

The Trinity and Otherness

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1. Against enclosed identity and romanticised otherness

One of the challenges facing Christians and churches in South Africa is the reflection on, and the embodiment of, a Christian ethic of hospitality. Such an ethic, which draws on the rich biblical accounts of hospitality, has the potential, among other things, to critique certain inadequate ways of relating identity and otherness. A Christian ethic of hospitality challenges the notion of an *enclosed identity* in which the aim is to protect my/our identity by insulating me or us from what is different and other. It thus serves as a reminder not to emphasise identity in such a way that it becomes sectarian and parochial, in short, totalitarian. The twentieth century, including our recent South African past, can be seen as a dreadful monument to the dangers of such a mindset of enclosed identity.

A Christian ethic of hospitality, furthermore, is not to be equated uncritically with a *liberal, romantic openness towards otherness*. Within such a framework, the other is viewed as an abstract ideal or serves to satisfy our aesthetic appetite for strangeness. Such a romanticised notion of otherness fails to take the concrete identity of the other seriously. While there is the pretence of openness, the self in fact insulates him- or herself from the other and otherness. Hence, identity also becomes totalitarian. It can also be argued that such a view is not merely a failure to take the identity of the other seriously, but also a failure to deal adequately with the identity of the moral self. To act morally, according to modernistic moral theories, implies that the moral person ignores, or alienates, him- or herself from his/her narrative or identity in order to make an 'objective', rational moral judgement. The critique of such modernistic moral theories is well known. The moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre offers a powerful analysis of why the Enlightenment project of grounding morality in rationality qua rationality had to fail,¹ while another moral philosopher, Charles

1 See especially his widely influential book, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (1984). MacIntyre puts his critique against the Enlightenment philosophers this way: '(T)hey indeed attempt to find a rational basis for their moral beliefs in a particular understanding of human nature, while inheriting a set of moral injunctions on the one hand and a conception

Taylor, calls our attention to what he, in his inquiry into the sources of modern selfhood, calls inescapable frameworks.² The Theologian Stanley Hauerwas also critiques modernistic ethical and political theories for their attempt to detach morality from particularity.³

While all may not agree with the constructive positions of scholars such as MacIntyre, Taylor and Hauerwas, their critique of what can be called the 'identity of non-identity' of modern ethical and political theories seems to be of paramount importance. For an ethic of hospitality, this implies that it is a false option to 'ignore' identity in modernistic fashion, because doing so leads to a reduction of morality that fails to take notions such as character, virtue, passions, moral exemplars, practices, community and tradition seriously.⁴

It should be noted, however, that a plea for an acknowledgement of identity can easily become a way of avoiding the challenges facing our cultural situation. One often hears, for instance, in political and church discourse, the plea for identity made in such a way that the suspicion arises that it is merely masked conservatism linked with the inability to

of human nature on the other hand which had been expressly designed to be discrepant with each other ... They inherited incoherent fragments of a once coherent scheme of thought and action and, since they did not recognize their own peculiar historical and cultural situation, they could not recognize the impossible and quixotic character of their self-appointed task' (55).

- 2 See his *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (1989). In this monumental work Taylor writes: 'Frameworks provide the background, explicit or implicit, for our moral judgements, intuitions or reactions ... To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame of horizon within which I can try to determine what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose' (26, 27).
- 3 See Taylor 1989. In this monumental work Taylor writes: 'Frameworks provide the background, explicit or implicit, for our moral judgements, intuitions or reactions ... To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame of horizon within which I can try to determine what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose' (26, 27).
- 4 This statement that the modern project ignored identity needs to be qualified. In his book *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (1997) sociologist Zygmunt Bauman makes the insightful comment that the 'modern project promised to free the individual from inherited identity. Yet it did not take a stand against identity as such, against having an identity, even a solid, resilient and immutable identity. It only transformed the identity from the matter of ascription into the achievement thus making it an individual task and the individual's responsibility' (20).

face change. What is needed is not an emphasis on identity as such, nor on the alienation from identity, but an emphasis on a *certain kind of identity* – an identity open to the other and otherness.

One of the challenges facing us, then, is the challenge of facing the other and otherness – facing the stranger, strangeness, and even estrangement. Although the facing of the other, or openness towards the other and otherness, is not necessarily equivalent to a Christian ethic of hospitality, such a facing and openness are nevertheless constitutive of hospitality. Hospitality is the welcoming of the other in his or her otherness.

The plea for such openness towards the other and otherness is well known in philosophical and theological discourse. The work of, among others, the philosophers Emmanuel Levinas and Paul Ricoeur and the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer immediately comes to mind.⁵ An

5 Throughout his work, and especially in his major works *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (1969) and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* ((1981), Levinas develops the idea of ethics as first philosophy in which the responsibility for the other is primary. In the process he critiques what is, in his view, the Western philosophical tradition's tendency to grant precedence to ontology. According to Levinas, this resulted in what he calls ego-logy. Ethics is for Levinas the critique against the cognitive enterprise of the ego to reduce all otherness to itself. The ethical is therefore the locus of what Levinas calls exteriority. Exteriority names that which cannot be reduced to sameness. The ethical relation is one in which I encounter the face of the Other. The face of the Other is a revelation, or epiphany, that summons us to responsibility. The face of the other resists totalisation. It cannot be contained: 'The face resists possession, resists my powers. In its epiphany, in expression, the sensible, still graspable, turns into total resistance to the grasp' (*Totality and Infinity*, 197). The face has a certain vulnerability or nudity, and as such it invites violence. But the face of the Other is also my Sinai – prohibiting murder and violence. The face of the Other 'is the primordial expression, is the first word: 'you shall not commit murder' (*Totality and Infinity*, 199). Although Levinas does not use the word hospitality often in a major work like *Totality and Infinity*, it can rightfully be called a treatise on hospitality. For the use of the notion of hospitality in reference to Levinas' work, see Derrida 1999:21 and Ford 1999:30–44. Levinas is indeed an important conversation partner in the rethinking of an ethic of hospitality.

