring God and the world too close.’¹⁶⁴

Gunton expresses alarm in the following passage (regarding the previously mentioned controversial pages from *God for Us*) which includes LaCugna’s introduction of the chiasmic model:

In one crucial passage, the author sounds as though she owes more to John Scotus Erigena, one of the fountainheads of modern pantheism, than to the Cappadocian Fathers:

This chiasmic model of emanation and return, *exitus* and *reditus*, expresses the one ecstatic movement of God outward by which all things originate from God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and all things are brought into union with God and return to God. There is neither an economic nor an immanent Trinity; there is only the *oikonomia* that is the concrete realization of the mystery of *theologia* in time, space, history, and personality.

It can be argued that far from ensuring the relevance of trinitarian categories, the outcome of such a process is to destroy it. The source of the malaise can be found in the principle of self-communication, with its emanationist and neoplatonic – and thus ultimately pantheist – overtones. There is ultimately only one reality, the divine-worldly emanation, which constitutes the world and then swallows it up. Against this it must be contended that far from ensuring the relevance of trinitarian categories, the outcome of such a process is to destroy it. God’s personal otherness from the world is needed if there is to be a true establishing of the world in its own right.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Gunton, review of *God for Us*, 136.

¹⁶³ Gunton, review of *God for Us*, 136.

¹⁶⁴ Gunton, review of *God for Us*, 137. For similar criticisms of LaCugna by Gunton, see Colin E. Gunton, “The God of Jesus Christ,” *Theology Today* 54, no. 3 (1997): 328-29, later republished in his third set of collected papers, Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 23-24 and Gunton, “Church as a School of Virtue?,” 105. He also refers indirectly to LaCugna when he writes of ‘those who have come under the influence of the so-called “Rahner’s rule,”’ in Gunton, *Act and Being*, 77.

¹⁶⁵ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, xviii-xix. Molnar is in accord with Gunton’s views on Eriugena and LaCugna. See Molnar, *Divine Freedom*, 5.

Gunton's association of LaCugna's model with pantheism is unjustified. It seems he has noted the Neo-platonic origins of the model and, without taking her qualifications into account, has presented his readers with a number of provocative images of an emanationist nature.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, while spelling out what he considers to be the wider implications of LaCugna's model in a later publication, Gunton makes a surprising claim – a claim not made, I would argue, in the spirit of LaCugna's proposal. Referring directly to her model of emanation and return introduced in the notorious passage from *God for Us*, he writes, 'An eschatology of this kind, with its suggestion of a symmetrical outflow of things from and back to God, risks suggesting the ultimate pointlessness of creation.' He asks, 'Is the world made simply to return to nothingness whence it came?'¹⁶⁷ Gunton contrasts this type of eschatology (which he also associates with Origen and Tertullian) with 'a truly pneumatological eschatology' which allows us to 'pay far more attention to the creation's interest for and in itself.'¹⁶⁸ It seems ironic that LaCugna is accused here of rendering human participation in the world a meaningless venture when she makes it clear that relationship *among* human beings is a vital part of God's plan from creation to consummation. She insists, for example, that '*Entering into divine life is ... impossible unless we also enter into a life of love and communion with others.*'¹⁶⁹

LaCugna's Review of Gunton

Prior to the publication of Gunton's review of *God for Us*, LaCugna wrote a review of the first edition of his work, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*.¹⁷⁰ Her review opens as follows:

It is an unexpected pleasure to find a theologian on the other side of the Atlantic reaching so many of the same conclusions as I did in *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (HarperCollins, 1991), first of all about the need for the doctrine of the Trinity to be reconceived so that it might function again at the center of Christian faith, and, second, and perhaps most

¹⁶⁶ While Gunton associates LaCugna's model with the pantheistic tendencies of Eriugena in more than one publication, he discusses Plotinus elsewhere, exploring his ideas on emanation and pantheism. Gunton asks whether theologians who draw on Plotinus' thought find in him 'an ally or a Trojan horse.' Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 35-36.

¹⁶⁷ Gunton, "Church as a School of Virtue?," 105.

¹⁶⁸ Gunton, "Church as a School of Virtue?," 105.

¹⁶⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 382. LaCugna's italics.

¹⁷⁰ LaCugna, review of *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 307-09. LaCugna's review was published in 1993 and Gunton's in 1994.

surprising of all, agreement on the ontological strategy that would best serve this need.¹⁷¹

One imagines that LaCugna would have been surprised to read Gunton's negative comments on *God for Us* published the following year.¹⁷² LaCugna acknowledges both the differences and convergences which exist between her project and Gunton's. Of particular interest, however, are her comments on his approach to the God-world relation. She writes, 'Gunton develops a theological anthropology and cosmology out of the (Thomistic) idea that creation is in some sense independent from God, that it is created freely by God in order to be itself.'¹⁷³ She observes that 'both otherness and relation are important in his ontology,' correctly identifying the theological reasons for the need for both: 'otherness preserves the contingency of the created order, and relation preserves the connection between the two ontologically distinct realities, God and world.'¹⁷⁴

LaCugna concurs with the fundamental point Gunton makes: 'While this seems right to me, Gunton gives the impression that God's primary mode with respect to the world is otherness, and relation is secondary. This sounds a lot like the Reformed cry to "let God be God" but undercuts the very strong claim of the Cappadocian ontology that relatedness is primary.'¹⁷⁵ She *agrees* that creation is contingent upon God and that God and the world are ontologically distinct. However, she also makes the *measured* observation that Gunton (given the nature of the Cappadocian relational theology with which he engages) could have given greater emphasis to the idea of relatedness. LaCugna recognises that this emphasis on relatedness needs to be made *alongside* an understanding of God as other. A similarly thoughtful response by Gunton toward LaCugna's expressed emphasis on relatedness would have resulted, perhaps, in a less remarkable and polemical but more judicious review of *God for Us*.

¹⁷¹ LaCugna, review of *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 307. Although LaCugna and Gunton agree on issues surrounding problematic aspects of the negative divine attributes, it seems that LaCugna may have misjudged the extent of their agreement regarding ontology and trinitarian doctrine. This has not gone unnoticed by Grenz and Molnar. See Grenz, *Rediscovering*, 147 and Paul D. Molnar, review of *Rediscovering the Triune God*, by Stanley Grenz, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60, no. 4 (2007): 493.

¹⁷² Gunton's views on *God for Us* seemingly did not change in the three years following the publication of his review. As noted above, Gunton reused several passages from the initial review, and added further critical comments in his 'Preface to the Second edition' of *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, republished in 1997.

¹⁷³ LaCugna, review of *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 308.

¹⁷⁴ LaCugna, review of *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 308.

¹⁷⁵ LaCugna, review of *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 308.

Conclusion

I begin this conclusion acknowledging the personal nature of the following quotation from one of LaCugna's doctoral students, Nancy A. Dallavalle, published in an editorial essay she wrote in Catherine LaCugna's memory: 'For Catherine, the movement of creation from God and to God (*exitus–reditus*) was no mere model, but a deeply held conviction about the origin and end of the world and its creatures, herself included.'¹⁷⁶ The Neo-platonic model of emanation and return was adapted and developed by LaCugna to express the Christian claim that God is for us and with us. It is a practical and powerful means of expression. LaCugna referred extensively to the passage, Eph 1:3-14, in order to ground her model in Scripture. Giving an insight into her work with her students at the University of Notre Dame, LaCugna writes: 'I begin by initiating them into the richness of the biblical, creedal and liturgical language about salvation. They are intrigued to see doctrine through the prism of liturgical language. The scheme of *oikonomia/theologia* is simple and graphic, and they are relieved, frankly, that learning about the Trinity does not mean learning esoteric theories and terminology.'¹⁷⁷

As I have argued in this chapter, critics like Finan, Weinandy and Gunton have made valid points about the importance of God being understood as ontologically distinct from the world. I have contended also, however, that their reaction to the idea of divine self-communication and to the model of emanation and return has failed, firstly, to recognise LaCugna's concerns regarding the defeat of the doctrine of the Trinity, and secondly, to pay due attention to the alternative ways she finds to safeguard the notion of divine transcendence.

The dangers and even pointlessness of an uncritical compartmentalising of theologians on the basis of particular terms they use (such as emanation) and of traditions on which they draw (such as Neo-platonism) is illustrated in a 1994 report on a CTSA Workshop entitled "Differences and Agreements in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology."¹⁷⁸ Participant Joseph Bracken undertook to assign to each of the projects under discussion an 'inherent heterodox risk.' To [Elizabeth] Johnson's project he assigned 'an implicit modalism; to LaCugna's the

¹⁷⁶ Nancy A. Dallavalle, "In Memory of Catherine Mowry LaCugna, 1952-1997," *Horizons* 24, no. 2 (1997): 265.

¹⁷⁷ LaCugna, "Author's Response," 141.

¹⁷⁸ Michael Downey represented Catherine LaCugna at this Workshop.

danger of subordinationism and the incorporation of divine life (without remainder) into world process; to [Ted] Peters' a similar subordination of God to cosmic process; and to his own the danger of tritheism.¹⁷⁹ Finan, the author of the report, notes, however, that 'Later discussion among participants led Bracken to admit that such labelling may not be especially profitable.'¹⁸⁰ In my final chapter I look to disturb some of the 'barriers' which exist as a result of the uncritical compartmentalisation and labelling of some of LaCugna's ideas on divine transcendence.

¹⁷⁹ Barbara A. Finan, "Contemporary Trinitarian Theology: Differences and Agreements in Contemporary Trinitarian Theologies," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 49 (1994), 165.

¹⁸⁰ Finan, "Contemporary Trinitarian Theology," 165.

Chapter Six

Catherine LaCugna's Trinitarian Theology Through the Lens of Kathryn Tanner's Radical View of Divine Transcendence

Introduction

Major contributions to theology are often re-viewed (or, to use Kevin Hughes' term, 're-membered') sometimes many years after they were first published. Researchers may seek new angles from which to view such contributions, and in this final chapter I intend to re-view LaCugna's work through the lens of Kathryn Tanner's radical understanding of God as transcendent. Tanner and LaCugna could be typecast as focusing on radical divine transcendence and immanence respectively. However, labels such as these are often inaccurate and unhelpful, as I have sought to demonstrate.

In exploring LaCugna's understanding of divine transcendence from what could be considered an unlikely angle, my intention is not to draw parallels between LaCugna's and Tanner's treatment of divine transcendence, as, while they share common ground in this area, there are also significant points of difference. Nor is it to comprehensively address all of the concerns raised by LaCugna's critics, although I continue to engage with commentators in this regard. Rather, it is to provide a fresh perspective, aided by Tanner's radical approach, with a view to highlighting some of the strengths of LaCugna's expression of divine transcendence.

Undoubtedly, the notion of God's radical transcendence is fundamental to Tanner's theology. In her 2001 book, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology*, she summarises her understanding of God as 'wholly other' in the statement: 'In short, God, who is already abundant fullness, freely wishes to replicate to every degree possible this fullness of life, light, and love outward in what is not God.'¹ She identifies the two most general principles underlying her systematic vision as 'a non-competitive relation between creatures and God' and 'a radical interpretation of divine transcendence.'²

¹ Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), 2.

² Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, 2.

In her earlier work, *God and Creation*, from which I will draw extensively in the first part of this chapter, Tanner devises rules for coherent speech about God which take these two principles into account. She proposes a rule which, in short, calls for the avoidance of *contrastive* and *univocal* speech about God in relation to the world. In Tanner's view, God's transcendence is not adequately expressed when God is merely *contrasted* with the world. To state without qualification, for example, that God is immutable and the world is mutable makes too weak a claim. I will expand upon the reasons behind this judgment and discuss the types of language Tanner deems acceptable as an alternative below. The call to avoid *univocal* speech about God is made in response to instances where the 'common ground' between the God and world is emphasised without due acknowledgement of the radical distinction which exists between the two. LaCugna's treatment of personhood, human and divine, has been described by Gunton and others as univocal and, consequently, her understanding of personhood will be under particular scrutiny in this chapter.

Tanner hypothesises that her proposed rules 'may be enough to account for the success of any theology explaining the coherence of Christian talk' and invites the reader to 'test this claim against his or her familiarity with theological positions' not mentioned in her analysis.³ I have placed certain boundaries around the way I make use of Tanner's rules, limiting my discussion to Tanner's notion of divine transcendence in terms of divine nature rather than divine and human agency.⁴ I also acknowledge that I have selected examples from Tanner's work which assist in illuminating particular aspects of LaCugna's theology.⁵ Many of Tanner's more complex ideas are not relevant to my argument and therefore are not brought into the discussion. Nevertheless, her invitation represents an intriguing challenge and one to which LaCugna's trinitarian theology is well suited.

³ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 37.

⁴ As Tanner turns to the discussion of theological cases, she broadens her parameters from coherent talk about divine agency to talk about divine nature in her examples for the first rule. She explains, as I note in Chapter 1 of this thesis, 'The theological loci of our discussion will vary: we will look at treatments of God's nature and God's agency.' Tanner, *God and Creation*, 56. I will make use of Tanner's rule with reference to LaCugna's treatment of God's nature rather than God's agency. The reason for this limitation is that LaCugna only briefly raises the issue of God's agency in *God for Us*. Her prime area of interest is the Cappadocian notion of the ontological priority of personhood over substance. Tanner's examples relating to God's nature provide a useful point of connection to the present study.

⁵ Tanner establishes caveats of this kind in *God and Creation* on her use of the ideas of ancient Greek philosophers such as Plotinus and of patristic sources. These will be noted below.

This chapter is structured in two sections. The first comprises a brief overview of the idea of radical transcendence and of Tanner's rationale for proposing rules for coherent Christian discourse. I expand upon methods of avoiding univocal and contrastive language and recount some of Tanner's examples in which these types of language are both absent (in pre-Christian discourse) and upheld (in Christian discourse). The focus returns to LaCugna's trinitarian theology in the second section. Having devoted much of my previous two chapters to her model of the *oikonomia* (Theme 1), attention turns, in this chapter, to Themes 2 and 3 and, more specifically, to a single linguistic motif selected from each of these themes for detailed examination.

The motif for Theme 2, 'The Mystery of Divine-Human Communion,' is LaCugna's pairing of the words 'immutably' and 'personal.' For Theme 3, 'Creation *ex nihilo* and Creation *ex amore*,' I examine LaCugna's substantive use of the predicate 'love' of God (such that one says, 'God is love,' rather than 'God is loving') in the context of her understanding of creation *ex amore*. The task I have set myself is, in each case, to demonstrate, with reference to Tanner's rule, and with reference also to relevant insights from Ian Ramsey's idea of the qualified theological model (outlined in Chapter 3 of this thesis), LaCugna's ability to uphold the Christian understanding of God as transcendent.

Kathryn Tanner's Rule for Talk of God as Transcendent

Tanner, Placher and the Domestication of Transcendence

Tanner claims that theologians have become 'forgetful of the coherence'⁶ of earlier forms of Christian discourse, rendering their statements about God's transcendence and agency incoherent. This is partly the result of developments during the Enlightenment which led to what William C. Placher describes as 'the domestication of transcendence.' He emphasises the importance of the notion that 'God is not one of the things in the world.'⁷ In his discussion of the term transcendence, Placher notes that the *Oxford English Dictionary* records the first use of the word as recently as 1848. 'Transcendence' was defined as 'God's distance from and independence of the created world, in contrast to immanence.'⁸ He argues

⁶ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 2.

⁷ Placher, *Domestication of Transcendence*, 10. Placher identifies as one of his roles, 'unofficial historian of post liberal theology, or "the Yale school,"' though he adds that he is sceptical about the existence of such a school. He acknowledges a remarkable group of scholars he trained at Yale. Kathryn Tanner is one of this group.

⁸ Placher, *Domestication of Transcendence*, 6.

that before the seventeenth century Christian theologians were very mindful of ‘the mystery, the wholly otherness of God, and the inadequacy of any human categories as applied to God.’⁹

The seventeenth century is identified by Placher as the time when philosophers and theologians ‘increasingly thought they could talk clearly about God.’¹⁰ Contrasting terms were used to explain the difference between God and creation: ‘God was transcendent (distant, unaffected) in contrast to immanent (close, engaged).’¹¹ ‘Transcendence’ was considered a definable property of God and thus became ‘domesticated.’ The traditional Christian response would have been to explain ‘how all categories break down when applied to God.’¹² Tanner’s notion of non-contrastive transcendence supports this latter response.

Tanner’s Rule and Her Objections to Contrastive and Univocal Language Use

Tanner proposes, in her rule, to counter the inadequacy of a contrastive definition of transcendence: ‘Avoid both a simple univocal attribution of predicates to God and world and a simple contrast of divine and non-divine predicates.’ She calls this ‘a rule for talk of God’s transcendence beyond both identity and opposition with the non-divine.’¹³

She observes that the notion that God is ‘somehow beyond this world’ seems to be a presumption of a number of Christian practices, and outlines a number of cases in which such a presumption is made:

God must not be of this world if God is to act as saviour and judge. Biblical and liturgical doxologies proclaim God’s ‘otherness’ in power and mystery. Prohibitions against idolatry forbid the ascription of divine attributes to things of this world. The mystery of God’s way is a presupposition of the Christian trust that, appearances to the contrary, the world is ruled by a good, just and loving God.¹⁴

⁹ Placher, *Domestication of Transcendence*, 6.

¹⁰ Placher, *Domestication of Transcendence*, 6.

¹¹ Placher, *Domestication of Transcendence*, 7.

¹² Placher, *Domestication of Transcendence*, 7. Placher refers to LaCugna in his book, referring to *God for Us* primarily to make the point that the seventeenth century (not specifically addressed in *God for Us*) also marked a period of decline in terms of trinitarian doctrine. Placher, *Domestication of Transcendence*, 165-67.

¹³ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 47. The second part of the rule is: ‘Avoid in talk about God’s creative agency all suggestions of limitation in scope or manner.’ This rule ‘prescribes talk of God’s creative agency as immediate and universally extensive.’

¹⁴ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 38.

In this section I refer to two examples Tanner provides from Greek philosophy which rely on the kind of contrastive and univocal language use she looks to avoid. Beginning with univocity, Tanner refers to a world view in which divinity is thought of as existing ‘within the matrix of the same cosmos’ as the world.¹⁵ Divinity, in this case, is ‘the sort of thing which can be said to be shared generically,’ specifying differences of degree rather than kind.¹⁶ Understood in this way, divine transcendence is compromised. One of Tanner’s examples of this type of limitation is Plato’s demiurgic craftsman who, ‘as a sort of being within a complex system ... merely works on what pre-exists.’¹⁷ The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* offers a Christian alternative to counter the univocity inherent in this Platonic world view. This alternative will be further explored below with reference to LaCugna’s notion of creation *ex amore*.

Having shown univocal speech to be problematic, Tanner might be expected to turn to types of speech which draw a sharp *contrast* between God and world. However, contrastive language also fails to adequately convey the Christian understanding of God as both radically transcendent and intimately involved with the world. Her reference to Aristotle’s concept of divinity as the ‘unmoved mover’ illustrates this inadequacy. Tanner describes a divinity characterised as ‘a realm of eternal, changeless intelligibility.’ This ‘divinity’ is set off ‘*over and against the world as a whole*’ characterized by the *contrary* predicates of becoming, uncertainty and instability.’¹⁸ She observes in Aristotle ‘a prima facie difficulty in connecting up divinity, understood as eternal, self-enclosed thought of itself, with its direct antithesis, a world of time and change, division and fluctuation.’¹⁹ When divine immutability is contrasted with the changeable world to this extreme degree the result is the ‘solely self-referential

¹⁵ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 39.

¹⁶ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 39.

¹⁷ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 40.

¹⁸ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 40. My italics.

¹⁹ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 41. Tanner does not italicise the Latin.

isolation of an indifferent God.’²⁰ This characterisation of God is at far remove from that of the Christian God of love, and most certainly is one with which LaCugna would take issue.²¹

Tanner’s Application of her First Rule to Theological Cases

In this section I present some of Tanner’s examples of Christian discourse on God and world which successfully avoid *contrastive* and *univocal* speech.

Avoiding a Simple Contrast of Divine and Non-Divine

Tanner identifies two ways in which theologians can avoid a simple *contrast* when speaking about God and the world. The first involves using contrastive terms while at the same time denying implications of a simple contrastive use. The second requires the avoidance of a contrast by identifying the uniqueness of divinity.

(a) Using Contrastive Terms While at the Same Time Denying Implications of a Simple Contrastive Use

Terms which appear to be contrastive, for example, predicates used in Greek cosmologies to contrast divine and non-divine, can be shown to function *non-contrastively* when used in Christian discourse about God. Tanner discusses a case relating to the divine nature from early church father, Tertullian.²² In his response to the Docetic Christology of Marcion, Tertullian uses an apparently contrastive term such as ‘immutability’ in a new way by denying the implications of a contrastive use. Addressing the issue of the intelligibility of the Incarnation, Tertullian acknowledges that if ‘the divine nature were simply changeless ... in opposition to a changing world, it would become difficult to see how God could be intimately

²⁰ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 41.

²¹ LaCugna writes, ‘The God who watches us from a distance as an uninvolved, impartial observer, does not exist.’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 397. While this description does not exactly portray the Aristotelean concept of the ‘unmoved mover,’ it conveys her unequivocal rejection of this kind of an understanding of God.

