

***Participation or Communion? Trinitarian Reflections on Lonergan's Four-point Hypothesis\****

D. Glenn Butner, Jr.  
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Marquette University  
[david.butner@marquette.edu](mailto:david.butner@marquette.edu)

In what sense can a Trinitarian ontology be the basis of a theology of history that is capable of explaining divine grace in an adequately social way? In many respects this is the question that undergirds Robert Doran's recent publication, *The Trinity in History: A Theology of Divine Missions, Vol. 1*. For Doran, the answer lies in his attempt to link Bernard Lonergan's four-point hypothesis to Lonergan's theory of history articulated in the notion of social grace. The resulting theology is both intellectually and spiritually stimulating, but it is my belief that it has not yet completely bridged the divide between a potentially "abstract and static" Trinitarian ontology,<sup>1</sup> and a dynamic theology of history made concrete in social grace. Fortunately, I do not consider this incomplete synthesis insurmountable. Rather, it is my belief that the metaphysical and historical aspects of Doran's project can be brought into greater harmony through the category of "communion." Therefore, this paper will proceed with three goals. First, it will briefly explain the four-point hypothesis and its relation to social grace in the theology of Robert Doran. Second, it will explore the terminological ambiguity in the fourfold hypothesis and in Doran's theology surrounding the word "participation." Third, in the constructive element of the presentation, I will develop the notion of "communion" as a means of resolving some of the questions that are inadequately addressed through the term

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\* This paper contains several small modifications from the version presented at LOE 2014. These changes are predominantly in footnotes and are an attempt to clarify several points of confusion raised in the question and answer period, and are not a reversal of any positions.

<sup>1</sup> Robert M. Doran, *The Trinity in History: A Theology of Divine Missions, Vol. 1 – Missions and Processions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 140.

“participation” as the basis of a further synthesis of a theology of history and Trinitarian metaphysics.

What, then, is the four-point hypothesis? Simply put, it is a means of correlating the created grace of the divine economy with the subsistent relations of the immanent Trinity through the notion of participation. The hypothesis is presented concisely in Lonergan’s sixth chapter of *Triune God: Systematics*, which I will quote at length:

there are four real divine relations, really identical with the divine substance, and therefore there are four very special modes that ground the external imitation of the divine substance. Next, there are four absolutely supernatural realities, which are never found uninformed [i.e. in such a state that grace has departed], namely, the secondary act of existence of the incarnation, sanctifying grace, the habit of charity, and the light of glory. It would not be inappropriate, therefore, to say that the secondary act of existence of the incarnation is a created participation of paternity, and so has a special relation to the Son; that sanctifying grace is a participation of active spiration, and so has a special relation to the Holy Spirit; that the habit of charity is a participation of passive spiration, and so has a special relation to the Father and the Son; and that the light of glory is a participation of sonship, and so in a most perfect way brings the children of adoption back to the Father.<sup>2</sup>

Lonergan’s hypothesis was only briefly developed in *Triune God: Systematics*. A fuller elaboration emerged with the publication of Robert Doran’s *The Trinity in History*. His contribution has been to historicize the four created supernatural realities in an attempt to connect this Trinitarian ontology to a theory of history. Though time does not permit a full explanation at this juncture (and I will say more shortly), two important points should be noted. First, the theory of history that he is utilizing understands society as a whole to be dynamic and capable of moving toward decay through a cycle of decline, and toward redemption through social grace. Second, Doran hopes to map this

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<sup>2</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, Volume 12: The Triune God: Systematics*, ed. and trans. Michael G. Shields and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 473.

account of history onto a phenomenology that correlates with the four created supernatural realities.

To assess whether the four-point hypothesis is an adequate basis for linking Trinitarian metaphysics to a theology of history, we must first address a terminological ambiguity in the four-point hypothesis. The primary terminological ambiguity arising from the four-point hypothesis centers on the term “participation.” This term is the basis for answering the question of how the four created realities of the *esse secundarium*, sanctifying grace, charity, and the light of glory are related to the four subsistent relations of paternity, active and passive spiration, and filiation. Each created term is a participation in a subsistent relation. Unfortunately, the word “participation” is not thoroughly defined in Lonergan’s *Triune God: Systematics* or in Doran’s *Trinity in History*. Let us consider, then, three possible understandings of the term “participation.” The first understanding can be called *simple exemplary participation*. This understanding arises from a simplistic application of Thomas Aquinas’s basic metaphysics of participation. For Thomas Aquinas, anything predicated primarily of God can only be predicated of human beings in a secondary sense. Humans participate in these predicates as a form of participating in God. To give one example, if we are to call someone god by participation (think for example of Psalm 82:6), we do so on the grounds that the term “God” is primarily attributable to the Triune God and only secondarily to us on the basis of “some likeness of the true God” (*Summa PP. Q.13 A.10*). If something is attributed to God and also to humans, it is because “these perfections flow from God to creatures” (*Summa PP. Q.13 A.6*). In this sense, participation would be seen as a likeness to God rooted in our created connection to God and subsistence in God. Though this notion of

