

What has Economic Trinity to do with Economics? : A Trinitarian Understanding of Human Responsibility and Economic Flourishing

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I. Introduction

The famous serenity prayer by the illustrious German theologian Reinhold Niebuhr reads, “God, give me / [us] grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, Courage to change the things which should be changed, and the Wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.”¹ This prayer brings forth two aspects of human life: things that are beyond human intervention and things that demand human intervention and hence to seek divine grace and wisdom to discern and live in this world. While we have no control over what Heidegger called the “thrownness” (*Geworfenheit*) into this world, there are things that require our attention and action that will establish our existence as God intended spiritual/moral agents in this world. Economy is one area where we are supposed to exercise control over but unfortunately we have succumbed to the dictates of the market forces instead. As Andy Hartopp observes, “Market forces, economic forces, play a highly significant role in permitting a thoroughly secular culture to be pushing Christianity right to the margins.”² This is evident from the sustained narrative about economy being based on the single indicator of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that conveniently ignores all other factors – moral and spiritual – to assert a purely materialistic criterion on human

¹ Elisabeth Sifton, *The Serenity Prayer: Faith and Politics in Times of Peace and War*, Reprint edition. (W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 2.

² Andy Hartopp, “Why Is Engagement between Christian Economists and Theologians Difficult?” in Jeremy Kidwell and Sean Doherty, *Theology and Economics: A Christian Vision of the Common Good*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 23.

conception of growth and wellbeing.³ Rowan Williams also notes that “contemporary economic language and habit” are asserting a “privileged status for economics on the grounds that it works by innate laws to which other considerations are irrelevant.”⁴ Andrew Henley further confirms it by saying that economics pursues “a form of intellectual hegemony, in which all forms of human social encounter are sought to be brought under the ambit of economic motivation and analysis.”⁵ In order to challenge this faulty worldview and resume a proactive role as Christians in the society, the best antidote is to seriously consider Rowan Williams’ observation: “[E]conomic relations have something to say to us about how we see our humanity in the context of God’s action. Money is a metaphor like other things; our money transactions, ... tell us something of how we might see our relation to God.”⁶ Economic relations do not subsume all human relations and purposes, but rather they have a part in revealing an important aspect of our relationship to God and also are an essential domain of God - human action. But, this is possible only when we resist the notion that everything can be reduced to “one sovereign model or standard of value (economical).”⁷ This essay will challenge the underlying notions of modern economics by tracing the root of “economy” as *oikos* in its intended meaning and will suggest a reevaluation of economic relations by exploring the relational understanding of the doctrine of Trinity. From this historical understanding of the Triune relations in human “economy,” certain models will be identified in order to re-vision the responsive action of the Church as a

³ Ibid.

⁴ Rowan Williams and Larry Elliott, *Crisis and Recovery*, 2010 edition. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), Kindle loc. 458.

⁵ Andrew Henley, “Economics and Virtue Ethics,” in Kidwell and Doherty, *Theology and Economics*, 120.

⁶ Rowan Williams, “Theology and Economics: Two Different Worlds?” *Anglican Theological Review*, 92:4 (2010), 607.

⁷ Williams and Elliott, *Crisis and Recovery*, Kindle Loc. 460.

community of followers of Christ; this will facilitate us to conceive a countercultural transformation of economics as shared responsibility toward whole human flourishing.

II. Oikonomia – The Community

A better place to start in our endeavor will be to go to the root of the word economy and attempt a rerooting of our understanding. The term “economics” is from the Greek root *oikos*, meaning the concept of a “well-managed, stewarded household” (*oikos* + *nomos* - law of the household).⁸ Etymologically, the management of the household points to the budgeting practice of a household comprising of immediate family, servants, slaves, distant relatives, perhaps a tutor for the children, and other workers.⁹ In other words, *oikos* referred to a small social unit that transcended biological family relations. In the Gospels, Jesus often used parables about stewardship and money with implications for caring for the poor and the destitute.¹⁰ Apart from this financial connotation, *Oikos* was also one of the early terms for referring to “church”—meaning, the “household of faith,” and the care for others was assumed into the larger reality of the church, that is the “the household of God.”¹¹ Given these deep links to the community-oriented nature and function of the term, economics, in the contemporary conception is definitely wayward in its intentions. Let us analyze this corruption of intention and meaning.