²² I am relying here on Tanner’s interpretation of Tertullian. Tanner openly acknowledges the extent of her direct engagement with ancient sources. While in *God and Creation* she draws on original sources, she notes, for example, that her ‘interpretation of the Greek milieu of theological thinking is generally informed by Norris’s work.’ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 174, n. 7. Tanner is referring here to Richard Norris, *God and World in Early Christian Thought* (New York: Seabury, 1962). While avoiding the strong criticism directed toward LaCugna for her interpretation of patristic sources, Tanner is not entirely immune to reproval. In her Preface to *Christ the Key*, she writes, ‘While I welcome specialist interest in the question of my faithfulness to sources, my main intent is simply to show the fruitfulness of a kind of internalizing of the history of Christ [*sic*] thought for its creative redeployment.’ Tanner, *God and Creation*, ix. Reviewing *Christ the Key*, Jason Sexton, acknowledges Tanner’s intent, but nevertheless summarises his critique as follows: ‘In short, Tanner’s sources have contexts, and it would have been nice to know about them.’ Jason Sexton, review of *Christ the Key*, by Kathryn Tanner, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54, no. 1 (2011): 197.

one with the human in Christ.’²³ An unacceptable implication (for Christians) of a contrastive use is that God could be considered a finite being, operating on the same level as created changeable beings. Tertullian argues that the Christian understanding of the God-world distinction is not one of ‘simple opposition to change which excludes intimate relation with what changes’ (which we have observed in the Aristotle example), but rather, one which allows for ‘God’s entering into relation with the creature under all possible circumstances without danger of compromising the divine nature.’²⁴

(b) Avoiding a Simple Contrast by Identifying the Uniqueness of Divinity

While Tanner, in the example above, describes a way to *adapt* the use of contrastive terms in Christian discourse, in the following cases she suggests that contrastive terms be avoided altogether. The theologian can instead attempt to ‘identify divinity in its uniqueness so as not to suggest that God’s nature simply *differs* from that of created beings.’²⁵ She explains:

God, as transcendent, is beyond those relations of identity and opposition, and is therefore not to be characterized in terms of particular natures in contrast to others. It is common to say, instead, that God is radically distinct from the non-divine simply through ‘himself’.²⁶

In her first example in which the unique nature of God is identified, Tanner refers to the Christian idea (articulated by Robert Sokolowski) that God did not need to create, and would have remained unaltered and undiminished had he not done so. She notes, ‘Such affirmations express in a material mode a prohibition against identifying divinity through terms that refer, by comparison or contrast, to the nature of the non-divine.’²⁷

The second of Tanner’s examples involves specifying the unique nature of God through ‘an odd substantive use of predicates.’ She observes that when speaking of the non-divine, the

²³ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 57.

²⁴ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 57.

²⁵ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 57. Tanner’s italics.

²⁶ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 57.

²⁷ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 58. An expression ‘in a material mode’ is a statement which conforms to Tanner’s rules. She provides, as another example, the statement ‘God is transcendent.’ This, she explains, ‘appears to be a first-order statement about the nature of God and not a directive for linguistic behaviours [which can work] as ‘a shorthand for a rule about talk of God in relation to the world.’ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 49. Tanner suggests that such an expression ‘can be invoked to head off any inclination to talk of God as simply identical or opposed to what is said of the creature.’ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 49-50.

subject of a statement is not identified with the predicate as such. She gives the example, ‘Peter is a human but cannot be identical with humanity per se.’²⁸ God, however, as the subject of a statement, may be *identified* with the predicate. Tanner explains the sense in which this use of predicates illustrates her first rule:

God’s nature is clearly not being opposed to that of the things of this world since God is talked about as being simply identical with what is asserted predicatively of those creatures. If a man is righteous, God is righteousness. God is not, however, what created reality is, because in the creature’s case such terms are only asserted predicatively and not substantively. The creature may be said to be righteous but not, in any serious sense righteousness per se.²⁹

Tanner identifies the ‘form-itself schema’ or, as I will refer to it hereafter, the ‘predication of an abstract noun,’ where an abstract noun referring to some perfection is predicated of God (for example, ‘God is love’) as a ‘paradigmatic [illustration] of the rule of divine transcendence in talk of God’s nature.’³⁰ She writes:

God is uniquely specified without opposition to the non-divine by a very peculiar use of an abstract predicate nominative with an ‘is’ of identity: an abstract noun is used substantively to identify what subsists, and not, as would ordinarily be the case, for purposes of affirming an equivalence on the level of concepts.³¹

LaCugna’s treatment of the statement ‘God is love’ (Theme 3) will be examined in the light of the possibilities this particular grammatical construct holds for the expression of God as transcendent.

Avoiding Univocal Speech About God and World

Tanner then turns to the avoidance of a simple *univocal* attribution of predicates to God. She acknowledges that the predication of an abstract noun is more useful for the non-contrastive than for the univocal aspect of her rule. Any sense of univocal predication must be avoided in order to ‘prevent divinity from being characterized directly within the order of common essences predicated of finite things.’³²

²⁸ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 58. Tanner does not italicise the Latin.

²⁹ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 58.

³⁰ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 58-59.

³¹ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 59.

³² Tanner, *God and Creation*, 59.

To nuance simple univocal speech, Tanner recommends, firstly, choosing terms which ‘suggest a lack of formed particularity,’³³ such as limitlessness, infinity, simplicity and fullness. Terms can be selected not for their role as descriptors but for the entirely different purpose of signalling that univocal or contrastive predication is not permitted. Tanner advises the choice of the term ‘simplicity’ over ‘compositeness’ as a heuristic device to demonstrate the structural inadequacy of our language for the world: ‘talk of God as simple would therefore indicate, as talk of God as composite could not, the inappropriateness of such language in talk about God.’³⁴

The term ‘immutability,’ too, can be used to indicate that ‘God is beyond the contrasts by which finite things are distinguished and differentiated’³⁵ rather than its more usual association with the notion of rest, stillness and opposition to change. The attribute of immutability features in two of Tanner’s examples for coherent speech about God and world. LaCugna also uses this term. Although she does so differently from Tanner, I will argue below that her use is neither contrastive nor univocal.

The Role of Meta-Level Statements in Tanner’s Methodology

Tanner considers the degree of success in applying her rules to be dependent, to a large extent, not only on the clarity of a particular theologian’s ideas but on the directions they provide the reader for appropriate use of language. It is helpful, she explains, if the theologian under examination uses ‘meta-level talk.’³⁶ A formulation by Athanasius provides an example of such language:

[T]alk of the trinity as three persons in the one substance of God becomes a paradigm application of the sort of rule that Athanasius formulated as such: in talking of the Father and Son (for example), whatever is said of the Father is to be said of the Son but the Son is not to be called the Father.³⁷

She suggests some opening phrases suitable for meta-level talk: ‘It is appropriate to say ... It is not appropriate to say...’ Statements of this kind confirm the claim made by Tanner and her colleagues that theological discourse is rule-governed. She expects ‘an explicit account of

³³ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 60.

³⁴ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 61.

³⁵ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 61.

³⁶ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 50.

³⁷ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 50.

rules for discourse from theologians with a heightened selfconsciousness [*sic*] about language use.’³⁸ It has been demonstrated in Chapter 3 of this thesis that LaCugna does possess a heightened self-consciousness in this regard. Furthermore, LaCugna makes several Meta-Level Statements or, as Tanner also describes such statements, ‘linguistic indications of rules at work.’³⁹ These will be discussed below.

LaCugna’s Theology Through the Lens of Tanner’s Rule

LaCugna’s Logical Geography

Tanner warns of the risks inherent in taking individual statements out of context when assessing the overall coherence of a theologian’s output:

To determine the rules that govern it, one must attend to the overall ‘logical geography’ of a theological statement in context – to use Gilbert Ryle’s phrase. Taking statements out of context is no way to establish the rules actually at work in their formulation. One must not make a fetish of theological statement and act as if a statement’s sense could be read off from it without considering its operation within wider linguistic and historical contexts.⁴⁰

LaCugna makes some controversial claims in *God for Us* and in her early articles. These include statements about her ‘chiastic model of emanation and return’ (Theme 1),⁴¹ about the perichoretic communion of persons divine and human in her ontology of personhood (Theme 2)⁴² and about the God-world relation in her doctrine of creation *ex amore* (Theme 3).⁴³ Some of her conclusions on the issue of divine suffering are also problematic.⁴⁴ However,

³⁸ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 51.

³⁹ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 53.

⁴⁰ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 52. Tanner refers to the Introduction of Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1949).

⁴¹ See, for example, ‘There is neither an economic nor an immanent Trinity; there is only the *oikonomia* that is the concrete realization of the mystery of *theologia* in time, space, history, and personality.’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 223.

⁴² See, for example, ‘The starting point in the economy of redemption, in contrast to the intradivine starting point, locates perichōrēsis not in God’s inner life but in the mystery of the one communion of all persons, divine as well as human. From this standpoint “the divine dance” is indeed an apt image of persons in communion: not for an intradivine communion but for divine life as all creatures partake and literally exist in it.’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 274.

⁴³ See, for example, ‘To be God is to be the Creator of the world.’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 355.

⁴⁴ See, for example, ‘The God who does not need nor care for the creature, or who is immune to our suffering, does not exist.’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 397. Some of LaCugna’s comments on divine impassibility appear unclear and undeveloped. For example: ‘Once the personal history of Jesus, including his death, is made central to the theology of God, then we must conclude that God suffers in Christ, even though the content of this assertion remains as needful of interpretation as the assertion that God is good, or God is relational, or God is

LaCugna's 'logical geography,' which is centred on her mission to close the gap between *oikonomia* and *theologia*, must remain at the forefront of the judgments made when evaluating her ideas.

LaCugna's Meta-Level Statements

As I have indicated, the presence of Meta-Level Statements in her work renders LaCugna a suitable candidate for engagement with Tanner's rule. The specific function of these statements will become clear during the course of this chapter. Here I will make brief and general reference to each of the three I have identified for particular attention.

Meta-Level Statement 1 is derived from LaCugna's 'insight' that the economy of salvation is just as ineffable as is the eternal mystery of God (*theologia*), and thus that our language about the triune God should be grounded in the biblical narrative and in our understanding of God as relational.

Meta-Level Statement 2 is a statement in which LaCugna denounces the idea of univocal and literal speech about God's being.

Meta-Level Statement 3 arises from LaCugna's proposal to apply negative divine attributes not to substance, to which they have traditionally been applied, but to personhood.

LaCugna's guiding principle in *God for Us* is that 'for Christian theology, the mystery of God can be thought of only in terms of the mystery of grace and redemption.'⁴⁵ This principle forms the basis for Meta Level Statement 1 in which she spells out what this means for speech about God. '*We can make true statements about God – particularly when the assertions are about the triune nature of God – only on the basis of the economy, corroborated by God's self-revelation in Christ and the Spirit.*'⁴⁶

This first Meta-Level Statement should not be regarded as something which compromises the Christian understanding of divine transcendence. On the contrary, according to LaCugna, the most profound Christian mystery lies in the realisation that the triune God has entered into relationship with humanity and the world, and that not only can we participate in the divine

eternal.' LaCugna, *God for Us*, 301. Such issues are complex and beyond the scope of this thesis to address in depth.

⁴⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 2.

⁴⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 2-3.

life but, to some extent, we can dare to articulate something of this mystery. Indeed, this is what I have identified throughout the thesis as a core ‘insight’ in her trinitarian theology.

In an early article, LaCugna makes a statement regarding univocal speech about God:

Now it is perfectly clear that a theology that would speak univocally or literally about God’s being would run contrary to the whole of the biblical and patristic view of God as well as violate the most basic precepts of all theology and mystical experience.⁴⁷

I have abbreviated this statement to form Meta-Level Statement 2: ‘*It is not appropriate to speak univocally or literally of God’s being.*’ The significance of this statement lies in its lack of ambiguity regarding univocal speech about God’s being. Readers should be mindful of LaCugna’s clear views on the risk of violating fundamental theological tenets through the use of univocal language when interpreting some of her other statements on God, particularly those pertaining to personhood, divine and human.

