A CRITICAL RE-EXAMINATION OF KARL RAHNER'S *GRUNDAXIOM*: THE AXIOMATIC UNITY OF THE "ECONOMIC" AND "IMMANENT" TRINITY

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Introduction

Among Catholic theologians, Karl Rahner is regarded as a preeminent figure in the revitalization of Trinitarian theology, whose work profoundly shaped the way other theologians think about the Trinity and its relevance for Christian life and mission. In *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, Catherine Mowry LaCugna commends Rahner for having done so much "to reawaken interest in trinitarian theology... [which] is a profound meditation on the essential unity of 'theology' and economy."[1] Certainly, LaCugna is just one among many "ecumenical" theologians who ascribe to Rahner—especially to the milestone publication of his book, *The Trinity*—the profound and lively contemporary understanding and appreciation of the theology and place of the Trinity in our Christian life. In her "Introduction" to Rahner's *The Trinity*, she underscores the seminal importance of Rahner's landmark opus for Catholic dogmatic theology when she writes: "Rahner's book launched one of the most significant theological developments of the last few decades: the restoration of the doctrine of the Trinity

1. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1973), 222.

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to its rightful place at the center of the Christian faith."[2] For Neil Ormerod, this was the aim of Rahner's work: "to bring Trinitarian doctrine and theology back into the centre of Christian theology, in particular bringing it into direct contact with Christology and the theology of grace."[3]

Rahner himself commented in his "Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise '*De Trinitate*'" and in his *The Trinity* that despite the deep and genuine mysticisms of the Trinity in the lives of such great saints as Bonaventure, Ignatius of Loyola, John of the Cross, and Blessed Elisabeth of the Holy Trinity—to cite a few of those he mentioned—"Christians, for all their orthodox profession of faith in the Trinity, are almost just 'monotheists' in their actual religious experience,"[4] that "should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged."[5] Rahner took offense at neo-scholasticism for constructing a doctrine of the Trinity that is allegedly fundamentally disconnected from the revelation and experience of God in salvation history and that has nothing to do with the goals and ends of Christian life, which is salvation in God.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a critical re-examination of Rahner's *grundaxiom* on the identity of the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity by presenting arguments that support the first part of Rahner's Rule (as some people call it) while challenging the second part. Consequently, we will

2. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "Introduction," in Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1967), xxi.

3. Neil Ormerod, "Wrestling with Rahner on the Trinity," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 68 (2003): 213.

4. Karl Rahner, "Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise 'De Trinitate'" in *Theological Investigations*, IV (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 79. Cf. Rahner, *The Trinity*, 10.

5. Rahner, *The Trinity*, 10-11. Cf. Rahner, "Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise '*De Trinitate*,'" 79.

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draw on the work of other theologians to provide an in-depth analysis and nuanced evaluation of Rahner's *grundaxiom*.

Overview of Karl Rahner's *Grundaxiom* in *The Trinity*

Rahner's trinitarian theology, developed systematically in his book, *The Trinity*,[6] and partly in his article, "Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise 'De Trinitate,'" is encapsulated in his famous but controversial axiom, *"[t]he 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity"* (22; emphasis in the original), or "the Trinity of the economy of salvation is the immanent Trinity and vice versa."[7] This identification between the "economic" and "immanent" Trinity is, for Rahner, "axiomatic," his basic axiom (*grundaxiom*). First, let us define the key terms in Rahner's axiom. For Rahner, the "economic" Trinity refers to God's activity and presence in the world, manifested in the joint mission of the Son and Spirit in the works of redemption and sanctification in salvation history, and is thus the historical manifestation of the eternal self-communication of God within the spheres of time and history. The "Immanent" Trinity, on the other hand, refers to the divine persons of Father, Son, and Spirit in reciprocal relationships to one another "within" the Godhead.[8]

In *The Trinity*, Rahner presents his three chief Christological and Trinitarian convictions:

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6. Cf. Since this section primarily tackles Rahner's *The Trinity*, I will merely mention the book's page number(s), whenever I quote it or refer to it, to conserve space. I will also only discuss a few of the book's most pertinent arguments in support of his axiomatic unity between the "economic" Trinity and the "immanent" Trinity, and not all of the Trinitarian arguments of the entire book.