Another philosopher who offers an insightful and nuanced engagement with the dialectic of identity and otherness is Paul Ricoeur. In his reworking of his 1986 Gifford Lectures, entitled *Oneself as Another* (1992), he deals with the question of selfhood and personal identity. Ricoeur distinguishes between two major meanings of identity, derived from the Latin, namely *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity. *Idem*-identity is synonymous to sameness. This is opposed to the idea of selfhood as *ipse*-identity. *Ipse*-identity involves the dialectic of self and other than self (otherness). For Ricoeur, otherness is constitutive of selfhood as

engagement with the thought of Levinas, Ricoeur and Bonhoeffer invite us to break free from the limitations of enclosed identity and romanticised otherness. While a thorough, albeit critical, engagement with their work provides wonderful resources for the rethinking of an ethic of hospitality, the focus of this article is more on the question of whether an adequate *theological* analysis of hospitality does not also require a more thorough engagement with trinitarian theology. And further, can a trinitarian focus help us to rethink the relationship between identity and otherness – which is of such crucial importance for an ethic of hospitality – in faithful and creative ways?

2. The promise and problems of trinitarian theology

2.1 A renewed interest

Over the last few years, we have witnessed what can be called a revival or renaissance in trinitarian theology. That we can speak of a revival in trinitarian theology implies that the doctrine has been neglected for some time. We read in some studies on the doctrine of God in paragraph headings about ‘the defeat of the doctrine of the Trinity’ (LaCugna),⁶ ‘the exile of

such. As the title *Oneself as Another* suggests, the selfhood of oneself implies otherness in such a degree that oneself cannot be thought of without the other. The self can never be separated from its other. For Ricoeur, the self does not dissolve into the other, but the autonomy of the self is tightly bound up with solicitude for one’s neighbour and with justice for each individual. Ricoeur fears Levinas risks eclipsing the need for self-esteem as an integral part of other-orientated responsibility. Ricoeur therefore quotes with affirmation in a footnote from Georges Bernanos’s *Diary of a Country Priest*, ‘It is easier than one thinks to hate oneself. Grace means forgetting oneself. But if all pride were dead in us, the grace of graces would be to love oneself humbly, as one would any of the suffering members of Jesus Christ’ (24).

The French writer Georges Bernanos was, interestingly, also an influence on the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. See Bethge 1970:103, 104. The theme of otherness is, of course, part and parcel of the life and thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Dirkie Smit has given a helpful overview of ‘the Other’ in the thought of Bonhoeffer. See Smit 1995. Bonhoeffer is well known for his remarks on Jesus Christ as ‘the man for others’ and the church as ‘the church for others.’ The theme of otherness is dominant also in his earlier writings. As far back as his doctoral dissertation *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study on the Sociology of the Church* (1998), he reflects on the relation of the self and the other in his discussion of the Christian concept of person and community.

6 LaCugna 1991:19.

the Trinity' (Forte),⁷ or 'the marginalization of the Trinity' (Placher);⁸ and a report of a study commission of the British Council of Churches on trinitarian doctrine (published in 1989) is entitled *The Forgotten Trinity*. However, given the renewed interest in the doctrine of the Trinity, it seems possible to confirm David Cunningham's observation: 'Indeed, so prevalent have such studies become that the phenomenon looks not so much like a renaissance as a bandwagon.'⁹

What makes this renewed interest in trinitarian theology remarkable is that it seems to cut across confessional boundaries. It is therefore possible to speak with Geoffrey Wainwright of an *ecumenical* rediscovery of the doctrine of the Trinity.¹⁰

It is worth noting that the three theologians who are often described as the progenitors of trinitarian theology in the twentieth century, namely Karl Barth, Karl Rahner and Vladimir Lossky, come from the Protestant, the Catholic and the Orthodox traditions respectively.

Barth's doctrine of the Trinity in *Church Dogmatics 1/1* (1932) is a powerful treatise on the identity of the Christian God. Rahner's influential essay in *Mysterium Salutis* (1967; published later in English as *The Trinity*) was an attempt to redirect trinitarian theology by criticising the tendency to separate the treatise 'On the One God' (*De Deo Uno*) from the treatise 'On the Triune God' (*De Deo Trino*). Lossky's work (see especially *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*) is also influential for setting the dialogue between Eastern and Western theology in trinitarian terms. Following Barth, Rahner and Lossky, some of the most renowned theologians of the twentieth century have written studies on the doctrine of the Trinity and reference to the doctrine is central in some significant books dealing, for instance, with spirituality, sacraments, sexuality, the church and personhood.¹¹

7 Forte 1989:3.

8 Placher 1996:164.

9 Cunningham 1998:19.

10 See Wainwright 1998. Wainwright gives a very helpful overview of the rediscovery of the doctrine of the Trinity and relates this in an interesting way to conversations within the ecumenical movement.

11 Influenced by Barth, Eberhard Jungel published *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being is in Becoming* (1976). Jürgen Moltmann's *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (1993) is a powerful critique of Barth and Rahner and an attempt to develop a social doctrine of the Trinity. Leonardo Boff's *Trinity and Society* (1988), sees the doctrine of the Trinity as a model for society that serves the liberation of the poor and the oppressed. An important trinitarian theologian writing in English today is Robert Jenson. The influence of Barth on Jenson is very strong, but he tries to move beyond Barth. See especially his book, *The Triune Identity*

2.2 Reasons for the revival of trinitarian theology

There are certainly many possible reasons for the revival of trinitarian theology. One has to do with ecumenical dialogue. The encounter with the theology and liturgy of Eastern Orthodoxy in an ecumenical context, while initially focusing almost exclusively on the filioque, led to, among other things, a reappraisal of the insights of the Cappadocians into a more relational ontology of personhood.¹² It is often said that Western trinitarian theology is merely a footnote to Augustine's brilliant reflections on the doctrine of the Trinity in his *De Trinitate*. Many more recent studies are more critical of Augustine's so-called psychological view of the Trinity. Western theologians have become more open to the Eastern critique and have even rediscovered some of the relational sources within the Western