Finally, LaCugna’s Meta-Level Statement 3 arises from her reinterpretation of divine attributes in theological language. I will trace the development of this process in the following section.

LaCugna’s Pairing of the Words ‘Immutably’ and ‘Personal’ (Theme 2)

I have selected a section from Chapter 8 of *God for Us*, entitled ‘The Living God,’ as a basis for my treatment of Theme 2,⁴⁸ firstly, because it comprises a detailed discussion of divine and human personhood, and, secondly, as it includes several references by LaCugna to the *way we speak* about personhood. Tanner considers such references helpful in the application of her rules. LaCugna takes a ‘brief look at some of the classical attributes of God.’⁴⁹ She approaches her discussion of the divine attributes from the perspective of the central argument of her book: that the doctrine of the Trinity was defeated as the gap between *oikonomia* and *theologia* widened during and after the Arian debates.

⁴⁷ LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 19.

⁴⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, ‘The Living God,’ 300-04.

⁴⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 300-04. Though the reasons for their concern differ, both Tanner and LaCugna are critical of the way these negating attributes have sometimes been employed in theological discourse. Tanner considers such terms to be insufficiently radical to make an unqualified contrastive distinction between God and creation. She writes, ‘[A] God who genuinely transcends the world must not be characterized ... by a direct contrast with it.’ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 46.

The Cappadocians' use of classical divine attributes adopted from Greek philosophy (such as incomprehensibility, impassibility, immutability, incorporeality, simplicity) contributed, LaCugna explains, to this widening as questions were asked of God's passibility when applied to God incarnate in Christ. The gap grew between attributes predicated of Christ in the economy such as his 'ignorance, suffering and death'⁵⁰ and what could be said of God in the context of apophatic theology. The use of classical divine attributes for God's essence maintained the '*homoousios*' of Father and Son (from the perspective of the immanent Trinity) in the debates of Nicaea but contributed, according to LaCugna, to the defeat of the doctrine of the Trinity. Christ was said to 'suffer in his humanity, *kat'oikonomian*, not in his divinity, *kata theologian*.'⁵¹ This led to a degree of incongruity between what could be predicated of the divine essence and what could be predicated of the second person of the Trinity *in se* and *ad extra*. LaCugna writes, with disapproval: 'the attributes of God were predicated of the divine essence, not of the divine persons.'⁵²

LaCugna reappraises the role of the attributes in trinitarian discourse, and uses her 'insight' expressed in her first Meta-Level Statement as a foundation on which to develop a third. The first step toward this new statement is taken in the following declaration: '*If the Christian doctrine of God is to be trinitarian, which is to say, derived from and checked against the economy of redemption, these attributes stand in need of reinterpretation.*'⁵³ Where attributes were previously predicated of God's essence, within an ontology of substance, she suggests that they now be predicated of the divine persons.⁵⁴

Addressing the attribute of 'immutability' LaCugna writes:

when substance metaphysics is replaced by an ontology in which *person* is ultimate, then immutability is a predicate of personhood: God is *immutably personal*. God cannot be anything but personal. God cannot revert to impersonal or prepersonal existence, or act in a way that is contrary to who God is. God is not ultimately a substance but a person.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 300.

⁵¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 301.

⁵² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 301.

⁵³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 301. LaCugna's italics.

⁵⁴ For a comprehensive discussion on the Cappadocian Fathers' challenge to Greek thought where nature of substance always preceded the person, see Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity," 44-60.

⁵⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 301. For critical response to this proposal, see Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 409, n. 51; Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 56; Grenz, *Rediscovering*, 157; Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity*,

LaCugna's Meta-Level Statement 1 claims: 'We can make true statements about God – particularly when the assertions are about the triune nature of God – only on the basis of the economy, corroborated by God's self-revelation in Christ and the Spirit.'⁵⁶ To this we can now add Meta-Level Statement 3: *Selected classical divine attributes [immutability, impassibility, incomprehensibility] formerly predicated of God's essence should now be predicated of divine personhood.* Where in substance metaphysics God had been described as immutable, in an ontology where person is ultimate, God is immutably personal.

LaCugna is by no means the first theologian to make a proposal of this kind. Isaak Dorner argued, in the mid-nineteenth century, 'for a basic shift in theology from regarding God as absolute substance, to seeing God as absolute personality.'⁵⁷ Stephen Holmes observes, 'On Dorner's telling, the definition of God as a simple, immutable, substance needs to be replaced with God as utterly and irreducibly personal.'⁵⁸ Holmes bemoans the fact that '[o]ver the last two centuries, the classical doctrine of the divine attributes has been subject to a "perfect storm" of seemingly unrelated challenges.'⁵⁹ The challenges include being 'relativized by Forsyth's insistence of God's holy personality, tested for logical coherence by analytic philosophers, and criticized by Harnackian accounts of history that stressed the differences between Hebrew and Hellenistic mind-sets.'⁶⁰ Von Harnack's influence, noted in the first chapter of this thesis, can indeed be discerned in LaCugna's proposal through her opposition to the negative 'Greek' attributes and to substance metaphysics.

LaCugna makes it clear that her notion of divine immutability does not protect God from suffering.⁶¹ The non-Arians considered the idea of divine suffering to compromise the divine nature, and their insistence on '*homoousios*' to uphold the notion of the three co-equal and impassible divine persons contributed, in LaCugna's opinion, to the defeat of trinitarian

184-85; Norman Metzler, "The Trinity in Contemporary Theology: Questioning the Social Trinity," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 67, no. 3-4 (2003), 280-81; Raith, "Ressourcing the Fathers?," 282.

⁵⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 2-3.

⁵⁷ Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 192.

⁵⁸ Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 192. Holmes' punctuation.

⁵⁹ Holmes, "Divine Attributes," 64.

⁶⁰ Holmes, "Divine Attributes," 64.

⁶¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 301.

theology. Her reinterpretation of divine attributes in the light of her ontology of personhood allows her to bring together that which had become separated through the decisions of the Council of Nicaea – *oikonomia* and *theologia*. She considers it ‘a more sound procedure to revise or overturn the premise of God’s impassibility in the light of the Cross, rather than to allow an axiom from Greek philosophy to predispose the conclusions of theology.’⁶²

Before looking in detail at LaCugna’s combination of the words ‘immutably’ and ‘personal,’ I will draw together what has been said in previous chapters of this thesis about both the term ‘immutability’ and the ‘qualified model.’ I acknowledge now, and will again below, the fact that, in re-interpreting the attribute of ‘immutability,’ LaCugna changes the word’s grammatical function from adjective (‘immutable’) to adverb (‘immutably’). However, I also contend that, this alteration notwithstanding, the term retains some of its traditional ‘classical’ meaning, and I revisit some of the ideas of Tanner and Ramsey to support my argument.

When Tanner calls for avoidance of simple univocal attribution of predicates to God, she uses ‘immutable’ as an illustration of a word which may be used to indicate that God is ‘beyond the contrasts by which finite things are distinguished and differentiated,’⁶³ rather than its more usual association with the notion of rest, stillness and opposition to change. She maintains that Tertullian was using the word non-contrastively to allow for ‘God’s entering into relation with the creature under all possible circumstances without danger of compromising the divine nature.’⁶⁴ While LaCugna would surely want to affirm the relational aspect of Tertullian’s solution, she would also want to reinterpret, or at least qualify, what is meant by ‘not compromising the divine nature.’⁶⁵ However, like Tertullian, she is not using the idea of immutability in a contrastive sense to imply lack of movement.⁶⁶

⁶² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 301.

⁶³ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 61.

⁶⁴ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 57.

⁶⁵ This is because LaCugna associates such an idea with a God hidden, impersonal and separate from the creature. Discussing the paradigm of real and logical relations in Aquinas’ theology, LaCugna questions his treatment of the notion of divine immutability. ‘Taking refuge in an intratrinitarian self-communication that is altogether unrelated to creation as a way of upholding divine freedom, rests on questionable presuppositions about divine immutability in relation to divine freedom.’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 168.

⁶⁶ Weinandy argues that ‘the Christian doctrine of the Trinity demands that the divine persons be immutably and impassibly who they are, not in a stagnant or inert manner, but in a way that is supremely dynamic and supremely relational.’ Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2000),

Ramsey draws extensively on his concept of ‘qualified model’ in his treatment of the term ‘immutability.’ I will locate this concept in the current discussion. In Chapter 1 of this thesis I observed that Tanner draws a distinction between her approach to language, which places priority on ‘grammatical peculiarities of forms of language,’⁶⁷ and ‘those philosophical analyses stressing the use of theological models in theology.’⁶⁸ Tanner offers ‘king’ and ‘friend’ as examples of the ‘theological model,’ and cites Ramsey’s *Models for Divine Activity* as a work which explores this type of model. I have suggested that while *Models for Divine Activity* is mainly concerned with the models with ‘conceptual content’ to which Tanner refers, his ‘qualified model,’ developed in *Religious Language*, incorporates some of the ‘grammatical peculiarities of forms of language’ which Tanner claims as her own particular area of interest in *God and Creation*. While Tanner is justified in drawing her distinction, I suggest that Ramsey’s qualified model ‘straddles’ the two forms she contrasts and, as such, it is pertinent to my argument. Therefore I will summarise my observations from Chapter 3 of this thesis on Ramsey’s examination of two qualified models: God as ‘immutable’ and God as ‘infinitely good.’

Ramsey uses the word ‘immutable’ as an example of a model and qualifier, where ‘mutable’ is the model and the prefix ‘im’ is the qualifier. He argues that words such as ‘immutability’ and ‘impassibility’ ‘claim for the word “God” a position outside all mutable and passible language.’⁶⁹ In doing so, he uses the potentially contrastive term ‘immutable’ in a non-contrastive manner, as Tanner recommends. In his discussion of the characterisation of God as ‘infinitely good’ he takes the negative attribute ‘infinite’ and changes its part of speech from an adjective to an adverb, just as LaCugna does when changing the adjective ‘immutable’ to an adverb ‘immutably.’ In making this change of word class, Ramsey undoubtedly moves attention from the concept of ‘infinity’ to that of ‘goodness.’ The change also enables him to say more about *God* than the attribute ‘good’ can do alone. As Ramsey

120. However, he also, incorrectly, states that ‘all critics of Aquinas and the Christian tradition consistently interpret divine immutability’ in terms of stasis and inertia. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, 123.

⁶⁷ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 175, n. 20.

⁶⁸ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 175, n. 20.

⁶⁹ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 53.

states, the words ‘infinite goodness’ point to something outside goodness language, thus giving ‘an appropriate placing to the word “God.”’⁷⁰

When LaCugna pairs ‘immutably’ and ‘personal’ she shifts attention from the attribute of ‘immutability,’ traditionally predicated of God’s being, to the attribute of ‘personhood,’ now *qualified* by the adverb ‘immutably.’ Having made this shift, is LaCugna now really talking about immutability in anything like its classic sense? It is difficult to answer this question emphatically either way as she seems to be ‘playing’ with the word ‘immutable.’⁷¹ Its lexical category now an adverb, I suggest that the term does retain something of its classical and ‘logically odd’ character in LaCugna’s hands, even with the accent squarely placed on ‘personhood.’ The main question I seek to address, however, is whether LaCugna successfully conveys the notion of divine personhood in a manner which avoids contrastive and univocal language.