participation is undoubtedly true, it is most certainly not what is intended by Lonergan or Doran. The inadequacy of simple exemplary participation is obvious when we consider that the human status of being a father would be a participation in the paternity of the Father on equal grounds with the *esse secundarium*.<sup>3</sup> Such equality would reduce the four-point hypothesis to a rather trivial theological datum.

An alternate interpretation of the term “participation” can be labeled *exemplary participation by degree*. According to such an understanding, both the human act of being a father and the *esse secundarium* of the Son are participations in the paternity of the Father, but they are so according to a different order of magnitude. In other words, the difference between the *esse secundarium* and human fatherhood is more of a quantitative difference where the *esse secundarium* participates more fully in paternity than the human act of being a father. In exemplary participation by degree there would be no qualitative difference, where the *esse secundarium* participates in paternity in a categorically different way than does the human act of being a father. I see two reasons for rejecting this interpretation of the word “participation.” The first is an exegetical concern arising from the terms used by Doran in conjunction with the four-point hypothesis. Doran refers to the secondary act of existence of the Son a “supernatural analogue” to the paternity of the Father.<sup>4</sup> This term is arguably redundant if we reduce analogy to its ontological sense as part of the triad of univocity, equivocity, analogy.

Insofar as human analogical being by participation simply is supernatural as distinct from

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<sup>3</sup> In the Q&A period, it became clear that the example of speaking would better illustrate the point. The *esse secundarium* participates in paternity because through it Christ can speak, but in the immanent Trinity only God the Father eternally speaks the Word. Human speech as a participation in divine speech is thus a closer correlate to the *esse secundarium* to illustrate the point that there must be something greater than simple exemplary participation to explain the four-point hypothesis.

<sup>4</sup> Doran, *TiH*, 166.

being by pure nature then all analogy is supernatural.<sup>5</sup> I believe instead that Doran is using the term “supernatural analogy” to refer to something more than normal Thomistic analogical notions of being. According to this understanding, the *esse secundarium* is part of a unique and larger analogy to the Trinity *in toto* rooted in four supernatural graces. This option will be unpacked after I explain the second half of my reasoning.

The second reason to reject *exemplary participation by degree* is theological. If we are to affirm an inseparable divide between Creator and creature (even granting the participatory ontology already discussed) we must distinguish between the divine hypostasis of the Son and human hypostases in a stronger fashion than by order of magnitude lest we fall into the error of Arianism. Because the *esse secundarium* is considered a participation in the paternal act of speaking, and since it is the hypostasis of the Son who speaks, and not the human nature apart from this hypostasis, we cannot merely distinguish between the speaking of Christ and human speaking according to an order of magnitude without thereby reducing the difference between hypostases to an order of magnitude. But such a univocal ontology eliminates the analogical basis on which a metaphysic of participation is founded in the first place, thereby rendering any notion of “created participation” moot. Therefore, it seems necessary to reject *exemplary participation by degree* in favor of our third option.

This third option can be labeled *systematic* or *relational exemplary participation*. As noted above, this option points to a unique and larger analogy to the Trinity *in toto* as the basis of the claim of participation. Consider again the secondary act of existence of the Son. This act has a larger analogical connection with the paternal *dicere* that is

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<sup>5</sup> I’m indebted to John Dunne for this point. John S. Dunne. “St. Thomas’ theology of participation.” *Theological Studies* 18 no 4 D, (1957), 488.

lacking in other participations in paternal *dicere*. Since the fullness of paternity is only known through the oppositional relation in Thomist metaphysics, an analogical participation that entailed the oppositional term would be a fuller participation than one that did not. Therefore, the *esse secundarium* could be a unique analogy if the created supernatural term itself had a necessary connection to an oppositional created supernatural term rooted in filiation, for example. According to this understanding, the *esse secundarium* only counts as a unique supernatural analogy insofar as it stands in relation to the light of glory that is a special participation in filiation. While I do not see the created terms of the secondary act of existence of the Son, sanctifying grace, charity, and the light of glory correlated in such a way as to parallel the four relations, I do see steps taken in this direction and I have no doubt that such a parallel can be completed in the second volume of Doran's work, or in another venue should he so choose.