(1982), as well as his *Systematic Theology Vol 1: The Triune God* (1997) and *Systematic Theology Vol 2: The Works of God* (1999). For a thorough engagement of prominent scholars with the work of Jenson, see Gunton *Trinity, Time, and Church: A Response to the Theology of Robert Jenson* (2000). One of the most informative discussions of the doctrine of the Trinity is Wolfhart Pannenberg's discussion in his *Systematic Theology, Vol 1* (1999). Pannenberg develops a qualified social notion of the Trinity. There is also renewed interest in the trinitarian theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar. See the various volumes of his *Theo-Drama* (1988–1992). Other Roman Catholic studies include Walter Kasper's *The God of Jesus Christ* (1983) and William Hill's *The Three-Personed God* (1982), as well as Bruno Forte's *The Trinity as History*. One of the important Catholic studies that follows Rahner, is Catherine Mowry LaCugna's *God For Us: The Trinity in Christian Life*. The work of Elizabeth Johnson can also be mentioned. See, for instance, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Discourse* (1993), as well as her article entitled 'To Let the Symbol Sing Again' (1997). The Orthodox theologian, John Zizioulas's book *Being As Communion* (1997) has also been very influential. The English Reformed theologian Colin Gunton has written extensively on trinitarian theology. See for instance, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (1991), *The One, the Three, and the Many* (1993) and *The Triune Creator* (1998). For a valuable collection of essays, see Christoph Schwöbel (ed.), *Trinitarian Theology Today* (1995). For another helpful discussion, see the chapter 'The Triune God' in Daniel Migliore's book *Faith seeking Understanding* (1991). Some other important studies include: Ted Peters *GOD as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (1993); Alan Torrance, *Persons in Communion* (1996); Thomas Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (1995); Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness* (1998); Nicholas Lash, *Believing Three Ways in One God: A Reading of the Apostle's Creed* (1992); David Cunningham, *These Three Are One* (1999) and Paul Fiddes, *Participating in God* (2001).

12 See Schwöbel 1995:3–4.

tradition such as, for instance, Augustine's own use of the model of the love relationship or the later work of Richard of St Victor.¹³

A further impetus for the revival of trinitarian theology has to do with Christian–Jewish dialogue. In this regard, a discussion (held in 1978) can be recalled between the Jewish theologian Pinchas Lapide and the Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann on one of the most difficult problems that seemingly divides Jews and Christians, namely Jewish monotheism and the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.¹⁴ More recently, other theologians have struggled with the statement that Yahweh is the triune God. This led to some fruitful conversations that, among other things, challenge Christian theologians to make clearer their understanding of the doctrine of the triune God and the way that this understanding relates to the Jewish understanding of the God of Israel.¹⁵ These ecumenical conversations – together, we may add, with the upsurge of Pentecostalism and its views on the Spirit – have led to a re-engagement with trinitarian theology as something at the heart of Christian discourse.

Another possible reason for the renewed interest in trinitarian theology has to do with the so-called death of theism. Some feel that the atheistic critique of philosophical theism (the belief in the existence of a supreme and beneficent being) opens new constructive possibilities for a trinitarian understanding of God. Elizabeth Johnson, for instance, argues that it is a good thing that the God of classical theism has come under such severe attack from Feuerbach, Marx and Freud as well as from Barth, Bonhoeffer and liberation and feminist theologians. While these various assaults may be viewed as attacks on faith, Johnson thinks, with Bonhoeffer, that they are 'a providential clearing of the deck so that precisely the relational Christian God can be rediscovered'.¹⁶

13 For a thorough study on the relational model in the work of Richard of St Victor, see Nico ten Bok 1996.

14 Lapide & Moltmann 1981.

15 See also Soulen (1999), Logister (2000) and Bruce Marshall (2000). For some very important and challenging perspectives in this regard, see also the articles of Peter Ochs, 'The God of Jews and Christians', David Ellenson 'A Jewish View of the Christian God: Some Cautionary and Hopeful Remarks' and David Tracy, 'God as Trinitarian: A Christian Response to Peter Ochs'.

16 Johnson 1997:302. On the relationship between the attack on theism and the revival of trinitarian theology, see also Schwöbel's editorial introduction to *Trinitarian Theology Today*. In the same book Ingolf Dalferth writes in his essay: 'Anti-theism, then, i.e. the rejection of Enlightenment theism, its consequences and its antithesis (atheism), has been one of the major motifs for trinitarian theology today' (1995:149). It seems as if there is a growing consensus that Christian theology must be trinitarian in character to move beyond the barren

A third reason relates more directly to our concerns in this essay. It has to do with identity, pluralism and otherness. It seems to be the case that a trinitarian focus holds the promise of a more adequate rethinking of the relation between the one and the many, sameness and difference, identity and otherness. For instance, David Cunningham writes: 'The doctrine of the Trinity calls into question our assumption that the categories of oneness and difference are incommensurable, incompatible, or even necessarily in tension with one another. The doctrine is thus an implicit critique of the dominant philosophical tradition of the West, in which "otherness" is associated primarily with fragmentation and revolt.'¹⁷ In a collection of essays *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion* we also read in the Introduction: '(T)he doctrine of the Trinity, with its dual emphasis on one-ness and three-ness as equally ultimate, contains unexpected and hitherto unexplored resources for dealing with the problems, and possibilities, of contemporary pluralism.'¹⁸ These remarks are in some way representative of the widespread assumption in trinitarian theology that the doctrine of the Trinity holds immense potential for dealing with the challenges of otherness and pluralism. While there is by no means consensus on how this is the case, it does seem as though there is a growing emphasis on the promise of a trinitarian focus for a clearer conceptualisation of the relation between identity and otherness, sameness and difference, the self and the other.

If we can state that there is pluralism in God, then it seems that our view of God offers a resource to embrace pluralism. Hence the great attraction of thinking in social categories about the Trinity. While Barth and Rahner can be described as mono-personal trinitarians, theologians such as Moltmann, Boff, Pannenberg, Johnson and others embrace in different ways some form of social trinitarianism.¹⁹ This often implies a

alternatives of theism and atheism. See also Dietrich Ritschl, *The Logic of Theology* (1997). Ritschl points to the fact that 'classical theism allows no freedom – it requires the sacrifice either of our own humanity or of belief in God. The biblical understanding of God ... takes quite different courses from classical theism' (140).

