

Reponse to John Dadosky, “*Ecclesia de Trinitate: Ecclesial Foundations From Above*,” November 2-3, 2011, Marquette University Lonergan Center Conference, “Doing Systematic Theology in a Multi-Religious World.” © Thomas Hughson, S.J. 2011

### I. Prologue:

My overall response to the paper is positive. I appreciate and endorse Dr. Dadosky’s project of developing a Trinitarian ecclesiology of friendship *ad extra* that takes a step beyond a communion ecclesiology *ad intra*. I find his turn to the work of Rene Girard fruitful and illuminating. Section V on ‘Expanding the Notion of Missions’ and the Conclusion take a promising step into understanding the universal missions of the Holy Spirit and of the Son beyond the visible Church. The proposal for an ecclesiology of friendship formed in a spirit and practice of dialogue outlines a position on Church mission congruent with the best current model, Prophetic Dialogue, argued by Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder in chapter 12 of *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (2004) and in Schroeder’s subsequent books.

To indicate appreciation further, let me offer a favorable evaluation of theological method. To employ a spatial trope, two directions in Dadosky’s Trinitarian ecclesiology of friendship meet a perennial methodological challenge, namely how to combine what Bernard Lonergan and Robert Doran identify as special categories unique to theology with general categories shared with other disciplines. The directions in Dadosky’s paper are, as it were, vertical, moving from the Trinity above to the Church below and then horizontally from within the Church outward, *ad extra* toward other Christians and non-Christian religions. These two directions are how Dadosky secures the superiority of special categories unique to theology in combination with general categories. Trinity and church are special categories while friendship and dialogue are general categories. Conjunction of special and general categories in an ecclesiology of friendship does not occur by way of a method of correlation that often tends toward reducing special to general categories, leveling theological with non-theological knowledge, and reducing divine reality to human ideas. Dadosky’s theological reflection, to the contrary, respects the primacy of divine transcendence, gratuity, and initiative by giving priority to special categories ‘from above’.

His paper also has a methodological principle in common with the project, “Doing Systematic Theology in a Multi-Religious World.” Both project and paper place systematics in reference to cultural and religious contexts, concerns typical in the specialty of communications that *Method* outlines in gnomic brevity in chapter 14. Explicit consideration of *ad extra* friendship as distinguished from Christian fellowship brings systematics up to the very edge of and perhaps into the functional specialty of communications. Chapter 14 doesn’t mention interreligious dialogue but I see no reason not to extend its consideration of context and ecumenism to non-Christian religions, granting the difference between interreligious relations and ecumenical hope for Christian unity. And communications leads to an ecclesiology of friendship *ad extra* a recommendation for dialogue not only with other Christians and with non-Christian religions but for interdisciplinary dialogue with non-theological writings, authors, and ideas on the cultural and religious

context. There is nothing essential to Dadosky's paper, in fact, with which I strongly disagree. And that means further questions can be precisely focused. Three questions, an answer, and a comment follow.

## II. Question # 1

The first question asks, is there not substantial continuity between communion and friendship ecclesiologies? Both elucidate Trinitarian foundations from above, both attend to the Church having the Trinity as cause and exemplar, for both the Trinitarian missions constitute a redeemed community in modes of graced relationality-- in ecclesial communion/fellowship and in friendship centered in Christ, and in both ecclesiologies the Church's mission serves the combined missions of Christ and the Holy Spirit. At the same time, an ecclesiology of friendship modifies a communion ecclesiology by installing a primary orientation toward the Church's "ecumenical and interreligious priorities," and the 'others' that involves. Still, does not an ecclesiology of friendship *ad extra* fulfill or develop more than depart from communion ecclesiology?