7. Rahner, "Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise 'De Trinitate,'" 87.

8. Cf. LaCugna, "Introduction," xiii-xiv; LaCugna, *God for Us*, 211-212.

[1] that *only* the Logos, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, could have been incarnated (11, 120); "[t]he second divine person, God's Logos, is man, and only he is man" (23);

[2] "that the incarnation of precisely this person can tell us... about the peculiar features of *this* person within the divinity" (11); and

[3] that God's self-communication to human beings, which is precisely what we mean by uncreated grace, is God's communication of his very *self* to humans and not merely of some "created" effects of grace (22).

Rahner argues that we can have knowledge of the immanent Trinity by considering the economic Trinity, that "the doctrine of the 'missions' is from its very nature the starting point for the doctrine of the Trinity" (48), that "the experience of faith which assures us that the incomprehensible God is really, as he is in himself, [is] given to us in the... twofold reality of Christ and his Spirit" (55). To prove this claim, Rahner tries to demonstrate that the "missions" of the Son and the Spirit *ad extra* are not mere "appropriations" but are revelatory of the inner life of the immanent Trinity. For him, the Incarnation "belongs to the Logos alone" (23), and is not just appropriated to him, even if it is "casually effected by the whole Trinity" (23). Likewise, grace should not be understood solely as "created" effects in us caused by God in an *efficient* way, or that it is merely "appropriated" to the third person of the Trinity (the Holy Spirit), even if it is the work of the entire Trinity; rather, it is to be considered as God's self-communication (22-23).

For Rahner, the Incarnation, which is the "mission" of the Logos alone (24-25), is "a dogmatically certain 'instance'" of proper roles in the economy (27). The proposition that any of the three divine persons could have been incarnated is, for Rahner, not supported and "demonstrated" by the Scriptures

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and the Church Fathers, and hence "false," so that it cannot be argued "that 'hypostasis' is in God a univocal concept with respect to the three divine persons" (29). Also, according to Rahner, such a proposition "would create havoc with theology" as "[t]here would no longer be any connection between 'mission' and the intra-trinitarian life" (30). If this happens, the redemptive mission of the Logos would tell us nothing about his eternally-begotten relationship with the Father. Hence, "we cling to the truth that the Logos is really as he appears in revelation, that he is *the one* who reveals to us... the triune God, on account of the personal being which belongs exclusively to him, the Father's Logos" (30). Since, the human nature of Jesus "is the constitutive, real symbol of the Logos himself... the Logos with God and the Logos for us, the immanent and the economic Logos, are strictly the same" (33).

Likewise, Rahner asserts that the Trinity revealed in salvation history is the same Trinity that exists eternally, and this unity is grounded in the experience of God's grace (34-38). For him, if God's communication is a *self*-communication, which is what uncreated grace is, then it is the entire Trinity that is communicated, whereby "each one of the three divine persons communicates himself to man in gratuitous grace in his own personal peculiarity and diversity" (34-35), and where "these three self-communications are the self-communication of the one God in the three relative ways in which God subsists" (35). God indeed "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 this Trinity itself, albeit as freely and gratuitously communicated" (35).

Furthermore, for Rahner, this self-bestowal of God to human beings happens not out of a mere *efficient* causality, which is a result of created grace, but rather by virtue of a *quasi-formal*

causality, which means none other than the indwelling of the Trinity in the human, God's very offer of himself to man, something that, for Rahner, is intrinsic to human nature (35-37). "God's self-communication is truly a *self*-communication. He does not merely indirectly give his creature some share of himself *by* creating and giving us created and finite realities through his omnipotent *efficient* causality. In a *quasi-formal* causality he really, and in the strictest sense of the word, bestows himself" (36).