17 Cunningham 1999:8.

18 Vanhoozer 1996:x.

19 In *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, Moltmann critiques Barth and Rahner for opting to protect the sovereignty of God by speaking respectively of the Trinity as 'three modes of Being' and 'three modes of subsistence' of the One God. Moltmann feels this leaves the door open too wide for monarchianism. Hence he develops a social doctrine of the Trinity in which 'God is a community of Father, Son and Spirit, whose unity is constituted by mutual indwelling and reciprocal interpenetration' (viii). This makes it possible to view the divine sociality not as a single ruler, but as a democratic community, not in the lordship of the man over the

critique of Augustine's psychological or mental doctrine of the Trinity and a revisiting of the thought of Eastern theology (and especially the Cappadocians) or, remaining in the West, the more relational trinitarian theology of Richard of St Victor. Hence the popularity of the description of the triune God as persons-in-relation, or the use of the patristic notion of *perichoresis* to describe the inter-trinitarian life of God. Whether we adhere to a strong social doctrine or (like Barth) speak of modes of being or (like Rahner) of modes of subsistence, it is nonetheless clear that the doctrine of the Trinity at least holds the promise of locating plurality not merely within the world or the church, but within the life of the Godhead.

Before we discuss these issues more fully, it seems clear that trinitarian theology at least holds the promise of dealing faithfully and creatively with the challenge of pluralism and otherness. It points to the possibility of a 'relational ontology' that can challenge modern notions of personhood.

Within a culture of pluralism, it is also the case that trinitarian theology becomes important to *identify* the Christian God. As Robert Jenson writes:

In the foreseeable future the life of the Western world will be very like that of the declining Mediterranean antiquity, in which trinitarian language was first created presenting a different divine offering at every street corner. For Christian discourse to be intelligible, we shall have to accept our place as one item of this pluralism and make clear – first and principally to ourselves – which God we mean, before we venture on his reality or characteristics. Therefore the Western Church must now either renew its trinitarian consciousness or experience increasing impotence and confusion.²⁰

woman but in their equal mutuality, not in their ecclesial hierarchy but in a fellowship church. For one of the many discussions of Moltmann's doctrine of the Trinity, see Richard Bauckham, 'Jürgen Moltmann's *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God and the Question of Pluralism*' (1996). In his book *Trinity and Society* (1988), Leonardo Boff, like Moltmann, uses 'social language'. The title of the introduction makes this clear: 'From the solitude of One to the Communion of Three.' If God were mere unity, there would be solitude. If God were two, there would be separation and exclusion. But, argues Boff, God is three, a Trinity, and being three avoids solitude, overcomes separation and surpasses exclusion. Reading Boff it is clear that he sees the divine community as a model for human community in such a way that it provides the basis for social liberation. For a more qualified plea for a 'social' understanding of the Trinity, see also Pannenberg's chapter 'The Trinitarian God' 1999:259–336, as well as Elizabeth Johnson's *She Who Is*, 1992:191–245.

20 Jenson 1982:ix.

Hence trinitarian theology seems to be important in a culture of pluralism to identify the Christian God – and thus to exclude false gods. Such a trinitarian identification of God helps us to relocate pluralism within God and thus find our inspiration and empowerment to be open towards the other and otherness from our participation in Christ and through the Spirit in this Triune life.

2.3 The doctrine of the Trinity as second order symbol

If we describe hospitality as the openness to, or welcoming of, the other and otherness, it does indeed seem to be the case that trinitarian discourse can offer rich possibilities for a creative rethinking of an ethic of hospitality – an ethic which celebrates otherness without forfeiting identity. Before travelling further along this road, however, it must be noted that not all trinitarian roads are worth travelling. For instance, the doctrine of the Trinity can be used as a heavy super-structure that opens the door for a speculative ‘top-down’ approach to theology in which the doctrine of the Trinity serves in an oversimplified manner as a mere model for our views on personhood, the church and society. It may be worthwhile to quote the German theologian Michael Welker’s sobering remark in a footnote on trinitarian theology at length:

Whereas trinitarian theology has been quite successful in warding off theological errors and heresies, particularly in the early church, in my opinion its constructive contributions have been relatively modest. Quite contrary to the assertion expressed again and again that trinitarian theology is the centre of dogmatics, and that all the dogmatic parts are, or should at least be, stamped and penetrated by this different picture, they either dogmatize very meagre or use completely vague basic ideas of God (e.g. ‘relationality,’ ‘sociality,’ ‘unity and plurality’), or in a reductionist way introduce anthropological phenomena or figures of thought into the doctrine of God and into the overall connections of systematic theology, such as the important, but from a trinitarian points of view insufficient, experience of an encounter of two persons (I–Thou) as aspects of the relation of interpersonal love. Or, completely docetic, they drift above human experiences and the experiences of God expressed in biblical traditions. The fact that they thus use religious symbols in more or less open, conscious or unconscious, ways to strengthen patriarchal or other ideological views of the world can be demonstrated by numerous examples.²¹

21 Welker 1998:319.

In this remark, Welker indicates a number of important challenges for thinking about the promise of trinitarian theology. Welker points to the danger of introducing foreign notions back into the doctrine of the Trinity. This becomes possible when we separate doctrine from what Welker calls the ‘human experiences and experiences of God expressed in biblical traditions’. This opens the door to a speculative and abstract theology that seems to be defenceless against charges of idealising and ideologising. The doctrine of the Trinity, as ‘second-order’ language, can never be separated from the ‘first-order’ language of Scripture as heard, read and performed in faith communities. We need to be reminded that, as Donald Juel notes, ‘(f)ull-blown trinitarian faith is a later, creative interpretation of the biblical witness by the church’.²² In his book *GOD as Trinity*, the Lutheran theologian Ted Peters also reminds us that the doctrine of the Trinity is a second-order symbol and that we must be careful to use the symbol to serve as an ethical ideal or divine model for human society. He comments, ‘There is a better way, namely, to appeal to the primary biblical symbol that is already directed toward human community. I suggest the kingdom or reign of God.’²³ Peter’s remark is important. With regard to this paper’s focus on hospitality, it needs to be stated that the notion of the reign of God also serves as a powerful metaphor for rethinking what it means that the God depicted in Scripture is a welcoming God. Any attempt to relate the doctrine of the Trinity to the moral life in such a way that these first-order symbols are suppressed does an injustice to the rich biblical accounts. This does not mean that we must not, for instance, use the doctrine of the Trinity when thinking about ethical matters, but that we must use it in a ‘soft’ manner – more like a guiding light than as something cast in stone.