## III. Question # 2

Vatican II's method and spirit of dialogue inform ecclesial friendship *ad extra*. Dialogue assumes equality in dignity between or among participants, accepts that all participants possess and offer truth though not necessarily on an agreed premise of parity in truth about God, and proceeds with a will to listen to and to learn from the others. Dialogue turns away from understandings of mission tied to 'foreign missions'. Since the 16th c even the most inspired, least nationalist or imperialist missionaries were associated willy-nilly with armed subjection of non-Western peoples. Nonetheless, the ideal of dialogical Church mission faces a theological and pastoral question. Can all dimensions of mission be subsumed into and shaped by dialogue? Schroeder's paradigm of Prophetic Dialogue has six distinct dimensions listed in the paper's Introduction: 1) witness and proclamation, 2) liturgy, prayer and contemplation, 3) justice, peace, and stewardship of creation, 4) interreligious and secular dialogue, 5) inculturation, and 6) reconciliation.

Assembling these six dimensions is one thing, explaining their inner unity is another and I submit that the Schroeder's paradigm of Prophetic Dialogue associates the six dimensions without synthesizing them, without explaining their unity, and without arranging them in an ordered relationship. Consequently, a major systematic-theological task not mentioned in the Dadosky paper looms up. In regard to the six dimensions of Prophetic Dialogue, or of any dialogical ideal for Church mission, theological reflection, and I quote Dadosky's 2011 article in *The Heythrop Journal*, "...entails bringing what Lonergan called a critical exigence to bear on the plethora of images, dimensions, etc., to uncover a basis for interrelating all of the various analogies into an explanatory account." A basis for interrelating the six dimensions of mission need not be a single, synthesizing concept but at least has to clarify an internal order among the six dimensions. Can an ecclesiology of friendship do that? Or does an ecclesiology of friendship serve the cause only of ecumenical, interreligious, and secular dialogue? Are not other dimensions of Church mission also to be re-conceived as somehow dialogical, or in some ordered relationship with dialogue? Does an

ecclesiology of friendship lend itself to the larger task of producing a dialogical paradigm for mission and not only a model still in search of a unifying paradigm?

How, for example, does an ecclesiology of friendship understand the unity or order between on one hand thought and action in Schroeder's dimension 3 (justice, peace, and stewardship of creation) with its readiness for contestation, conflict, and liberating social change, and on the other hand theologically expert engagement in dimension 4 (interreligious and secular dialogue)? At some point interreligious dialogue between Hindus and Christian has to come to terms with a caste system in India that locks millions in lower castes into oppression. Nor can an ecclesiology of Catholic friendship with other Christians and other religions cannot wall itself off from the evangelical mandate to witness to and proclaim the gospel. Of course, there are kinds of witness in service that do not involve verbal proclamation aimed at eliciting conversion. Mother Theresa witnessed to divine love in care for the poorest, mostly Hindu. The Jesuit operation of a university in Bagdad prior to the Baathist regime educated mostly Muslims. Those kinds of witness are assimilable into an ecclesiology of friendship. But has Trinitarian ecclesiology of friendship the potential for conceiving the unity and dynamic order among all six dimensions of Church mission? I am inclined to think an ecclesiology of friendship is just what Church mission needs most. But how can a witness in friendship accompany or account for an axis of interruptive witness to justice, peace, and the integrity of creation?

#### IV. Question # 3:

How can Section II's statement of a strong nature/mission distinction in the Church be squared with an ecclesiological consensus that the church is missionary by nature, so that mission is an aspect of the church's nature rather than that the church has a nature and also has a mission? Does not thinking of the nature of the church as a "distinctive identity in history, a community between the three persons in the divine Godhead" and the mission of the church as "the principal explicit mediator in history of the gospel message" perpetuate the idea that the church has a mission rather than that the church is missionary by nature?

And likewise on Section II, how can attributing mutuality to inner-trinitarian *perichoresis* not import a creaturely limit into understanding of the Trinity? 'Mutuality' carries a creaturely implication of non-transparent otherness that necessarily involves a finite coming-to-be of knowledge that I suggest cannot be removed by a *via negationis* within a *via eminentiae* without emptying mutuality of its meaning. Of course, the same question can be put to the traditional attribute of dancing-around, *perichoresis*. It too may be in need of more thinking so imagery doesn't terminate a search for understanding.