Let me delve deeper into two key insights from the preceding paragraph. Rahner's expression—"quasi-formal causality"—is an important expression for him in trying to explain how God can become and remain an intrinsic, constitutive principle of the human person without ceasing to be divine, and without the human ceasing to be a creature. To understand how this is possible, we must distinguish between two kinds of causality or causes: efficient and formal. Whereas in efficient causality, God effects something different from himself, such as in the act of creation, in formal causality, God exerts a different kind of causality, which Rahner calls "quasi-formal causality." In his self-bestowal to a spiritual subject, God does not create an effect different from himself, but rather communicates himself, a self-communication in which God becomes the intrinsic co-constitutive element of the human subject on account of the divine self-communication to this creature. Thus, God becomes the formal cause of the spiritual subject's supernatural acts, without ceasing to be God and without the human ceasing to be human. Rahner appends the prefix "quasi" to ensure that despite God becoming and acting as the formal cause of our graced acts, he remains the wholly infinite, transcendent, and sovereign God; that God does not lose himself in his divine self-communication to the human but rather preserves absolutely intact his divine essence and his

radical freedom.[9] An essential insight that follows consequently from this idea or is fundamentally rooted in it is Rahner's *The Trinity*'s third Christological and Trinitarian conviction previously mentioned (22): that, in God's self-communication in grace to the human, God is not communicating something *about* himself but *his* very self, which is the primary meaning of grace. In *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Rahner contends that, in the divine self-communication to the human, "God in his own most proper reality makes himself the innermost constitutive element of man," that "what is communicated is really God in his own being," that what God offers is "himself in his own reality," that "God... does not give some numinous, mysterious gift which is different from himself, but... gives himself."[10]

In closing, let me reiterate that for Rahner, there are "two distinct yet related ways... of the free gratuitous self-communication of God... in Jesus Christ and in the 'Spirit'" (83), two distinct yet interrelated and mutually conditioning modes of free, gratuitous self-communication of God. The mysteries of the Incarnation and grace are two manifestations of the one-self-communication of the one God, and the distinctions among Father, Son, and Spirit that are experienced in the history of salvation "must belong to God 'in himself', or otherwise this difference, which undoubtedly exists, would do away with God's self-communication" (100).

Critique of Karl Rahner's Basic Axiom (*Grundaxiom*)

In spite of the robust, almost universal attraction of Rahner's *grundaxiom*, many theologians have found themselves

9. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith. An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1978), 120-122; Karl Rahner, "Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace," in *Theological Investigations*, I (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd., 1974), 330-331.

10. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116, 117, 119, 125.

only willing to accept the first part of the axiom and could not bring themselves to embrace the second part.

The "Economic" Trinity Is The "Immanent" Trinity: Agreement

The statement that the "economic" Trinity *is* the "immanent" Trinity does not seem to pose any problem for most theologians. In fact, for Walter Kasper, it can be argued that "what Karl Rahner sets down as a basic principle, reflects a broad consensus among the theologians of the various churches."[11] As initially examined, the identity of the "economic" and "immanent" Trinity means that God absolutely and entirely gives Godself to the human without remainder, and that, therefore, what is communicated, revealed, and given in the economy of salvation is God as he is in himself.[12] Reiterating Rahner's basic idea, John J. O'Donnell, in his book, *The Mystery of the Triune God*, says: "God does not want to offer something other than himself but himself. The Giver and the Gift are identical in the act of revelation."[13] For Rahner, the historical dimension of God's self-communication establishes the order of theological knowledge, as we always theologize on something revealed—revealed in salvation history. The divine economy of salvation, manifested in the missions of Christ and the Spirit in the world and history, is the starting point for knowledge of the eternal mystery of God, the only legitimate starting point for a theology of God.

Even the International Theological Commission, in its 1981 document entitled "Theology, Christology, Anthropology,"

11. Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1984), 274.