However, also with regard to notions such as the kingdom or reign of God, the questions can be asked: the reign of *which* God? How do we *identify* this God? Hence the need for second-order symbols as an attempt to, as Karl Rahner puts it, ‘say once more what we have heard.’²⁴ The doctrine of the Trinity is therefore important as a type of condensed narrative that can illuminate the first-order symbols.

2.4 The immanent and the economic Trinity

These concerns mentioned above have been manifested in an uneasiness to separate the so-called immanent and economic Trinity. In early twentieth-century theology, which inherited the strong emphasis on divine transcendence from the nineteenth century, the Trinity was often

22 Donald Juel 1997:.

23 Peters 1993:184, 185.

24 Rahner 2001:80.

viewed from two different viewpoints. The ‘immanent Trinity’ was used to portray Father, Son and Holy Spirit as they are within God’s own inner life. The notion of the ‘economic Trinity’ was used to refer to God as Father, Son and Spirit at work outside the divine life in the world.

In his famous treatise on the doctrine of the Trinity, Karl Rahner remarks ‘that despite their orthodox confession of the Trinity, Christians are in their practical life almost mere “monotheists”. We must be willing to admit that, should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged ... One has the feeling that, for the catechism of the head and the heart (as contrasted with the printed catechism), the Christian’s idea of the incarnation would not have to change at all if there were no Trinity’.²⁵ Rahner continues to critique the way in which the treatise ‘On the One God’ has been separated from the treatise ‘On the Triune God’ (since the thirteenth century, but with earlier roots)²⁶ in such a way that it looks as if everything that matters has already been said in the treatise ‘On The One God’. This treatise can easily become quite philosophical and abstract and hardly refers to salvation history at all. For Rahner, the isolation of the treatise of the Trinity has to be wrong, for there has to be a connection between God and humans, because the Trinity is a mystery of *salvation*. Hence Rahner formulates his basic thesis (often referred to as Rahner’s rule): ‘The “economic” Trinity is the “immanent” Trinity, and the “immanent” Trinity is the “economic” Trinity.’²⁷ There is no inner Trinity apart from the economy of salvation. Rahner writes: ‘God relates to us in a threefold manner, and this threefold, free and gratuitous relation to us is not merely a copy or an analogy of the inner Trinity, but the Trinity itself, albeit as freely and gratuitously communicated.’²⁸ Many theologians have commented on Rahner’s thesis. It seems, in Ted Peters’s words, to mark ‘a decisive watershed in twentieth-century trinitarian thinking’.²⁹

25 Ibid. 2001:10, 11.

26 See also LaCugna’s [note 647] revealing remark: ‘While the separation of the ‘economy’ and ‘theology’, implicit at Nicaea, allowed Athanasius and the Cappadocians to effectively counter Arianism, the distinction also made it possible for the Christian theology of God, specifically, trinitarian theology, to develop to some extent apart from soteriology’ (1991:43).

27 Rahner (note 665) 22.

28 Ibid. 35.

29 Peters 1993:102. Peters also recalls Walter Rasper’s warning against possible misinterpretations. Firstly we would misinterpret Rahner if we understand the economic Trinity as a mere temporal manifestation of an eternal immanent Trinity, because history really counts. Secondly

Catherine LaCugna, whose thought is deeply influenced by Rahner, feels that Rahner's axiom needs interpretation and application. She sees the great merit of Rahner's axiom that no adequate distinction can be made between the doctrine of the Trinity and the economy of salvation. Or to use the notions she embraces in her study, there is an essential unity between *oikonomia* and *theologia*. She continues, however, to point out that with regard to this unity, 'there cannot be a strict identity, either epistemological or ontological, between God and God for us'.³⁰ There is an essential unity, but not a strict identity. Hence her principle: 'Theologia is fully revealed and bestowed in *oikonomia*, and *oikonomia* truly expresses the ineffable mystery of theologia.'³¹ And further: 'The economy is not a mirror dimly reflecting a hidden realm of intradivine relations; the economy is God's concrete existence as Christ and as Spirit ... Economy and theology are two aspects of one reality: the mystery of divine-human communion.'³² LaCugna asks for a revision, which she views as a return to the biblical and pre-Nicene pattern of thought, that suggests not merely that we abandon the misleading terms of immanent and economic Trinity, but that we also 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. Similarly, *theologia* is not the Trinity *in se*, but, more modestly and simply, the mystery of God. In all, LaCugna, while making some helpful qualifications and critiquing the language of immanent and economic Trinity, seems to reinstate Rahner's basic intention that trinitarian theology is nothing more than a theology of the economy of salvation. While LaCugna admits that it is true that the distinction between economic and immanent Trinity goes back to the old distinction between *oikonomia* and *theologia* (as Jüngel notes), it is only legitimate 'as a conceptual distinction in which the economic doctrine of the Trinity deals with God's history with the world, and the immanent trinity is its summarizing concept'.³³

there is the opposite danger of interpreting Rahner's thesis to mean that the immanent Trinity is dissolved in the economy Trinity, as though the eternal Trinity first came into existence in and through history.

Peters, however, is not totally convinced by Kasper, because it seems to him as if Kasper assumes that the internal relations of the immanent Trinity are already fixed in eternity, so that what is new is merely their manifestation under the 'veil' of history. Peters own response is to propose a third way in which the relationship between time and eternity is reconceived 'so that what happens in the history of salvation becomes constitutive of the content of eternal life' (102).

30 LaCugna [note 647] 221.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid. 222.

33 Ibid. 224.

Some theologians will see in the positions of Rahner and LaCugna the dangers of pantheism and would like to keep the distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity. In an article 'The God of Jesus Christ', the reformed theologian, Colin Gunton, asks, for instance, the question whether approaches such as that of LaCugna finally escape the pantheism that results from any attempt to bring the world too close.³⁴ Over and against this, Gunton feels that the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity protects God's freedom: 'God's personal otherness from the world is needed if there is to be a true establishing of the world in its own right, as truly worldly creation.'³⁵

Miroslav Volf also finds a strict identity between the economic and the immanent Trinity untenable. For him, this would entail the belief that the world is necessarily an integral part of God's life. Volf follows Yves Congar's suggestion (in Congar's book *I believe in the Holy Spirit*) that Rahner's thesis applies only if it is not reversible, that is, that it does not imply the rule that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity. Volf writes: 'There is always a surplus in the immanent Trinity that the economic Trinity does not express.' He continues: 'And the other way around: something new is introduced within the Trinity with creation and

34 Gunton writes: 'From the logic of their position it is difficult not to conclude that there is ultimately only one reality, the divine-worldly emanation, which constitutes the world and then swallows it up.' (1997:329).