#### V. An Answer :

In Section V, 'Expanding the Notion of Missions' Dadsoky states that the inner-Trinitarian love of the divine persons overflows, "not only into creation but into an offer to the entire created order to share and

participate in this supernatural reality. This offer is ordered explicitly in the dual missions of the Son and the Spirit towards the created order.” He goes on to point out that the visible missions of Son and Spirit are accompanied by invisible missions that extend divine love to all of creation and all of humanity. Then Section VI, the Conclusion asks, “if there is an invisible mission of the Spirit, in what way can we also speak of an invisible mission of the Son?” In reply I recommend *ressourcement* of the council of Chalcedon’s two-nature Christology with attention to the divine nature of the Incarnate Logos. In *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* and other writings Jacques Dupuis spelled out the immense significance of the difference—not a separation—between the particularity of Jesus and the universality of the Logos.

Dupuis said, “The action of the Word reaches beyond the limits imposed on the operative presence of the humanity of Jesus, even in its glorified state, just as the person of the Word exceeds the human nature of Christ, the hypostatic union notwithstanding.”<sup>1</sup> Dupuis’s recognition of divine excess to the point of incommensurability internal to the hypostatic union is compelled by the Definition of Chalcedon,<sup>2</sup> affirmed by Thomas Aquinas, and integral to Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant adherence to Chalcedon and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. Dupuis emphasizes that the visible human nature of Christ and the visible Church do not encompass the total saving influence of the divine and Incarnate Logos Who also invisibly graces the authors and followers of non-Christian religions beyond the influence of Jesus’ human nature in and through visible Christianity. This salvific influence of the Logos outside the visibility of Jesus’ humanity and beyond the visible Church is the invisible mission of the Son.

Last year in a paper for this conference titled, “Classical Christology and Social Justice: Why the Divinity of Christ Matters,” I took up the universal creating influence of the divine nature of the Logos which the Creator/creature difference between Jesus’ two natures prevents from passing into the humanity of Jesus. The invisible, universal, creating and ordering act of the divine Logos Incarnate, a divine act that exceeds the capacity of Jesus’ human nature and the visible Church, is the ultimate principle for the social mission of the Church and for commitment to social justice in the social teaching of the Church.

#### VI. A Comment for Further Discussion:

A Girardian approach to Christ, redemption, sin, and grace seems really productive. Whether or not Girard always escapes a method of correlation is another question. A positive or negative answer to that question notwithstanding, a Girardian approach needs to protect itself from a debased libertarian appeal to the dynamics of envy as a thumbnail analysis of social justice and by extension any advocacy of it such as is found in Catholic social teaching. The language and dynamics of envy, without any connection to Girard’s work, have turned up on the low road of TV punditry as a premise for rejecting anything problematic about

<sup>1</sup> Dupuis, “Universality of the Word and Particularity of Jesus Christ,” 338.

<sup>2</sup> Dupuis, “Universality of the Word and Particularity of Jesus Christ,” 332.

a widening division between life opportunities available to some and the poverty, lack of education, ill health and human deprivation of many. According to this view, contrary to Jesus' parable of Dives and Lazarus, envy of the rich by the poor motivates practical and theoretical problematizing of the fact that some people purportedly by means of talent, persevering labor, willingness to risk, and good fortune amass much of the wealth and power generated in a society. The have-nots then envy the haves and seek means to take what does not belong to them. In this view, analyses, theories, and practices under the heading of social justice serve the cause of envy. Now that kind of resistance to the social dimension of the gospel entails, unknown to itself, resistance to the freely undertaken covenantal outline of a just society in Israel's Torah and in the impulses toward justice in the visible and invisible missions of the Son and the Spirit.

An appeal to Girard's work, it seems to me, becomes a platform for refuting, if only in a footnote, this kind of perverse and pernicious approval of human suffering. More, because gross inequities prevent many of our fellow human beings of all religions and none from approximating the kind of equality ordinarily thought essential to friendship. Consequently an ecclesiology of friendship has an internal principle for action in history—the necessity of large-scale movement toward a measure of equality as a condition of friendship—that supports Catholic social teaching, the human solidarity so forcefully pronounced by *Gaudium et spes*, and legitimate means for social change.