12. Cf. LaCugna, "Introduction," xvi.

13. John J. O'Donnell, *The Mystery of the Triune God* (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd., 1988, 29.

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has given its *imprimatur* to this expression. Following Rahner and others who agree with him in the first part of the axiom, the Commission affirms that the Trinity revealed in salvation history is the same Trinity that exists eternally, and that it is this immanent Trinity that is communicated freely and gratuitously in the economy of salvation. Indeed, the economic Trinity is "for us the only definitive source of all knowledge of the mystery of the Trinity;" thus, "[t]he elaboration of the doctrine of the Trinity had its beginnings in the economy of salvation."[14] Similarly, Luis Ladaria observes that "[i]n the life of Jesus, in the revelation of the 'economic Trinity,' we see opening before us the mystery of the immanent Trinity."[15]

Rahner's trinitarian theology is premised on the belief that God is by nature self-communicating: the Father communicates the divine essence by "uttering" the Son in the Incarnation and bestowing the Spirit who makes possible our human response in grace. If God is by nature self-communicating, then God, who necessarily what God is, must communicate Godself, otherwise—and at the risk of being tautologous—he would cease being self-communicating. From this perspective, if the Triune God revealed by Jesus in the economy of salvation is not who God is *in se*, then God has not really communicated himself at all. For Rahner, God's self-communication as grace must—if it is a real self-communication—reflect the divine nature and thus the Trinity, for the gift that God truly offers to the human is nothing but God's own self, his very self. "[T]he God who is

14. International Theological Commission, "Theology, Christology, Anthropology," *International Theological Commission Texts and Documents 1969-1985* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 215.

15. Luis Ladaria, *The Living and True God* (Miami: Convivium Press, 2010), 42.

revealed to us appears before us just as he is. Otherwise, there would not be a true revelation."[16]

For if it true that God really has communicated himself in our salvation history, i.e., if the one Holy Mystery has offered himself (and not something other than himself) in the incarnation and grace, then it follows, as Rahner argues, that God in his own life must also exist in these three modes of being. If God has held nothing back in his revelation, then God in his own life is as he is in his revelation. If God in his revelation is three-fold, then God in his infinite Being is trinitarian Mystery.[17]

God's self-communication in the world through Christ and the Spirit must take place in accord with the immanent self-expression of God the Father to the Son in the Spirit. Indeed, what we see God doing in the world and history mirrors the relationships of the Father, Son, and Spirit in eternity.

Indeed, the divine economy of salvation through Christ and the Spirit fully expresses what God is in himself; hence, no matter how mysterious God is and remains, this God will not turn out to be different from the God revealed in salvation history. The identity of the economic and immanent Trinity means that what God has revealed and communicated in Christ and the Spirit is the reality of God as God is eternally, immanently, for what is given in grace "is not merely a copy or an analogy of the inner Trinity, but this Trinity itself, albeit as freely and gratuitously communicated," since "[t]hat which is communicated is precisely the triune personal God" (35-36). Echoing Rahner's thought, Walter Kasper, in his book, *The God of*

16. Ladaria, *The Living and True God*, 50. Ladaria also writes: "If he did not give himself to us as he is, he would not be giving himself. If he did not manifest himself as he is, he would not be revealing himself to us" (Ibid., 56).

17. J. O'Donnell, *The Mystery of the Triune God*, 35.

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Jesus Christ, explains: "[This] self-communication in the history of salvation would not truly be God's self-communication unless it also belonged to God in himself, unless the economic Trinity were also the immanent Trinity."[18] For Kasper,

> God's action through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit is therefore truly God's saving action only if we are dealing with God himself and if God himself is there for us as he is in himself. The economic Trinity would thus be deprived of all meaning if it were not at the same time the immanent Trinity.[19]