35 Ibid. 329. It needs to be said that Peters (whose approach Gunton also critiques) sees value in the immanent-economic distinction as a way to protect the freedom of God. Peters (note 670) writes: 'The reaffirmation of intimate Emmanuelism cannot be at the cost of the transcendent God who is beyond' (22). Peters call attention to the attempt of theologians like Robert Jenson, Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann to look for the identity of the economic and the immanent Trinity in eschatology. The genuine freedom of God is thus the reality of possibility, the openness to the future (to use Jenson's language). In my view this dichotomy between the freedom of God and God's relation to the world is also well addressed in the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In his book *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (1994), Charles Marsh recalls the distinction of Barth between the primary and the secondary objectivity of God. This distinction is made to protect God's aseity over his promeity (as is also the concern of Gunton), not as a way to forge a dichotomy between God in himself and God in his relation to the world, but simply to say that before all else God is God. Marsh sees Bonhoeffer's theology as 'a continuous wandering along the various paths of the secondary objectivity of revelation, attentive with an intensity not found in Barth to the inner rhythms of worldliness but by no means disregarding the majestic narrative of God's aseity inscribed by him. Bonhoeffer wants to plumb the depths of the meaning of God's promeity; to understand the earth, its riches, delights and sorrows, in all its christic grandeur' (32).

redemption – the encounter of the self-giving love of God with the world of enmity, injustice and deception.³⁶

We make the above brief remarks on the relationship between the immanent and the economic Trinity, because it seems important to take up the, albeit different, concerns of Rahner, Welker and others where we speculate about the inner life of the Godhead in a manner separated from the history of salvation. The far-reaching effect of such a separation is, in the words of Christoph Schwöbel, ‘that the scriptural witness to God’s relationship with creation in the people of Israel and in Christ is irrelevant for understanding the immanent constitution of divine Being’.³⁷

With regard to thinking about an ethic of hospitality, this implies that we must guard against grounding an ethic of hospitality in any speculative way in the inner Triune life in a way that it is divorced from the rich biblical accounts. Such attempts are fraught with dangers of idealising.

3. Relating the doctrine of the Trinity to the Christian moral life

But still the question can be posed: how do we relate the doctrine of the Trinity to the Christian life, or more specifically, to an ethic of hospitality?

One possible answer to this question is to argue that the Triune life serves as *model* for the Christian life. Though there is some possible biblical warrant for such an approach, it seems to be highly problematic to limit the moral life to such an ethic of imitation. Such an ethic of imitation fails to take the discontinuity between God’s identity and our identities seriously. What, for instance, is meant by person or relation within the Triune life is not to be equated uncritically with what we understand about human personhood or relationality. Such a discontinuity points to the importance of a hermeneutical task that is marked by struggle, interpretation, ambiguity and embodiment. While an ethic of imitation does help us to find continuity between God’s Triune life and our lives, its failure to deal adequately with the discontinuity – and, we may also add, the category – of sin ultimately turns the moral life into a cold ideal or hard law which leaves no place for grace and gratitude. With regard to trinitarian theology, the temptation is real to speculate about analogies between God’s inner trinitarian life and our vision for personhood, the church and society. While such attempts are rhetorically powerful, they are theologically suspect. These cautionary remarks do not mean that we are doomed to silence with regard to the continuities between God’s identity and ours, but they do point to the dangers of using the notion of

36 Volf 1998:407.

37 Schwöbel [note 653] 7.

imitation in an uncritical way when relating the doctrine of the triune God to the Christian moral life.³⁸

Given this critique of the notion of imitation, it can be argued that the notion of *imagination* is a more adequate notion for making the link between the Triune life and the Christian moral life. The images, metaphor and stories of the triune God fund Christian moral imaginations in a way that enables a different construal of the world that has transforming potential. For some, such a link between imagination and ethics will be problematic, especially for those who espouse certain modernistic ethical theories. For them, the focus on imagination will seem to be subjective, arbitrary and non-rational. These modernistic moral theories, however, have been highly criticised within recent moral discourse. The plea for the moral importance of the identity of the moral agent enables a broader understanding of ethics that creates the space to integrate imagination more fully into our understanding of the moral life. Such a plea for the moral importance of imagination has, among other things, the potential for a more constructive linking of goodness and beauty, or ethics and aesthetics.³⁹

While such a link between imagination and the moral life seems of paramount importance, imagination (understood in a certain way) does seem to have limitations as a moral category. It can lead to an individualistic, disembodied view of the moral life that separates imagination from Christian practices, or it can point to the importance of creative genius in such a way that the isolated, autonomous self of the Enlightenment

38 In his article '*The Trinity Is Our Social Program*', Miroslav Volf (note 677) points, in reflecting on a statement by Nicholas Fedorov, to two equally unattractive options, the one consisting in seeking to imitate the triune God with blatant disregard for the fact that we are not God and the other consisting in respecting our creaturely difference but failing our most proper human calling to be like God (1998:404,405). Volf continues: 'Between 'copying God in all respects' and 'not copying God at all' lies the widely open space of human responsibility which consists in 'copying God in some respects'' (405). Volf acknowledges that there are limits to the correspondences between the triune God and humans. He does not believe that the doctrine of the Trinity provides a social programme, but argues that it does contain the contours of the ultimate normative end to which all social programs should strive. Hence his use of the term 'social vision'. In his book *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, Volf gives a more elaborate discussion of his plea that there are broken creaturely correspondences between the triune God and humanity. See especially 191–220.

39 For a reflection on the importance of imagination for Christian ethics, see my article '*Etiek as Optiek? Oor die rol van beelde en verbeelding in die Christelike morele lewe*' (2004).

remains intact. Imagination as a moral notion certainly has the value of critiquing the subject–object dichotomy of the Enlightenment, but it needs qualification.