Looking firstly to her description of God as ‘immutably personal’ in terms of contrastive and non-contrastive language use, I offer two interpretations. Her main purpose in reinterpreting the classical divine attributes is to emphasise her claim that ‘God is ultimately not a substance but a person.’⁷² In this sense she is using the word to highlight the *contrast* between personal and impersonal (or between an ontology of personhood and of substance). This particular differentiation has little connection with Tanner’s concept of contrastive and non-contrastive divine and non-divine predicates, as it merely signals LaCugna’s proposal of an alternative ontological framework.⁷³ However, the second interpretation, operating within LaCugna’s relational ontology, is of greater interest. Tanner states that contrastive language for God in relation to the world (or, in this case, God in relation to humanity) should be avoided. One needs to ask, then, if LaCugna is simply looking to contrast God as ‘immutably personal’ with humanity as ‘mutably personal.’ I suggest not, as it is unclear exactly what would be

⁷⁰ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 68.

⁷¹ The idea of LaCugna ‘playing’ with the word immutable is that of my Principal Supervisor, Christiaan Mostert.

⁷² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 301.

⁷³ LaCugna uses the idea of the ‘perfection’ of God in a similar way. She sees the perfection of God as ‘the perfection of love, of communion, of personhood.’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 304. See also LaCugna, *God for Us*, 246 and 263.

gained by making such a distinction. Thus, LaCugna is not using the words ‘immutably personal’ to contrast God and humanity.

LaCugna’s repudiation of univocal language about God in Meta-Level Statement 2 provides a strong foundation from which to defend her ideas on univocity, the second language type prohibited in Tanner’s rules. While LaCugna does draw parallels between divine and human personhood,⁷⁴ and refers, at times, to personhood *per se*,⁷⁵ I suggest that her description of privatives such as incomprehensible, infinite, and impassible as ‘terms of apophasis’⁷⁶ (although given in the context of substance metaphysics) *informs* her application of the idea of ‘immutability’ to ‘personhood.’ Ramsey writes of ‘a rich piling up of models’ and of the pairing of models to convey mystery.⁷⁷ This, I suggest, is what LaCugna has achieved through her claim that ‘God is immutably personal.’ She does not reject, but rather builds upon and, indeed, intensifies the classical and non-contrastive understanding of the term ‘immutable’ when she predicates it, in adverbial form, to the divine attribute, ‘personal.’ The word ‘immutable’ now indicates that divine *personhood* exceeds our human concepts and language or, as Ramsey writes, the word makes a ‘language plea,’ as its function is to speak of God ‘at the cost of emphasising his distance from certain characteristics of perceptual language.’⁷⁸

Meta-Level Statement 3 is congruent with LaCugna’s call for a positive incorporation of traditional negative theological constructs. The term ‘immutable’ is attributed not to divine substance but to divine personhood which, when understood within LaCugna’s model of *oikonomia* and *theologia* (summarised in Meta-Level Statement 1), speaks of the God who is with us and for us, through Christ by the power of the Spirit. Applying divine attributes to God as personal rather than God as substance represents a significant change in the way we understand divine transcendence. Our unknowing of the divine essence becomes an

⁷⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 289-90.

⁷⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 323-24.

⁷⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 332.

⁷⁷ Ramsey, *Models*, 42.

⁷⁸ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 53. Writing on applying the category of person to God, Kasper offers another perspective, advising that the category of person can apply to God only by analogy. To ‘try to move beyond it into a higher supra-personal dimension would mean leaving the realm of meaningful and responsible language. God’s essence would then disappear into utter vagueness [which would lead one to] misunderstand the biblical God, who has a concrete name.’ Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 155-56.

unknowing grounded in that which the personal God has revealed to us.⁷⁹ Having ‘re-cast’ the divine attribute ‘immutability’ in this way, LaCugna can claim:

God’s immutability is God’s fidelity, both to be God and to be God-for-us. God remains eternally faithful to the Covenant made with Israel. ... For Christians, Jesus Christ is the definitive and fully personal sign of God’s everlasting fidelity to-be-with-us. The Spirit is divine fidelity in action, as the Spirit leads all creatures into an ever-deeper communion with each other and with God.⁸⁰

LaCugna has noted Ramsey’s observation that ‘religious language has to be logically odd to be appropriate currency for such an odd situation as religious people claim to speak about.’⁸¹ She engenders the element of surprise by an unexpected placing of the word ‘immutably’ with the word ‘personal.’ The unusual *juxtaposition* of these particular words invites the reader to reflect anew on divine personhood, not in opposition to, nor divorced from, the concept of human personhood, but rather freed from the contrastive and univocal interpretations Tanner seeks to avoid.

LaCugna and the Statement ‘God is Love,’ in the Context of Creation ex amore (Theme 3)

LaCugna’s substantive use of the predicate ‘love,’ along with one of her affirmations expressed in a material mode (to use Tanner’s terminology), provides the main content for discussion in this section. LaCugna’s claim, ‘God is Love itself and the origin of Love,’⁸² and her reference to God as ‘self-originating and self-communicating love’⁸³ are two examples of her substantive use of the abstract noun ‘love.’ Tanner provides, as an illustration of an ‘affirmation in a material mode,’ the claim that God did not need to create, and would have

⁷⁹ LaCugna’s application of the attribute of *incomprehensibility* to this ‘rule’ illustrates a key point in this change: ‘The assertion that God is incomprehensible likewise needs to be revised. It is one thing to say that God is incomprehensible because we do not know the essence of God as it is in itself. It is another thing to say that God is incomprehensible because God is personal. The former locates God’s incomprehensibility in the limitations of the human mind, the latter in God.’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 302.

⁸⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 301-02. Gunton comes to a similar conclusion, although, his reference to ‘self-sufficiency’ sets him apart from LaCugna: ‘Aseity provides a necessary defence of God’s ontological self-sufficiency ... immutability of his utter constancy and consistency, impassibility of the indefectibility of his purposes for the perfection of his creation. Gunton describes the ancient attribute as having been ‘refined in the fire of God’s action.’ Gunton, *Act and Being*, 133. He acknowledges elsewhere that the tradition can sometimes turn the affirmation that God is immutable (in the sense that ‘his being is ontologically secure so that his promises can be relied on’) into something more abstract and impersonal. Colin E. Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 189.

⁸¹ LaCugna, “Placing,” 17, quoting Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 90.

⁸² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 303.

⁸³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 355.

remained unaltered and undiminished had he not done so.⁸⁴ LaCugna's statement, 'God does not have to be loved in order to love'⁸⁵ also falls into this category of affirmation. Using these statements by LaCugna, I will argue that she respects the notion of the contingency of creation and safeguards the Christian understanding of divine transcendence. I will continue to engage with theologians who question LaCugna's theology in this regard (particularly Duncan Reid who claims that LaCugna violates Tanner's rules), but will also turn to the writings of theologians whose ideas strengthen my defence of LaCugna. Finally, I will revisit LaCugna's first Meta-Level Statement to further demonstrate the coherence of her claims.

LaCugna introduces the idea of creation *ex amore* with a clear reference to divine grace and freedom: 'While the world is the gracious result of divine freedom, God's freedom means necessarily being who and what God is. From this standpoint the world is not created *ex nihilo* but *ex amore, ex condilectione*, that is out of divine love.'⁸⁶ In proposing this as an alternative to creation *ex nihilo*, she is not looking to diminish any sense of 'creaturely dependence' on God.⁸⁷ Furthermore, in the passage leading up to her proposal, LaCugna allays potential concerns regarding divine necessity. She acknowledges the absurdity of saying that 'God "needs" the world in order to be God, if this sets up the creature as a higher and more ultimate principle than God,'⁸⁸ as this would require the creature to have pre-existed God.⁸⁹ The agnosticism LaCugna has expressed elsewhere in her writings is not apparent in this passage. In their assessment of LaCugna, Olsen and Hall voice concern that she 'inadvertently exchanges one value for another' when both must be preserved; they hold that 'her insistence on *relevance of the Trinity for Christian life*' leads her to 'undermine the *total gravity of grace* by making God a prisoner (as it were) of history.'⁹⁰ Olsen's and Hall's

⁸⁴ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 58.

⁸⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 303.

⁸⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 355. See Chapter 2 of this thesis for LaCugna's reference to Pseudo-Dionysius, Richard of St. Victor and Bonaventure and the notion of God as 'goodness that is self-diffusive, not self-contained: *bonum diffusivum sui*.' LaCugna, *God for Us*, 353.

⁸⁷ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 73.

⁸⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 355.

⁸⁹ Moltmann describes the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* as a 'fitting' concept of the biblical understanding of creation. Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 74.

⁹⁰ Olson and Hall, *The Trinity*, 112. Authors' italics.

solution, in which both values are served, demands the qualified claim ‘that “once there is a world” (based entirely on God’s gracious decision to create something outside himself) there is no ontological “distance” between immanent and economic Trinities.’⁹¹

Schwöbel, too offers a nuanced contribution to the debate. It is one which, given LaCugna’s notion of creation *ex amore*, I consider to be congruent with her stance:

Does God need our love? In one sense the answer must be: no. Since God is love in the communion of the [divine persons] he does not need our love. *But* since God in his love freely chooses to create a world with human beings who can achieve personal identity in a relationship of love with the God who is love and because God identifies with his creatures in the ultimate way of becoming incarnate and suffering the price of love in the death of Christ on the cross, God needs our love. In this sense, the answer can be: yes.⁹²

While she could have made this idea more explicit in her writings, as Olson, Hall and Schwöbel have done, LaCugna’s commentary on divine necessity and freedom (further discussed below) strongly suggests that the claims she makes which emphasise the relational aspect of God and creature should not be considered ‘inadvertent’ but, rather, to be based on an understanding of God as both radically transcendent *and* radically immanent to the world. LaCugna articulates this notion very clearly when she writes:

God is no less mystery on account of God’s radical immanence in Christ. Indeed, the God who is absolutely other, absolutely transcendent but also absolutely near to us – this God is absolute mystery. The God of Jesus Christ does not withdraw into seclusion or isolation so that we are forced to speculate on a hidden God. Rather, the self-expression of God in Christ points to God’s ineffable personhood. The Spirit of God incorporates all creatures into the mystery of this divine life.⁹³

The adverb ‘absolutely’ refers to God as transcendent *and* as immanent. This is precisely the understanding of transcendence and immanence Tanner conveys in her argument for coherent talk about divine and human agency.⁹⁴ LaCugna is not using this language for the same purpose as Tanner, which is to facilitate coherent discussion about divine and human agency.

⁹¹ Olson and Hall, *The Trinity*, 112.

⁹² Schwöbel, “God Is Love,” 327. My italics.

⁹³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 324.

⁹⁴ Tanner writes, for example, ‘The Christian theologian ... needs to radicalize claims about both God’s transcendence and involvement with the world if the two are to work for rather than against one another.’ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 46.