The state of the question is still open. I think it can be summed up as follows. There are four principles on which extensive consensus exists and unfinished business on a fifth. The first principle, as *Ad gentes* at Vatican II said, holds that the Church is missionary by nature, that is, not only by dominical commission in Matthew 28 and ecclesial obedience to it. Section II leaves the missionary nature of the church somewhat obscure. True, Section V says that, “the visible missions of the son and the Spirit in history...establish the Church in its authentic self-mediation to proclaim the truth of the Word and the love of the Spirit.” This statement approximates saying the Church is missionary by nature but adopting the language of ‘missionary by nature’, while open to more than one understanding, would tie the ecclesiology of friendship to an ecclesiological consensus.

The second principle is that the mission of the Church is not its own but God’s mission, *missio Dei* said Karl Barth. The divine missions of Son and Spirit constitute not only Church mission but the very existence of the Church. Your felicitous phrases affirm “foundations ‘from above’,” and “*Ecclesia de Trinitate*.” An ecclesiology of friendship likewise explicitly joins an admittedly smaller consensus around the third principle that accepts dialogue as a defining attribute of Church mission. A fourth principle recognizes that the context of mission today is post-Christendom, post-colonial, and multi-religious, something perhaps presupposed but not explicit in the paper. The fifth principle,

II. But it isn’t section II’s appropriation of Henri de Lubac’s distinction between the active and passive aspects of *ecclesia* to mean a distinction between the nature and the mission of the church. Does not that distinction set in motion a sequence of first a gathered nature and then a gathering mission? Does not baptism join believers at once not only to the passive being-gathered but also to participation in the active mission of Christ? How would the nature/mission distinction avoid an older ecclesiology that said the church ‘has a mission’ instead of ‘is missionary by nature’? Every celebration of the Eucharist has a passive aspect insofar as the gathered receive the effects of the Trinitarian missions of Son and Spirit and an active aspect insofar as believing the Word and being strengthened by the Eucharist continually make mission possible.

Also the more general theological and methodological insight in Dadosky’s exploration, namely that something in the Trinity is like or causes mutuality in church mission, deserves further consideration. However, I am not at all sure about the viability of a double analogy between the distinctness of the divine persons/distinctive nature of the church, on one hand and Trinitarian *perichoresis*/ mutuality in mission of the church on the other. To attribute mutuality, an analogy from human relationships, to *perichoresis* in the Trinity, even by a *via negationis* and *eminentiae*, adds something convivial to *perichoresis* besides the relations of origin in one and the same divine nature. Does not mutuality imply not only otherness but unknown depths in each? Without that unknown, impossible in the Trinity, what is left of mutuality?

I will suggest that something else, not a Trinitarian reality but an advance in theological thinking identified by Lonergan, has brought about or contributed to bringing about mutuality in mission. Dadosky points out in Thomas Merton's words "a stage of religious maturity at which it may be possible for someone to remain perfectly faithful to a Christian or Western monastic commitment and yet learn in depth from...a Buddhist or Hindu discipline and experience." Mission as mutual engagement rather than as unilateral proclamation and invitation owes much to new respect for what Lonergan remarked on as non-logical operations. In the sciences besides the logical operations of induction, deduction, inference, and step-by-step reasoning there are non-logical operations such as discovery, gathering data, and recognition of something new. In the life of faith besides affirmation of doctrines and values there are religious experience, liturgy, personal prayer, spontaneous appreciation, love, and connaturality with the things of God. Much of the well-known turn to experience in 20<sup>th</sup> century Catholic theology involves new respect for non-logical operations in important for theology and not only in personal and liturgical spirituality. Without ceasing being immersed in traditional doctrines and values, like Merton many people have accepted non-logical operations that have opened affinities between themselves and what they find in other Christian traditions and in other religions. And might new theological respect for non-logical operations belong to new attention to the distinct mission of the Holy Spirit in the church and world?