Given the limitations of certain constructions of the notions of imitation and imagination for providing a link between the Triune life and the Christian moral life, we can ask whether the notion of *participation* is not a more adequate notion. The Christian moral life is not merely about imitating or imagining differently, but about participation in the life of the triune God. Therefore, the Triune life is not merely a model or inspiration, but also the source that enables a Christian moral life. This does not diminish the importance of imagination, but it does qualify faithful Christian imagination as being a participatory imagination (or an imaginative participation). Such a view of the Christian moral imagination as a participatory imagination challenges the less helpful strands of modern ethical theory and holds the potential to give a more adequate account of the relationship between the doctrine of the Trinity and the Christian moral life.

4. Enriching the participatory imagination: Perichoretic hospitality

With regard to an ethic of hospitality, there is a wealth of biblical metaphors and narratives that fund our moral imagination (which has been qualified above as a participatory imagination). These metaphors and narratives serve as primary symbols. But it can also be argued that certain secondary symbols within trinitarian discourse can enliven and enrich our imaginations with regard to an ethic of hospitality, particularly with regard to the relating of the notions of identity and otherness. These notions are not abstracted from biblical accounts but can be seen as attempts ‘to say again what we have heard’ (to use Rahner’s phrase once more). These notions cannot substitute the biblical metaphors and narratives, but they can help us in the process of creative embodiment of an ethic of hospitality. While it is certainly possible to recall many such notions, the remainder of this article will focus on one such notion, namely the patristic notion of *perichoresis*, and its reception in more recent trinitarian studies.

In trinitarian studies, reference is often made to God as essentially relational. This is expressed in both the Eastern and the Western trajectories in trinitarian faith, albeit in different ways. It was agreed by the end of the fourth century that the nature of God should be thought of as a communion of persons. The verb *chorea* was sometimes used to express the idea that each person participates in others. Later this was expressed

in a noun, *perichoresis*. This term was first used in a trinitarian context by Pseudo-Cyril in the sixth century and later in the eighth century by John of Damascus.⁴⁰ The notion of *perichoresis* takes up the words of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel: ‘... believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me’ (John 14:11). As Paul Fiddes notes, the term *perichoresis* had the advantage of emphasising reciprocity and exchange in the mutual indwelling and penetration of the persons, thus expressing ‘the permeation of each person by the other, their co-inherence without confusion’.⁴¹ The Greek term was translated by two Latin terms, namely *circuminsessio* and *circumincessio*. *Circuminsessio* means that the person is contained in another, filling the space of the other, literally ‘seated’ in one another (from the words for sitting and seat, *sedere* and *sessio*). The reference is thus to a state of being. Thomas Aquinas preferred this rendering. The other Latin term, *circumincessio* (from *incedere*, to permeate), was a more active word that captured the sense of movement in and through the other (it was preferred by Bonaventura and other theologians in the West).

Something of this idea of *circumincessio* is expressed in the metaphor that was sometimes used in the Middle Ages to describe the persons of the Trinity, namely that of a divine dance. This is a powerful image and one often evoked in recent trinitarian studies. While the word *perichoresis* does not mean to dance around (it comes from *perichoreo*, not *perichoreuo*, with a short o in the middle), many find the pun on the Greek evocative. Elizabeth Johnson, for instance, writes, ‘a divine round dance modelled on the rhythmic, predictable motions of the country folk dance are [*sic*] one way to portray the mutual indwelling and encircling of God’s holy mystery’.⁴² She extends this metaphor to the art created by modern choreographers in their attempt to express something of the anguish and ecstasy of the modern spirit, signifying a more complex order. She concludes: ‘Perichoretic movement summons up the idea of all three distinct persons existing in each other in an exuberant movement of equal relations: an excellent model for human interaction and freedom and other regards.’⁴³ In similar vein, she writes elsewhere that this idea of the divine community as a divine dance serves as inspiration for human community, as well as a prophetic challenge to human relations and social

40 It can be noted that the earliest theological use of the verb *perichoreo* was in the discussion of the divinity and humanity of Christ by Gregory of Nazianzus and Maximus the Confessor. It was used to portray the reciprocity and exchange between the divine and human actions in the person of Christ (see Fiddes 2000:73).

41 Fiddes 2000:71.

42 Johnson 1992:220.

43 Ibid. 221.

structures that subordinate and marginalise. Therefore, she continues, 'the symbol of the triune God summons the church to be a community of sisters and brothers in kinship with the earth, equal partners in mutual relationship, sent to bring the world into this dance of life'.⁴⁴ Catherine LaCugna also finds the metaphor effective for its iconoclasm directed against an oppressive hierarchy: 'There are neither leaders nor followers in the divine dance, only an eternal movement of reciprocal giving and receiving, giving again and receiving again.'⁴⁵

Theologians such as David Cunningham and Paul Fiddes also refer to the communion within the Trinity as a divine dance, but the emphasis is not so much on the 'dancers' as on the pattern of the dance – more about the perichoretic movements than about the movers. As Fiddes states: 'I suggest the image of the dance makes most sense when we understand the divine persons as movements of relationship, rather than as individual subjects who have relations.'⁴⁶ Cunningham also finds the image of a divine dance useful, for it suggests order and symmetry in the midst of diversity. Given his view that God is the relationships God has, the image is, however, not a wholly happy image, 'since dances are always done by dancers, thus returning to the original problem of relationality: how to prevent it from devolving into a picture of three separate entities who are only accidentally related'.⁴⁷ Without going further into the concerns raised by Cunningham and Fiddes with regard to their critique of the notion of God as substance, it nonetheless seem clear that the notion of *perichoresis* (and its creative linking to metaphors like that of a divine dance) is a way to prevent the isolation and separation of the divine 'persons'. It enables participation. As the German theologian Eberhard Jüngel puts it: 'The doctrine of *perichoresis* helps us to formulate the concrete unity of the being of God in that we think of the modes of God as meeting one another in unrestricted participation.'⁴⁸

Jürgen Moltmann also uses the notion of *perichoresis* as a way to think about the relationship between unity and plurality: 'The doctrine of *perichoresis* links together in a brilliant way the threeness and the unity, without reducing the threeness to the unity, or dissolving the unity in the

44 Ibid. 1997:309.

45 LaCugna [note 647] 272.

46 Fiddes [note 682] 72.

47 Cunningham 1999:180.

48 Jüngel 1976:33. He also writes: 'The significance of the doctrine of *perichoresis* is that it helps us to formulate this unity of the modes of God's being among themselves as the concreteness of God's being. It is an attempt at responsible speech about God' (35).