While, as I have noted in the introduction to this chapter, it is not my intention to examine and compare the ways in which LaCugna and Tanner treat the notion of divine transcendence *per se*, in this case I make the connection between the two theologians' ideas to highlight the point that LaCugna employs language in a manner congruent with Tanner's non-contrastive Christian understanding of God as transcendent.

Duncan Reid's Application of Tanner's Rule to LaCugna

In his article, "The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology: An Alternative View,"⁹⁵ Duncan Reid applies Tanner's non-contrastive notion of divine transcendence to LaCugna's theology.⁹⁶ Prior to this application of rules, he expresses concern regarding LaCugna's thesis in *God for Us*, in which the two sets of propositions, previously expressed in terms of two levels (an inner 'immanent' and outer 'economic') of trinitarian communion, are no longer defined as such. He suggests that both of these ideas are important and that they need to be held 'together in tension as expressing, on the one hand, something about the trinitarian God in Godself, and on the other hand, something about God in relation to us.'⁹⁷ He acknowledges with interest that LaCugna wants to retain, on occasions, a notional distinction between God as God and God for us,⁹⁸ but concludes that 'this express desire does not inform the burden of her argument.'⁹⁹ Reid considers LaCugna's argument to 'lay itself open ... to the critique that Kathryn Tanner has brought to the whole of modern theology, namely of developing one side of the transcendence-immanence polarity at the expense of the other.'¹⁰⁰ He explains Tanner's notion of non-contrastive transcendence, and claims that LaCugna's theology 'leaves no room for speech about the transcendence of the trinitarian God *as Trinity*.'¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Reid, "The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology," 289-300.

⁹⁶ Reid states LaCugna's position to be 'that the modern "defeat" of trinitarian thinking can be attributed to the separation of speech about God's unity from speech about God's triunity.' Reid, "The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology," 289. He concedes that *God for Us* has 'deservedly become a standard text on trinitarian theology,' adding that any problem with the book lies in LaCugna's 'excessive emphasis on the identity of the economic and immanent Trinity.' Reid, "The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology," 289. While the focus for much of Reid's article is on his defence of the trinitarian theology of Gregory Palamas (in the light of LaCugna's, at times problematic, interpretation of Palamas' work), my main interest lies in his exploration of her treatment of the God-world relationship in the early pages of the article.

⁹⁷ Reid, "The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology," 291.

⁹⁸ Reid cites LaCugna, *God for Us*, 331 and 224ff.

⁹⁹ Reid, "The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology," 291.

¹⁰⁰ Reid, "The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology," 291. Reid cites Tanner, *God and Creation*, esp. 79-80.

¹⁰¹ Reid, "The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology," 291.

Reid describes what he regards as a division of the persons of the Trinity according to their respective transcendence and immanence as follows: ‘LaCugna’s God is transcendent as Father and immanent as Son and Spirit, and this finally means the submersion of God’s transcendence in God’s *oikonomia*. *Theologia* and *oikonomia* have in practice become identical.’¹⁰² His reference to such a ‘submersion’ suggests that, perhaps he has too closely associated creation and *oikonomia* in a manner not unlike that of Weinandy (see Chapter 5). Two examples of LaCugna’s expression of the identity of *oikonomia* and *theologia* are provided:

the notional distinction becomes all but non-existent in sentences like ‘theology is the contemplation of the divine *oikonomia*’ (LaCugna, *God for Us*, 169) and, more pointedly, ‘there is only the *oikonomia* that is the concrete realization of the mystery of *theologia* in time, space and personality.’¹⁰³

Reid claims that, in Tanner’s terms, ‘this constitutes a revisionist violation of the “rule for talk of God as transcendent.”’¹⁰⁴ In his final point on the application of Tanner’s rules, he turns to a passage by LaCugna in which her expression could be interpreted as allowing little or no room for God beyond the role as creator. He cites her controversial claim, ‘To Be God is to be the Creator of the world’¹⁰⁵ as an example of her violation of Tanner’s rules:

While wanting to accept the ‘infinite qualitative distinction’ between God and world, she immediately ‘recasts this distinction’ to enable her to say that ‘to be Creator, that is, to be in relation to creation as the Creator, is not a relation added on to the divine essence, ancillary to God’s being. To be God is to be creator of the world’ (LaCugna, *God for Us*, 355). LaCugna fails to see that this in fact makes creation a ‘metaphysical necessity’, precisely what she had wanted to avoid. The creature, here, ‘is not ultimately other than divine’ (Tanner, *God and Creation*, 165).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Reid, “The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology,” 292.

¹⁰³ Reid, “The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology,” 292, n. 13.

¹⁰⁴ Reid, “The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology,” 292.

¹⁰⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 355.

¹⁰⁶ Reid, “The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology,” 292, n. 14. Making the claim that for LaCugna, the creature ‘is not ultimately other than divine,’ Reid is quoting from the Conclusion of Tanner’s *God and Creation*. This quotation is taken from a discussion by Tanner on divine agency. One of Tanner’s examples of God’s transcendence and universal direct agency being compromised is a situation in which God’s efficacy has ‘a direct and universal range, but only in virtue of the fact that, in violation of our rule for talk about God as transcendent, the creature is said to be some sort of divinity or moment in the divine life (e.g., in the philosophical theology ... of G. W. F. Hegel).’ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 164-65. Tanner writes of theologians who have given up ‘the traditional Christian claim that the creature is not God.’ LaCugna has not given up the Christian claim that the creature is not God, and to associate her understanding of the God-world relation, even indirectly, with that of Hegel as Reid has done, misrepresents her. Groppe, on the other hand, interprets LaCugna’s statement, ‘To be God is to be creator of the world,’ as LaCugna presupposing that, in this context,

Taken at face value, LaCugna's claim appears problematic. Reid acknowledges, however, that LaCugna would want to avoid an understanding of creation as a 'metaphysical necessity,' and I contend that she does successfully avoid such an understanding. Reid is speaking in terms of substance metaphysics, referring to creation as 'a relation added onto the divine essence.'¹⁰⁷ LaCugna is not alone in arguing that such a heuristic framework cannot adequately convey all that needs to be said about God's relationship with the world. Anthony Kelly makes this point when he writes of the 'definition of God as *Ipsum Esse subsistens*, sheer Be-ing,' yielding 'to the notion of God as "Being-in-Love."' Kelly considers such a yielding not to be 'a denial of the necessity of metaphysics.' He sees it, rather as 'pointing to the need for a more appropriate metaphysics to serve the special realism of Christian faith.'¹⁰⁸ Similarly, in his article, "*Creatio Ex Amore Dei*: Creation out of Nothing and God's Relational Nature," Samuel J. Youngs seeks not to reject the notion of creation *ex nihilo*, but rather to explore alongside it, the notion of creation *ex amore*.¹⁰⁹ In the following passage, he shows how the ideas of creation, freedom and love can co-exist:

God is absolutely free, and in his freedom he willingly creates a world from nothing, and in that creative act enters into a relationship with that world. Thus, we can say that it is true, yet not enough, to say that God 'created out of nothing.' And it is also true, yet not enough, to say that 'God created out of freedom.' We must to both of these add: 'for the sake of love.'¹¹⁰

In using the language of 'recasting' the distinction between God and world, LaCugna, like many of her contemporaries, is looking for new ways to express the truths traditionally expressed in terms of substance metaphysics. In a recent study of contemporary apophaticism in the theology, Susannah Ticciati observes, through Nicholas Lash, that '[w]hile the Neoplatonic scheme need not be unintelligible to us today ... it is nevertheless not the picture which informs our own imaginative thought world. [Lash] goes on to suggest that the imaginative stranglehold in our day is that of "relentless causal systems", which result in what

'God' is a term of worship, a term of address spoken by creature to Creator.' Groppe, "*Creation Ex Nihilo*," 490, n. 48.

¹⁰⁷ Reid, "The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology," 292, n. 14.

¹⁰⁸ Kelly, *The Trinity of Love*, 192.

¹⁰⁹ Samuel J. Youngs, "*Creatio Ex Amore Dei*: Creation out of Nothing and God's Relational Nature," *Asbury Journal* 14, no. 2 (2014): 168.

¹¹⁰ Youngs, "*Creatio Ex Amore Dei*," 179.

Lash, following Buber, describes as our homelessness.’¹¹¹ While not wishing to make a laboured and artificial connection between Buber’s notion of ‘homelessness’ in the context of substance metaphysics and LaCugna’s metaphor of *oikonomia* as household, I suggest that it is this very concern regarding homelessness and alienation which motivates LaCugna to develop an ontology of communion and relation in her trinitarian theology.

God’s Uniqueness and the Claim ‘God Does Not Have to Love in Order to be Loved’

LaCugna looks for ways to specify the uniqueness of the divine nature in the context of creation *ex amore*. The expression of such uniqueness is identified by Tanner as a means of complying with her rule. LaCugna argues that the reason for creation lies ‘not in the creature, nor on some claim the creature has on God,’ but ‘entirely in the unfathomable mystery of God who is self-originating and self-communicating love.’¹¹² Her use of the seemingly innocuous word ‘even’ in the statement below strengthens her expression of both the contingency of the creature and the transcendence of God: ‘God alone is absolutely consistent with Godself, even if the creature is incapable of fully receiving that self-expression. God alone can perfectly express Godself in act, *even* under the conditions of the world.’¹¹³

Where Tanner puts forward the idea that God did not need to create the world, LaCugna makes the claim: ‘God does not have to be loved in order to love.’¹¹⁴ Unlike the creature, who learns to love in response to being loved, ‘God is Love itself and the origin of Love, that is to say, God is the origin of existence.’¹¹⁵ LaCugna describes the term ‘Unoriginate Origin’ as ‘perhaps the best translation of what is meant by calling God “Father”’ and as the ‘paramount term of apophasis.’¹¹⁶ She writes of the abundance of God’s love:

God is the Unoriginate *Origin*, who in plenitude and fecundity ecstatically self-communicates to Son, Spirit, and to the creature the very Godness of God. God bestows the life of supremely personal existence, Love itself

¹¹¹ Ticciati, *A New Apophaticism*, 47, quoting Nicholas Lash, *Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1988), 228-29.

¹¹² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 355.

¹¹³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 304. LaCugna’s italics.

¹¹⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 303.

¹¹⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 303. Schwöbel affirms the significance of this claim by posing the question: ‘How justified would we be in trusting the faithfulness of God’s love if God were not eternally loving, but became a loving God when human beings reciprocated his love?’ Schwöbel, “God Is Love,” 322.

¹¹⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 302.