Moreover, from the soteriological point of view, the "economic" Trinity must be the "immanent" Trinity; otherwise, salvation would not be possible because only God saves. "This salvation would be undermined if we did not really have to do with God himself."[20] Luis Ladaria, in his book, *The Living and True God*, sums it up: "There is thus a correspondence between the economic and the immanent Trinity, they are the same, they are not distinguished adequately. In this respect, there is no doubt that the postulate set forth by Rahner, at least in its first part, is both legitimate and necessary."[21] Kasper concludes that the economic Trinity "has meaning and significance only if God is present in the history of salvation as the one who is from eternity; more accurately, if God does not simply show himself to us as Father, Son and Spirit in the history of salvation, but is in fact Father, Son and Spirit from all eternity."[22] John Galvin recapitulates the argument in this section in these words:

18. Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 301.

19. Ibid., 274.

20. O'Donnell, *The Mystery of the Triune God*, 3

21. Ladaria, *The Living and True God*, 56.

22. Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 276.

> The basic principle is that the way God reveals himself corresponds to the way he is in reality. In more technical theological vocabulary, the "economic Trinity" (God as he reveals himself in the history, or economy, of salvation) is the same as the "immanent Trinity" (God as he is eternally in himself). Were this not so, God's self-communication would not be genuine self-gift and self-revelation. Thus our threefold experience of God, the holy mystery — as incomprehensible ground of his own self-gift, as present for us in our concrete history in Jesus Christ, and as transforming us in the innermost core of our existence—rightly leads us to speak of Father, Son, and Spirit, not only in our experience of God, but in the one God himself.[23]

The "Immanent" Trinity *Is* the "Economic" Trinity: Disagreement

The problem[24] lies in the second part of the axiom, of whether the "immanent" Trinity can really be strictly identical with the "economic" Trinity. In two separate places, LaCugna poses the questions in their simplest expressions: "Is God with us exactly identical to God as such?"[25] "Must there not be a

23. John P. Galvin, "The Invitation of Grace" in Leo J. O'Donovan (ed.)*: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner's Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 68.

24. Kasper seems to admit only that "the identification of the immanent and economic Trinities as established in... [Rahner's] axiom is, susceptible of several meanings and open to various interpretations," and enumerated some of the possible misinterpretations (Cf. Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 275-276). Instead of readily saying that the "vice versa" principle is wrong, Ladaria, in his interpretation of Rahner's dictum, also contents himself rather with determining "what this axiom does not mean" (Cf. Ladaria, *The Living and True God*, 57).

25. LaCugna, *God For Us*, 216.

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certain asymmetry between God '*in se*' and God '*pro nobis*'?"[26] It is easy to understand where this question is coming from. One who holds the strict identity of the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity will find it extremely difficult to avoid the almost foregone conclusion that the world and history are the stage on which God determines himself as God and, therefore, God necessarily depends on creation to be God, and that creation exists by necessity.[27] The first part of the statement robs God of his absolute freedom, sovereignty, and transcendence; the second part strips creation of its gratuity. Indeed, "even though it is quite clear that the revelation of the Trinity in the saving economy is founded on the immanent Trinity, the latter might exist without its economic manifestation."[28] Rahner's "vice versa" principle fails to provide any clue on how to maintain the freedom and gratuitousness of God's self-communication in the world and history.

In this side of the equation, we truly find a risk of conceiving an un-Christian image of God, for God will be viewed as a God who has to create the world and be incarnated in history in order to realize his own trinitarian being. If we maintain, thus, that there is no "gap" between the immanent and the economic Trinity, then it both implies a necessity on God's part to create the world for God's self-communicating *ad intra* would require a self-bestowal *ad extra*, and follows that the divine economy of salvation reveals all and contains all that is in the

26. LaCugna, "Introduction," xiv. Rahner (in the words of LaCugna) believes that "[there] is only one trinitarian self-communication, which has both eternal and temporal aspects. Rahner does not mean... that eternal and temporal realms are strictly identical, only that no gap may be inserted... between 'God' and 'God for us.'" LaCugna, *God for Us*, 216.