Though such an explanation does resolve the terminological ambiguity of the four-point hypothesis, it still leaves us with the lingering question of whether the hypothesis itself is sufficient to bridge the gap between the Trinitarian ontology and a theology of history. Insofar as our theology of history, through the four-point hypothesis, is a theology of the missions of the Tri-personal God, the question can also be posed in terms of trinitarian theology: does the fourfold hypothesis as deployed by Doran adequately connect the immanent and the economic Trinity? Unfortunately, if we understand the four-point hypothesis entirely, exclusively, and only in terms of participation, even if such participation is understood as relational exemplary participation, the answer given to this question must be in the negative. This negative answer can be justified using Lonergan's own terminology: Lonergan claimed that the

Persons were conscious both of themselves and of one another.<sup>6</sup> He also wrote that the missions of the persons of the Son and Spirit simply are the relations of origin with a created term,<sup>7</sup> and that the relations simply are the persons. If, according to the four-point hypothesis, we participate in the relations through the missions, then we must in some sense participate in the persons, and presumably in their consciousness, unless we are willing to grant a real distinction between this subjectivity and the persons themselves, something which would greatly modify Lonergan's metaphysics. Put another way, the four created supernatural realities not only result in participation, but, to use Lonergan's words in the hypothesis itself, they result in a "special relation"<sup>8</sup> to the each of the three Persons. The remaining task, then, is to explain the meaning of "special relation."

Stepping aside from the work of Lonergan for the moment, two additional problems necessitate the category of "communion" to supplement "participation" in order to adequately connect the immanent and economic Trinity, or Trinitarian metaphysics with a theology of history. The first can be called the Feuerbachian problem. This problem is but a modification of Ludwig Feuerbach's claim that our ideas of God are nothing but the projection of the human ideal onto the heavens. In our context, granting to the four-point hypothesis the claim that the divine relations are exemplary *in toto* of the necessary relations of the supernatural realities that lead to social grace, the critic can ask whether such systemic exemplary comparisons are grounded in an analogical correlate between creation and the Creator and between the work of redemption and the Redeemer, or whether such systemic exemplary comparisons arise from the fact that we are simply projecting an idealized human state onto a mythological being. Apart from any

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<sup>6</sup> Lonergan, *TGS*, 377.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 455.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 473.

category that would make the created realities dependent upon the Triune God, we cannot conclusively reject the Feuerbachian question. To put the matter in different terms, if the historical experience of state of being loved and in love, which Doran would consider the first experiential stage of the process which leads to social grace,<sup>9</sup> isn't ontologically connected in some fashion to the immanent Trinity, then the economic Trinity *pro nobis* active in history and the immanent Trinity *in se* which is outside of history are not connected. Unless we demonstrate a connection between this experiential state, the objection will linger that, unmoored from any eternal anchor, the unconditional experience of being in love could be replaced by any equivalent religious affectivity with the same result. Thus, to move from historical experience and historical social grace to the immanent Trinity, experience and social grace must not only be exemplary of the relations of the Triune God, but they must be caused by the very historical action of that God.

The second objection that necessitates the category of communion is the problem of emanation. To simplify the matter, we might categorize all soteriologies as ontological versus covenantal, or as *metathexis* versus *koinonia*.<sup>10</sup> Assuming some divide between the divine and the human, the former categories allow the divide to be bridged on the level of being without requiring access to the level of existence, while the latter necessitate a historical act (especially covenant) at the level of existence. In short, ontological soteriologies need not connect with history at all. If the move to social grace is entirely a matter of participation without recourse to some category (like communion) to explain the historical reconciliation between God and humanity at the level of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 89-90.

<sup>10</sup> The distinctions are taken from Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007).



conscious historical existence, then history hasn't truly been connected with Being, nor the immanent Trinity with the economic. Rather, social grace would arise from changes in being without any conscious awareness of the God with whom such changes resulted in greater conformity.

Returning to the work of Robert Doran, we see a heavy emphasis on participation in his first volume of *Trinity in History*, but no extended explication of the special relations, and thus little that is comparable to what I have been calling communion. Thus, Doran states that systematic theology is “concerned primarily with the participation of historical humankind in divine life,”<sup>11</sup> but that systematic theology today must be connected with a theological theory of history, which Doran identifies with the development of interiorly and religiously differentiated consciousness unfolding in the dynamics of human history.<sup>12</sup> Yet, Doran’s explanation of the dialectics of history reveal little need for conscious awareness of the Triune persons: the emanations of Word and Spirit (linked to their created terms) become the “*condition of possibility* of any consistent and sustained intelligent and responsible emanations in human beings,”<sup>13</sup> while the “sustained social harmony grounded in authentic cultural values that issue in a just social order is itself a function of the same gift of divine life.”<sup>14</sup> Yet social harmony is only a function of such divine emanations insofar as both rightly ordered human interiority and properly oriented historical dialectics are both “supernatural analogues” for the emanations of the Trinity.<sup>15</sup> Lonergan’s category of participation is retained as the explanatory function, while his category of “special relation” seems to have fallen to the