(Ipsum Amore). God begets the Son from this Love, God breathes forth the Spirit from this Love, and God destines everything to exist eternally in this Love.¹¹⁷

Her quotation from Jüngel beautifully conveys the mystery and the complete absence of contingency in God's gracious love: 'As Eberhard Jüngel notes, to say that God is Unoriginate Origin means that God "alone can begin to love without any reason, and always has begun to love."' ¹¹⁸

Gunton, who criticises LaCugna for her Neo-platonic leanings, does so assuming her world view to be one in which there is 'only one reality, the divine-worldly emanation, which constitutes the world and then swallows it up.'¹¹⁹ He justifiably states that 'God's personal otherness from the world is needed if there is to be a true establishing of the world in its own right.'¹²⁰ However, Gunton identifies the source of his concerns regarding LaCugna's theology as the principle of self-communication, and fails to recognise that in speaking of God as self-communicating love, LaCugna is challenging the paradigm she so closely associates with a hidden and unrelated God. When substance is constitutive of being, LaCugna would argue that the required distinction results in an emphasis on the notion of divine self-sufficiency. When personhood is fundamental to being and when love is the supreme ontological predicate, the statement 'God is love' recasts yet does not blur the distinction between God and world or the understanding of divine freedom. Divine freedom is not about unlimited choices but 'perfect conformity to who God is.'¹²¹ The self-sufficiency implied in the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is exposed as a 'philosophical myth,'¹²² and yet God's 'otherness' is not compromised: 'The God who *is* love (*Ipse Amore*) does not remain

¹¹⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 303. LaCugna's italics.

¹¹⁸ Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983), 327, quoted in LaCugna, *God for Us*, 303.

¹¹⁹ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, xix.

¹²⁰ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, xviii-xix.

¹²¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 262.

¹²² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 353.

locked up in the “splendid isolation” of self-love but spills over into what is other than God, giving birth to creation and history.’¹²³

LaCugna’s first Meta-Level Statement, ‘*We can make true statements about God – particularly when the assertions are about the triune nature of God – only on the basis of the economy, corroborated by God’s self-revelation in Christ and the Spirit,*’¹²⁴ should not, as I stated earlier in this chapter, be judged as something which limits the Christian notion of divine transcendence. Anthony Kelly is in accord with this vital point when he writes of the ‘fundamental story of grace ... told and retold in a variety of contexts: creation, election, liberation, covenant, promise, – all culminating in “these last days”, with the sending of the Son and the consequent outpouring of the Spirit.’¹²⁵ Importantly, he identifies, as the *constant telling point*, ‘the manner in which a transcendent divine love is going beyond itself in an initiative to form, heal, enrich and finally transform all creation. “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us ...” (1 Jn 4:10).’¹²⁶

Conclusion

What then are the ‘results’ of this evaluation of LaCugna’s trinitarian theology in the light of Tanner’s radical interpretation of divine transcendence and her principle of a non-competitive relation between creatures and God? To be sure, LaCugna’s ambivalence toward many of the theological tenets which have traditionally supported Tanner’s principles has necessitated much theological reflection on my part. Nevertheless, the detailed examination of LaCugna’s notion of God as ‘immutably personal,’ her recasting of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* as creation *ex amore*, and her honouring of the uniqueness of God through the grammatical construct ‘God is love’ each demonstrate that she has found alternative ways to uphold the notion of divine transcendence. Theologians such as Schwöbel, may have been more careful than LaCugna in their articulation of some of the theological subtleties underlying the

¹²³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 353. The words, ‘splendid isolation,’ are from Rahner, *The Trinity*, 17. Molnar is harsh in his assessment of LaCugna’s treatment of the word ‘love’ as univocal. Prior to the statement just cited, she writes, ‘Love by its nature is outgoing and self-giving.’ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 353. Molnar responds, ‘Here, love in general defines God’s love and displaces his freedom.’ Molnar, *Divine Freedom*, 128.

¹²⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 2-3.

¹²⁵ Kelly, *Trinity of Love*, 39.

¹²⁶ Kelly, *Trinity of Love*, 39. Michael Downey’s expression of ‘the simply astonishing truth’ that ‘God is love’ conveys something of LaCugna’s emphasis on the immediacy and the practical nature of the doctrine of the Trinity: ‘God’s Word is spoken; God’s Spirit is poured forth. The life and love of God are not past tense, but present, ecstatic, alive, outreaching, gift/ing here and now.’ Downey, *Altogether Gift*, 44.

doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. However, there is evidence that LaCugna shares these views, even though, at times, she gives such priority to the notion of God-in-relation that the required subtleties are temporarily lost.

Having said this, LaCugna is clearly in agreement with Tanner's non-contrastive understanding of divine transcendence, as the following statement attests: 'the God who is absolutely other, absolutely transcendent but also absolutely near to us – this God is absolute mystery.'¹²⁷ Medley brilliantly encapsulates LaCugna's achievement in this regard:

In the trinitarian vision of the divine-human relationship articulated by LaCugna, transcendence is a wholeness that embraces the world. Transcendence evokes awe, wonder, amazement, and the incomprehensible mystery of God's creative, redeeming, and sustaining presence within the universe. In this schema, transcendence is understood as neither above or over against but in and through relationship; connectedness does not diminish difference, rather is [*sic*] positively highlights it. Transcendence and immanence are, therefore, corresponding rather than opposing.¹²⁸

Furthermore, the Christian claim 'God is love' is a powerful one, and one which may render the traditional means of upholding divine transcendence, such as the distinction between the economic and immanent Trinity, less crucial than many consider it to be. In her quest for an alternative to the terms 'immanent' and 'economic' Trinity, LaCugna strongly, and in my judgment successfully, argues this case. Anthony Kelly, too, addresses this issue in the conclusion to his study of the trinitarian theology of Love:

Once 'being in love' is accepted as the focal analogy of trinitarian theology, the distinction [between the immanent and economic Trinity] is not entirely relevant: Love is really love or it is not: the realism of self-giving Love presupposes a self in the giver, a self in the gift, a self in the giving. God 'in se', the divine mystery 'in itself', is engaged and involved. At this point, a question surfaces: does not the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity belong more to a stage of theology not yet confident in its experiential basis?¹²⁹

Kelly proceeds to emphasise the necessity of 'respecting the incomprehensibility of the divine mystery of Love and its eternal character,' as, indeed, LaCugna does through her reflections on *theologia* as the eternal mystery of God.

¹²⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 324.

¹²⁸ Medley, *Imago Trinitatis*, 105.

¹²⁹ Kelly, *Trinity of Love*, 249-50.

Through the examination of the motifs chosen from LaCugna's ontology of personhood and from her notion of creation *ex amore*, the discussion returns to her model of the *oikonomia*. Her 'insight' that the *oikonomia* is no less a mystery than *theologia* has been subjected to Tanner's rule relating to radical and non-contrastive transcendence. LaCugna's views do not, in many instances, reflect those of Tanner, but this was never a condition of Tanner's invitation. Nor are all of the concerns of LaCugna's critics resolved as a result of this venture. However, by identifying LaCugna's own linguistic directives for speech about God (Meta-Level Statements) and through a detailed examination of selected linguistic motifs, I have shown that LaCugna has not violated Tanner's rule. This process has not only shone light on many of the strengths of LaCugna's work; it has also brought forth some thoughtful allies; and has facilitated further fruitful engagement with those who continue to question her understanding and expression of God as transcendent.

Conclusion

Because we are placed in the presence of God we participate in the very life of God. Though we are forbidden to see the face of God we are invited to enter into the saving act, to accompany God in history, to see and hear the wonderful works of God. We do not approach nor do we worship a ‘sitting God,’ but we accompany and worship a ‘walking God.’ Knowledge of God is journey with God.¹

LaCugna’s understanding and expression of the triune God’s freedom and transcendence have been examined in this thesis through the exploration of three significant themes in her writing: the first, her soteriologically motivated proposal for an alternative to the immanent-economic trinitarian model which calls for the essential unity and correspondence of *oikonomia* and *theologia*; the second, her notion of divine and human communion in which she develops an ontology of relation reflecting this unity and correspondence; and the third, her recasting of the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* as creation *ex amore*.

In Chapter 2, each of the themes has been expanded upon to highlight relevant influences, to acknowledge problematic aspects of LaCugna’s ‘recasting’ and to identify new ways to interpret her proposals. Chapter 3 focused on theological language; and Ian Ramsey’s concept of speech about God as ‘logically odd,’ outlined in this chapter, provided a basis from which to examine ‘person’ language (Theme 2) later in the thesis. Theme 1 was the focus of my research in Chapters 4 and 5. Concepts of freedom, necessity and pantheism in the writings of Plotinus, Eriugena, Bonaventure and Aquinas were investigated in Chapter 4, and relevant connections with LaCugna’s understanding of divine transcendence were highlighted. I studied LaCugna’s ‘Neo-platonic Model of Emanation and Return’ and the metaphor of a ‘walking God,’ and addressed particular concerns expressed by Finan, Weinandy and Gunton in Chapter 5. Finally, in Chapter 6, motifs selected from Themes 2 and 3 formed the basis of my engagement with Tanner’s rule ‘for talk of God’s transcendence beyond both identity and opposition with the non-divine.’²

Having recounted my methodology, chapter by chapter, I will present, below, my evaluation of LaCugna’s understanding of God as transcendent using Fred Sanders’ classification of

¹ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 198-99.

² Tanner, *God and Creation*, 47.

interpreters of Rahner's Rule as either 'radicalizers' or 'restricters' as a structuring principle. Before discussing LaCugna with reference to Sanders, however, I venture an observation on Ian Ramsey's notion of 'shuttlecock theology.'

Ramsey explains that those engaging in shuttlecock theology can 'run some model or other – sometimes a highly sophisticated model – to death, in a passionate desire to understand.'³ Responses from opponents are often vastly different yet equally unsatisfactory. Although Weinandy and Gunton make valid points in their critiques of LaCugna, at times, in their eagerness to defend divine freedom, they 'go too far.' In Weinandy's desire to safeguard God's 'otherness,' for example, he confuses the economic-immanent trinitarian relation with the God-world relation. Gunton, clearly disapproving of LaCugna's use of a model which has its origins in Neo-platonism, claims that she is veering dangerously close to pantheism, without taking into account the conditions LaCugna places around the use of such a model in the Christian context. LaCugna, by contrast, gives a balanced account of the need to embrace an understanding of both God's distinction-from and relatedness-to creation in her review of Gunton's work.⁴

However, LaCugna can also be considered a participant in the phenomenon of shuttlecock theology for her involvement in what has been named 'The Trinitarian Project' of the late twentieth century. Theologians associated with this 'Project' have looked to the past to pinpoint the issues over which trinitarian theology lost its way, and have proceeded to put forward an often radical and problematic alternative. One of the challenges inherent in a study of LaCugna involves reconciling, on the one hand, the compelling evidence of her detailed knowledge of patristic trinitarian sources and of the function of theological language with, on the other hand, some of her bold statements which seem almost to belie such a sophisticated level of knowledge and discernment. LaCugna claims that our understanding of the economic and immanent Trinity can be enriched through the use of a range of models, and argues that a 'highly complex doctrine such as the trinity ... will not be successful without a mix of languages.'⁵ Such openness to a diversity of approaches is not so apparent, however, in her calls to 'abandon the misleading terms, economic and immanent Trinity,'⁶ or

³ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 170.

⁴ LaCugna, review of *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 307-09.

⁵ LaCugna, "Placing," 30.

⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 223.

in claims that the ‘mystery of existence is the mystery of the commingling of persons, divine and human, in a common life, within a common household.’⁷ Recognising this tension in LaCugna’s work, and also acknowledging the concerns of critics regarding her interpretation of patristic and medieval sources, I turn now to make a final defence of her treatment of the Christian notion of divine transcendence.