threeness. The unity of the triunity lies in the eternal perichoresis of the trinitarian persons.⁴⁹

Catherine LaCugna sees the advantage of *perichoresis* in the fact that it avoids the pitfalls of locating the divine unity either in the divine substance (Latin) or exclusively in the person of the Father (Greek), but instead in a true communion of persons.⁵⁰

Colin Gunton also points to the value of the concept in his book *The One, the Three, and the Many*: '(I)t is a concept heavy with spatial and temporal conceptuality, involving movement, recurrence and interpenetration; and secondly that it is an implication of the unity-in-variety of the divine economic involvement in the world.'⁵¹

The few quotations above point to the fact that many trinitarian theologians view the doctrine of *perichoresis* as a creative image for portraying both relatedness and particularity, both identity and otherness. The notion of *perichoresis* seemingly conveys something of a hospitable participation between the divine 'persons'. It calls up the image of the Triune identity as not a self-enclosed identity but as a self-giving and other-receiving identity. If we believe that humans are created in the image of this triune God, these perichoretic relationships serve as a powerful model and source for lives that challenge the notions of the isolated individual, enclosed identity and cosy homogeneity.

Furthermore, the notion of *perichoresis* is a rich spatial notion that implies movement and mobility, or, as Paul Fiddes puts it: 'The idea of perichoresis kept alive, within the theological system itself, is a challenge to the dominating God whose power lies in immobility and in being secure from being affected by a changing world.'⁵²

It is, however, important to note that the notion of *perichoresis* is not about a self-enclosed and self-sufficient dance. No, it is open to the whole of creation: 'There is a richness and space in the divine life, in itself and as turning outwards in the creation of the dynamic universe that is relational order in space and time.'⁵³ To use Robert Jenson's phrase: 'God is roomy'.⁵⁴ Or as Jürgen Moltmann expresses this hospitable openness of the triune God: 'The Trinitarian relationships of the Father, the Son and

49 Moltmann 1981:175. For a more recent discussion of Moltmann on the notion of *perichoresis*, see his essay '*Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology*' (2000).

50 LaCugna [note 687] 271.

51 Gunton 1991:163.

52 Fiddes [note 682] 74.

53 Gunton [note 692] 164.

54 Jenson [note 661] 226.

the Holy Spirit are so wide that the whole of creation can find space, time and freedom in it.⁵⁵

In summary, we can say that the notion of *perichoresis* seems to imply that there is a reciprocity and inter-dependence between the three persons of the Trinity. This suggests that God is not an eternal solitude, but a timeful communion. There is plurality within God. What makes this notion of *perichoresis* attractive for an ethic of hospitality is, as argued, its potential to link identity and otherness in such a way that identity does not dissolve or otherwise become excluded. We see giving and receiving relationships within the interpersonal life of the triune God. The notion furthermore implies a dynamic movement within God, a movement that has an outward reach towards the whole of creation.

This notion of *perichoresis* can certainly be overburdened, but it helps us to ground an ethic of hospitality in the character or identity of God. It is necessary to note that such an emphasis does not mean that we derive our morality from the immanent Trinity in a way that is divorced from the economy of salvation. To put it differently, to speak as Christians of God's hospitality is to speak of the Cross.

Something of the notion of *perichoresis*, and the pathos of Trinitarian theology, is well illustrated in the famous icon from the 15th century by Andrei Rublev called *The Old Testament Trinity*?⁵⁶ It depicts three figures in an open circle. In the background we see the oak at Mamre. In the middle is the chalice (as symbol of the bread and the wine). The icon recalls the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah towards the three messengers. The Catholic feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson summarises well the attraction of this icon for an ethic of hospitality:

55 Moltmann [note 690] 109.

56 The frequent reference to Rublev's icon reflects something of the fact that the renaissance in Trinitarian theology correlates with the renewed dialogue between Western and Orthodox theologians on Trinitarian 'matters'. Many theologians refer to the inspiring character of this icon. Moltmann had a picture of the icon in front of him when he wrote his book *The Trinity and the Kingdom*. Konrad Kaiser comments as follows on the social implications of this icon: 'The cup, which in Orthodox tradition contains both the bread and the wine, is the central message of this icon for the world ... The eucharist cup calls for a daily sharing of bread and of material and spiritual resources with the millions of hungry people in the world. Through them God, the Trinity, comes on pilgrimage to us at every moment.' This comment of Kaiser is quoted in Larry Rasmussen's *Moral Fragments and Moral Community* (1993:157) and Rasmussen himself notes that he also has a copy of Rublev's icon in his office. For inspiring meditations on Rublev's icon, see Limouris, *Icons: Window on Eternity* (1990) and Paul Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty* (1990).

What this image suggests is that the mystery of God is not a self-contained or closed divine society but a communion in relationship. Moreover, its portrayal of the figures evokes the idea that this divine communion is lovingly open to the world, seeking to nourish it. As you contemplate, you intuitively begin to grasp that you are invited into this circle ... This is a depiction of a trinitarian God capable of immense hospitality, who calls the world to join the feast.⁵⁷

A trinitarian framework that incorporates in a qualified manner the notion of *perichoresis* indeed seems to be promising for a Christian ethic of hospitality. It depicts the triune God as a hospitable and welcoming communion of love. The triune God is the self-giving and other-receiving Host. Through the sacrificial giving in Christ, a gift of hospitality *par excellence*, humans (and the rest of creation) are invited and enabled to participate in the Triune feast of love. In Christ and through the Spirit, it becomes possible to embody what can be called perichoretic hospitality. This serves as a challenge against the isolation from the other and otherness, as well as the loss of particularity through our openness. It holds the potential to emphasise the need for an openness towards otherness without forfeiting identity (contra liberalism), as well as to emphasise identity in such a way that we need not kill others to safeguard our identity (contra nationalism).

We need to keep in mind that notions from trinitarian discourse, like *perichoresis*, are second-order symbols. These notions, however, can be viewed as creative attempts to depict something of the richness of the images, metaphors and narratives of Scripture that portray the God of Israel and Jesus as a hospitable God. Such a process of claiming and reclaiming adequate notions to describe the welcoming God is a continual process. In this regard, hopefully, trinitarian theology will continue to play an important role to free our imaginations and enable truthful speech and faithful lives.

57 Johnson 1997:299.