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<sup>11</sup> Doran, *TiH*, 141.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 142, 165.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-1.

side, at least in this portion of the work. Thus, Doran is able to write that a “real human subject” is one “characterized by the *processiones operationis* and *processiones operati* that characterize reasonable, responsible performance,” and which just so happen to be an analogue for the procession of the Word and Love from the Father, but this subject is not yet characterized as one being properly and consciously aware of Father, Son, or Spirit.<sup>16</sup> Rather, this real human is an “authentic subject in communion with others through participation in the Trinitarian relations.”<sup>17</sup> But does such participation not necessitate communion with God as Father, Son, and Spirit as well as communion with others? Yes, I believe it does. And is it not devastating to Doran’s project that he has not explicitly discussed such communion?

Anyone who has even read the cover of *The Trinity in History – Volume 1* should be aware that the answer to the second question must be a resounding no. Volume one has discussed the missions and processions, which is a fitting time to examine the notion of participation. I am fully convinced that volume two, which will address questions related to persons and relations, will be a more appropriate venue for exploring the “special relations” which I am here calling communion, and which I might add Doran has already gestured toward in volume one. Therefore, what I am arguing should not be taken as a rejection of Doran’s work as much as it is a proposal for where to go next: a theory of communion with Father, Son, and Spirit. To complete the work that he himself admits is incomplete, I believe that Doran needs to address the category of communion.

I have thus far argued that the category of communion makes proper sense of the four-point hypothesis by attending to the question of “special relations,” that it

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 310-11.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 311.

overcomes both the Feuerbachian and the emanationist problems, and that it should be a more significant category in the unfolding work of Robert Doran. The time has finally come for me to offer a definition for what I mean by communion. I propose the following:

*Communion*: Conscious, reciprocating responses by mutually opposed<sup>18</sup> agents to intentional stimuli arising from each oppositional agent.

In Lonerganian fashion let me break down each aspect of the definition. Communion occurs between *mutually opposed agents*: *agents* because the persons must act to be in communion, and *mutually opposed* agents because the action of each must be ordered toward the other (though in the case of God, whose acts have the divine being as their own *telos*, this ordering is only in a secondary sense giving the action a particular formality). The opposed actions of these agents must lead to *reciprocating responses*, meaning that the actions of each are not coincidentally ordered toward one another, but that there is a causal relation between an act and the resulting response. Furthermore, these responses must be *conscious*, and not merely reflexive or subliminal. Finally, I propose that the best means of making sense of the nature of the response is to consider it a response to *intentional stimuli*. The act of each opposed agent is a *stimulus* insofar as it is the basis for the response of a reciprocating act. It is *intentional* in that it was intended to elicit a response from the oppositional agent.

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<sup>18</sup> The word “oppositional” is taken in the sense of Anselm of Canterbury and the Council of Florence’s Trinitarian usage.

With this definition in hand, I'd like to conclude by sketching a basic understanding of how communion fits in with the role given to participation in Doran's broad project of linking the four-point hypothesis to a theory of history. If social grace is achieved through a series of conversions, religious, moral, intellectual, and psychic, and if these conversions proceed according to the basic pattern of insight, that is, as a function of, to use Lonergan's terms, "inner conditions"<sup>19</sup> of the mind that nevertheless "presuppose a positive object that is presented by sense or represented by imagination,"<sup>20</sup> then this object presented to the senses or re-presented by the imagination is the stimulus of insight. As stimulus, it is either from an agent or it is not, and if from an agent it is either intentional or unintentional. Supposing that the stimuli resulting in conversion are through the intentional agency of a divine person and are also consciously understood as such by the human being undergoing conversion, then conversion could be simultaneously understood as an instance of communion. In this reading, conversion is both part of a process whereby an individual participates in the four created supernatural realities in such a way that there is systemic exemplary participation in the Triune God that leads to social grace, but there is also conscious communion of the God who is active in and through these supernatural realities to bring about such participation. Such a reading may shift the emphasis away from the invisible missions of the Word and the Spirit toward the visible missions of both. I believe it will also take significant steps toward connecting existence and being, the economic and immanent Trinity, and a theory of history with the metaphysics of the Trinity. While further elaboration is certainly necessary to connect the notion of communion with the dialectics of history, a robust

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<sup>19</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, 28.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-44.

religious phenomenology, and even with Lonergan's larger systematic corpus, I hope that these musings may at least begin a discussion that, in due time, may bear some fruit.

Thank you.