Fred Sanders’ identification, in his writing on Rahner’s Rule, of theologians’ ‘core concerns,’ provides a useful platform from which to assess LaCugna’s understanding not only of the concerns of the typical ‘radicalizer’ but also those of the quintessential ‘restrictor.’ It is, of course, those more closely associated with this latter group who take issue with her ideas on divine transcendence. The first concern of ‘radicalizers’ is that the doctrine of the Trinity be relevant to Christian life. LaCugna opens the Introduction to *God for Us* with the words: ‘The doctrine of the Trinity is ultimately a practical doctrine with radical consequences for Christian life.’⁸ Statements on the risk of the alienation of Christian theology and life (resulting from an unchecked focus on the immanent Trinity) can be found throughout *God for Us* and in her earlier writings.⁹ The second concern is ‘a desire to have the actual presence of God in the events of the gospel narrative.’¹⁰ LaCugna calls for a contemporary reformulation of the doctrine of the Trinity which has a soteriological emphasis, placing Jesus Christ at the centre. She writes, ‘there is only one mystery: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.”’¹¹ Even in the context of negative theology, she insists that speech about God must ‘never be detached from the narratives, symbols and images of biblical revelation.’¹² The third concern is what Sanders describes as ‘a dismissal of metaphysics as such, or a philosophical criticism of traditional concepts of transcendence’ which is evident in the ‘rhetoric of Küng and LaCugna when they denigrate all attempts, or even desires, to speak of God *in se*.’¹³ LaCugna’s reluctance to speculate on God *in se*, and to accept the

⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 383.

⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 1.

⁹ See, for example, LaCugna, *God for Us*, 227; LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 203, 215, n. 58.

¹⁰ Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 161.

¹¹ LaCugna, “Re-Conceiving the Trinity,” 15.

¹² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 331.

¹³ Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 162.

premise of creation *ex nihilo*, places her squarely within the ‘radicalizers’ camp as one who questions substance metaphysics. She considers the understanding of divine freedom on which substance metaphysics is based to be inadequate, writing, for example, that the ‘self-sufficiency implied in the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is exposed as a “philosophical myth.”¹⁴ Here we come to the crux of the problem in defending LaCugna’s understanding of divine freedom and transcendence.

Sanders rightly identifies, as a central concern of the ‘restricters,’ the recognition and safeguarding of divine freedom. My aim throughout the thesis has been to demonstrate that LaCugna, too, recognises and addresses this tenet of the Christian faith. Thus, her classification by Sanders as a ‘radicalizer,’ should not, and I have argued *does not*, thwart her endeavours to address this core concern of the ‘restricters,’ albeit by different means. Central to LaCugna’s proposal for an essential identity between *theologia* and *oikonomia* is the concept that the eternal mystery of God (*theologia*) is revealed in the mystery of *oikonomia*. She goes to some lengths to nuance this claim:

[t]he complete self-revelation and self-giving of God to us in salvation history by no means diminishes the Absolute mystery of God. God who ‘draws nearer to me than I am to myself’ forever remains Incomprehensible and Inexpressible Mystery. ... Both immanence and transcendence must be predicated not just of *theologia* but *oikonomia*: God’s mystery is grasped as transcendent precisely *in* the economy of salvation. ... If we adhere to the principle that the economy and theology belong together as two aspects of the one reality, then the *economy of salvation is as ineffable as is the eternal mystery of God (theologia)*.¹⁵

This ‘insight’ drives LaCugna’s insistence that all speech about the triune God be based on our knowledge of God as revealed in the economy of salvation, through Christ by the power of the Spirit. As such, I have identified this directive, in my final chapter, as Meta-Level Statement 1. Using this as a basis, and drawing on arguments I have made in previous chapters, I will discuss three ways in which I consider LaCugna to have successfully upheld the Christian understanding of God as transcendent.

¹⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 353.

¹⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 322. LaCugna’s italics.

The first involves LaCugna's predication of divine negative attributes on personhood rather than substance, again, expressed succinctly in Meta-Level Statement 3.¹⁶ An important element in this re-conception is her claim that the 'term *person* can be applied to God only analogically or apophatically.'¹⁷ The significance of this statement, along with the claim summarised as Meta-Level Statement 2,¹⁸ should not be underestimated. If some of her more problematic proposals were read in the light of such statements, critics might question their fears regarding her univocal treatment of divine and human personhood. As I have argued in Chapter 6, LaCugna's attribution of the word 'immutable' to divine personhood places the notion of immutability beyond human comprehension, yet at the same time grounds our perception of divine personhood in that which has been revealed in the *oikonomia*. As both the study of Ramsey's models and qualifiers in Chapter 3, and further analysis in Chapter 6, has demonstrated, the use of words such as 'immutable' in the construct 'immutably personal' makes a 'language plea' for divine personhood, rendering it a 'non-contrastive' attribution and thus beyond the usual contrastive function of negative attributes.

The second builds upon LaCugna's emphasis on an ontology of personhood over substance, and involves a reframing of the Christian understanding of both the freedom and transcendence of God and of the utter contingency of the creature. She looks, in her reframing, to the language of love and grace with which the Gospel narratives and New Testament letters are imbued, and places less importance on the notion of the 'ontological distinction' between God and creation due to its connotations of separation and remoteness. LaCugna attests to what she sees as a more relevant Christian 'distinction' in her claims that 'God does not have to be loved in order to love,' and that '[t]his is not the situation of the creature who learns to love in response to being loved.'¹⁹

LaCugna has noted that the theological issues surrounding divine freedom and necessity are complex, and I can only concur with this observation. Nevertheless, I contend that, drawing on the tradition of Pseudo-Dionysius and Bonaventure, she develops a convincing alternative to the understanding of divine freedom espoused by her critics. She regards the doctrine of

¹⁶ Meta-Level Statement 3: Selected classical divine attributes [immutability, impassibility, incomprehensibility] formerly predicated of God's essence should now be predicated of divine personhood.

¹⁷ LaCugna, "The Trinitarian Mystery of God," 180.

¹⁸ Meta-Level Statement 2: It is not appropriate to speak univocally or literally of God's being.

¹⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 303.

creation *ex nihilo* as one which ‘domesticates the mystery of God by restricting divine freedom to an *a priori* idea of what it means to be free.’²⁰ This *a priori* idea thus represents a philosophical constraint rather than freedom. In the Christian mystical tradition, she argues, the ‘necessity that Good overflow is not a constraint in the ordinary sense of the word.’²¹ In her writing on the Dionysian concept of *bonum diffusivum sui*, LaCugna maintains that ‘the “ecstasis”, the going-forward of Good is out of super-abundance, plenitude, perfection, fecundity, not lack or need or desire.’²²

Thus, when trinitarian theology has as its starting point the *oikonomia* and when divine freedom is thought of in terms of the freedom of persons in relationship, LaCugna argues that the Christian notion of freedom can be understood in terms of love rather than autonomy and self-sufficiency.²³ Furthermore, when the term ‘necessity’ is applied to God in a metaphorical rather than technical sense, it can convey ‘freedom’ rather than the more expected connotations of limitation. Groppe’s observation that the ‘apparent antimony between freedom and necessity is transcended by love’²⁴ clearly encapsulates what I regard as LaCugna’s achievement of recasting creation *ex nihilo* in terms of creation *ex amore*.

Thirdly, and finally, LaCugna considers doxological language to have a logic that lends itself to the expression of divine transcendence. Sanders suggests that in offering doxological language as an alternative to the doctrine of the immanent Trinity, she is merely engaging in a diversionary tactic to avoid speaking of God *in se*. It is, however, far from a diversionary tactic. Her development of the *oikonomia* and *theologia* paradigm is an attempt to offer a new perspective, required to counter some of the theological issues associated with the model of the immanent-economic Trinity. LaCugna’s understanding of doxology entails God’s people praising God, as God, on the basis of God’s activity in the *oikonomia*. She looks to affirm that “God *as God*” is altogether present in the economy of salvation history, and at the same

²⁰ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 169.

²¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 161.

²² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 161.

²³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 168-69.

²⁴ Groppe, “Creation *Ex Nihilo*,” 490, n. 49.

time that God also exceeds and outstrips the human capacity to receive or explain this self-communication.’²⁵

As I turn to the quotation which opens this Conclusion, I am reminded not only of the ‘walking God’ but of the language LaCugna and McDonnell use to draw the reader into the mystery of the *living* God. God’s transcendence is such that ‘we are forbidden to see the face of God,’ yet we are ‘invited into the saving act, to accompany God in history, to see and hear the wonderful works of God.’²⁶ We are invited to worship this God who has come among us, who is transcendent, though not remote in the negative sense conveyed by the “‘sitting God” enthroned on high.’²⁷ LaCugna and McDonnell write, ‘Any formula which freezes out of time “a walking God” is deceptive. Trinitarian mystery is the movement of lover to beloved, not an abstract notion of what love is apart from the movement.’²⁸

In looking to the movement of lover to beloved, LaCugna is not attempting to restrict the idea of divine love to that of human love or to limit the metaphor of a ‘walking God’ to a univocal concept of walking. Clearly the metaphor must be interpreted in view of her over-arching model in which the *oikonomia* is God’s path of glory. The divine plan of redemption has been revealed to humanity yet it is beyond our comprehension. It is in the context of an, as yet, unfinished journey that LaCugna states that the ‘walking God cannot be a timeless God.’²⁹ The reflective and meditative style of McDonnell’s and LaCugna’s writing in their jointly written article and of much of LaCugna’s own work (though particularly in the ninth chapter of *God for Us*) is an important feature of her trinitarian theology, and Bonaventure’s advice to readers that his words not be ‘run through hurriedly,’³⁰ but slowly meditated upon is pertinent also to her readers.

LaCugna has chosen a key passage of Scripture (Eph 1:3-14) and has developed a trinitarian model, each emphasising the eschatological nature of the Christian faith. She describes creedal and dogmatic statements as ‘proleptic and anticipatory, pointing beyond themselves

²⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 217.

²⁶ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 198-99.

²⁷ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 199.

²⁸ LaCugna and McDonnell, “Far Country,” 204.

²⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 349.

³⁰ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium*, Prologue, part 5.

to the eschaton when finally all things in heaven and all things on earth will be united with God through Jesus Christ.’³¹ She warns that ‘if we overinvest dogmatic statements and regard them as timeless truths, we violate the principle that God is a “walking” God, that the economy is the ongoing but not yet complete providential plan of God.’³² While LaCugna is aware of the limitations of theological models, it is possible that in her fear that God be considered alien and remote, at times she herself has ‘overinvested’ in a model which emphasises God’s closeness to us and which moves the focus away from speculation on the intra-divine relations. However, at the heart of this model of *oikonomia* and *theologia*, of emanation and return, is the acknowledgement that we are creatures whose ‘origin, existence and ... destiny belong not to ourselves but to God.’³³ The transcendence of the triune God is not violated in LaCugna’s adaptation of the ancient model of emanation and return, nor is our understanding of divine freedom compromised in the gentle and spirit-filled image of a walking God.

³¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 359.

³² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 359.

³³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 347.

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