27. For O'Donnell, "[t]his would be the doctrine that God can only be God, can only realize himself as divine by involving himself in history" (O'Donnell, *The Mystery of the Triune God*, 38).

28. Ladaria, *The Living and True God*, 57.

immanent Trinity. Yet, God's nature as God, absolutely free and sovereign and transcendent, dictates that we singularly affirm that "God may be self-communicating *ad intra*, but God need not bestow Godself *ad extra* (creation being one moment of God's self-communication)."[29] Indeed, the immanent Trinity reveals and communicates Godself in the economy of salvation freely and gratuitously, in the freedom of love. For Ladaria, "the identity does not mean that the immanent Trinity only exists in the economic Trinity, that God becomes triune insofar as he communicates himself to humanity, or that the Trinity of persons is the result of his free decision for the purpose of this *self-communication*."[30] The immanent Trinity manifests freely and gratuitously in salvation history. Creation and Incarnation are gratuitous acts of God, a God who is not perfected with creation or with the economy of salvation, a God who has no need for humanity or for the world to be God. Ladaria believes that it is only when the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity are differentiated that divine freedom can be maintained.[31] "The immanent Trinity is not fulfilled or dissolved in the economy. It has fullness in itself, regardless of the creation and the saving work."[32] At the end of his brilliant article devoted to comparing "Augustine and Karl Rahner on the Relationship between the Immanent Trinity and the Economic Trinity" (the title itself), an article that is very sympathetic to Augustine and extremely critical of Rahner, Drayton Benner concludes:

> Rahner's basic axiom leads him into numerous theological difficulties which he could have avoided had he accepted Augustine's relationship between the economic and immanent Trinities, namely that *the two are closely related*

29. LaCugna, "Introduction," xv.

30. Ladaria, *The Living and True God*, 58.

31. Ladaria, *The LIving and True God*, 58.

32. Ladaria, *The LIving and True God*, 58.

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> *but not identical*, with the economic Trinity revealing the immanent Trinity. There may indeed be some ways in which Augustine's trinitarian theology could be improved, but Rahner's proposal that the economic and immanent Trinities are identical does not provide fertile ground for any such improvements.[33]

Reflecting on the insight of Yves Congar who asks whether God exhausts and reveals all his mystery in His self-communication in the economy of salvation, Ladaria argues that we cannot infiltrate all the mysteries of the triune God, the intra-divine life, the unity and distinction of the divine persons, the generation of the Word and the procession of the Spirit, and affirms that only in the eschatological consummation can we, humans, hope to know God fully in his self-bestowal. The immanent Trinity's self-communication in salvation history, therefore, calls for an acceptance of an element of *kenosis* and the cross that compels us to presuppose a distinction between who God is in himself and who God is for us.[34]

The International Theological Commission, in its critique of the second part of the axiom or the "vice versa," is very clear on this matter. Unequivocally, it asserts:

> The Trinity was not simply brought about in the history of salvation by means of the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, as though a historical process were necessary for God to emerge as Trinitarian. Therefore, the distinction must be maintained between the immanent Trinity, where liberty and necessity are the same thing in the eternal essence of God, and the Trinity of the economy

33. Drayton C. Benner, "Augustine and Karl Rahner on the Relationship between the Immanent Trinity and the Economic Trinity," in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9/1 (2007), 38; emphasis mine.

34. Cf. Benner, "Augustine and Karl Rahner," 61-62.

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> of salvation, where God exercises his liberty absolutely, with no suggestion of his being forced to it.[35]

For Ladaria, the identification between the economic and immanent Trinity must then be understood in two related senses:

> on the one hand God gives and reveals himself to us just as he is in himself, but that he does it freely, that is, his being is not realized or perfected in this self-communication; and that on the other hand, in this revelation God maintains his mystery, his greater nearness denotes the most direct manifestation of his greater magnificence.[36]

For the International Theological Commission, there is always "more" in the immanent Trinity that has been revealed to us and which we have known in God's economy of salvation. Additionally, the Commission affirms not only that in the mystery of Jesus Christ, the Father is revealed and communicated to us freely and gratuitously, but also that the divine persons in the Trinity lead a triune life in a most profound and almost new manner because of the economy of salvation.[37] God's saving economy has not brought perfection and growth in God, but it has "touched" the very being of God. The humanity of the Incarnate Son has entered into the life of the Trinity. The eternal relationships of the divine persons now include the humanity of the Incarnate Logos. Ladaria admits

35. International Theological Commission, "Theology, Christology, Anthropology," 216.

36. Ladaria, *The Living and True God*, 62. For Kasper, "if, then, the axiom which states the identity of the immanent and economic Trinities is not to lead to the dissolution of the immanent Trinity instead of to its substantiation, this identity must not be understood along the lines of the tautological formula A = A. The 'is' in this axiom must be understood as meaning not an identification but rather a non-deducible, free, gracious, historical presence of the immanent Trinity in the economic Trinity" (Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 276).

37. International Theological Commission, "Theology, Christology, Anthropology," 216.

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that this, in his opinion, is one of the most valuable aspects of the Commission's document, the idea that the kenotic event of the incarnation and death is assumed by the eternal Son in his life. Insofar as the Son assumes in his life these events, they affect... the very being of God the Father, who cannot live as his own, with the same Son and the Holy Spirit, the events of the temporal life of the incarnated Son. This means that the life of the Trinity, which is not constituted by virtue of these events, is lived from them in a way "almost new." In other words, even though, in relation to the saving economy, the category of necessity has no place, the former, once it has been freely decided by God, "affects" the divine life of the immanent Trinity. God has not wanted to be without us. This does not mean that the Trinity is perfected by the economy or that the economy gives the Trinity something that the Trinity had been lacking. The newness lies in the fact that the Son has entered as man into the relationships that make up the Trinity.[38]

Conclusion

We have explored the various theological challenges to Rahner's *grundaxiom*, particularly its assertion of the identity between the immanent and economic Trinity. Despite the theological "weakness" of his "vice versa" principle, it was Rahner, especially within the Catholic circle, who revived the

38. Ladaria, *The Living and True God*, 64. According to Rahner, "God's communication consists precisely in the fact that God really arrives at man, really enters into man's situation, assumes it himself, and *thus* is what [God] is" (Rahner, *The Trinity*, 89). For LaCugna, "[t]hough it is impossible to specify from God's side what is new, God is God 'in a new way' because of the world... God's self-expression in the economy of salvation thereby becomes an essential dimension of God's being as God" (LaCugna, *God For Us*, 220). Indeed, "one must acknowledge that something new happens to God in the incarnation. By virtue of his becoming flesh, God has a new mode of being in the world. We witness this in the classical thesis that God became man. As Rahner insists, we cannot so water down that nothing happens to God. Despite the classical axiom of God's immutability, the incarnation implies that God really does 'become'. As Rahner puts it, even if God is unchangeable in himself, he does become in the other, i.e. in his humanity" (O'Donnell, *The Mystery of the Triune God*, 37).

appreciation of the Trinity as the primordial mystery of our Christian life after the doctrine's isolation from the rest of the dogmatic system for more than a century. It was this great German theologian who made a strong appeal to all Christians to consider the doctrine of the Trinity seriously, not just as a doctrine about God but as the central and fundamental truth in the whole Christian theology and praxis, the doctrinal truth around which all other derived truths concerning our salvation must revolve. "The Trinity is a mystery of *salvation*, otherwise it would never have been revealed."[39] Rahner's theology of the Trinity summoned the Church back to a doctrine of God in which the story of the one God in Jesus Christ reveals the truth of the immanent Triune God who exists eternally as such, as Trinity, from all eternity. Indeed, because of, and thanks to, Rahner, it is no longer true, as he once feared, that "should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged."[40]

39. Rahner, *The Trinity*, 21; emphasis in the original.

40. Rahner, *The Trinity*, 10-11.

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