III. *Homo Economicus* : The Consumer

While in its inception the term economics was communitarian, it has come to denote the individual as an isolated entity. “Rational economic man” (*homo*

⁸ Martyn Percy, “Christianity and Social Flourishing,” in Kidwell and Doherty, *Theology and Economics*, 222.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 240.

economicus) and rational self-interest are two important components of the mainstream economic theory.¹² The “Rational Economic Man” (REM) model is an offshoot of the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill married to the notion that human beings automatically evaluate a range of options available to them in order to identify the best outcomes that would maximize their utility.¹³ This latter rational being capable of making such decisions is exemplified in the philosophy of David Hume and Adam Smith.¹⁴ This synthesis is patently presented in Alfred Marshall’s *Principles of Economics* in 1890, which became foundational to the development of economic analysis as a discipline in the twentieth century.¹⁵ This rational individual model has further evolved into “Rational Choice Theory,” (RCT) where the individual is the modern consumer who chooses “among the set of options available, the one that best satisfies that *consumer’s* preferences, given the disposable income available.”¹⁶ The communitarian notion has completely faded from the memory of its association with economics, and all that is left out is the mantra, “consumer is the king.” But the underlying principle of maximization of utility by the single-minded pursuit of one’s self-interest depends on an ambivalent notion of “utility” that is intangible; and hence the maximization of utility is also non-measurable and could not serve as an indicator of any well-being which will effectively undermine the very crux of utilitarianism and also seriously undermines the “trickledown” prophecy of Smith.¹⁷ Despite these fallacies, such economic theories continue to hold sway over the public mindset.

¹² Donald Hay and Gordon Menzies, “Seeking a Better Model of Economic Behavior,” in Kidwell and Doherty, *Theology and Economics*, 184.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* (emphasis mine)

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

IV. “Telos,” Not just “End”

When we approach this problem from the perspective of Christian theology, it becomes evident that the absence of an external teleology in economic analysis is the reason why this has corroded into a crude consumerism.¹⁸ As Andrew Henley notes,

It confines the subject to the consideration of behavior and activity of the economic agent that seeks only to further the private well-being of that same economic agent. It implies an essentially static and ahistorical perspective on issues of fairness and justice and it largely confines itself to considerations of individual rationality. In short, economics focuses on outcomes of economic behavior, rather than the quality of the behavior or decisions that might lead to those outcomes.¹⁹

In the name of individual rationality that is devoid of any moral framework, unbridled avarice and insensitivity toward society and environment are encouraged as “virtues”. Alasdair MacIntyre elaborates this, “[T]he joint effect of the secular rejection of both Protestant and Catholic theology and the scientific and philosophical rejection of Aristotelianism was to eliminate any notion of [hu]man-as-[s]he-could-be-if-[s]he-realized-his[her]-telos.”²⁰ The total neglect of such moorings has resulted in the lack of a to-be-realized *telos*, which in turn has led to dependence on a false notion of “end.” Thomas Aquinas notes that the order of human reason always starts with the end foreseen, but contrary to reason, human beings can be wrongly oriented toward their end.²¹ For him, the end (*telos*) of human life and society is God and God alone. So, the modern individual economic rationality that seeks an end in itself and not in the external *telos* toward God is a serious disorder. It is not just the divorce of moral principles from economic behavior, but also the estrangement of human beings from God. Stephen Long notes that, according to Aquinas, the new law (*lex nova*) in Christ “sets in order a person’s actions so that a person is directed toward his or her proper, and ultimate

¹⁸ Ibid., 109.

¹⁹ Andrew Henley, “Economics and Virtue Ethics,” in Kidwell and Doherty, *Theology and Economics*, 184.

²⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Bloomsbury, 1981, 3rd Ed., 2007), 54–55.

²¹ D. Stephen Long, *Divine Economy Theology and the Market* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 215, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10054180>.

end—the state of blessedness.”²² Aquinas contrasts the new law with the old law, (the natural law and the Decalogue etc.) not because of the invalidity of the latter, but because they do not have adequate power to orient our actions toward their true end, as that is possible only in Christ.²³ Long notes, “The New law as the grace that orders nature is not some otherworldly and anti-natural event working through an ineffable theophanous mystery. ... This constitutes a tradition of thought, language, and vision capable of eliciting our will and our reason toward our final end—the God who as Trinity is charity.”²⁴ Along with Aquinas, Long rightly identifies that the trinitarian God as manifested in the divine *Logos* is the to-be-realized *telos* of humanity. It is not only that the trinitarian God is our proper *telos*, but also, only in and through the triune God we attain our *telos*. This is possible when we focus our attention on the sphere of God’s action in the human history – in the incarnation of the Son of God. Karl Rahner reiterates this when he says that that to understand and relate to the God in Trinity, the right place to look at is the “salvation history”. He says, we should “confidently look for an access into the doctrine of the Trinity in Jesus and in his Spirit, as we experience them through faith in salvation history.”²⁵ Also understood in its reciprocal sense, in order to understand the life and ministry of Jesus, it has to be understood in the light of the Trinity. Let us delve into this mystery of divine Self-Communication.

V. Divine Oikonomia and Theologia

In Ephesians 1:9–11, we encounter the economy of God (*oikonomia tou theou*):

[God] has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan [*oikonomia*] for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will,

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 216.

²⁴ Ibid., 217.

²⁵ Karl Rahner and J. F. Donceel, *The Trinity* (London; New York: Burns & Oates, 2001), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=436043>, 152.

so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.
(NRSV)

This plan (*oikonomia tou theou*), is “God’s well planned action for our salvation, and this means God’s enactment and continuation of His story with His people.”²⁶ It is God’s plan of salvation, realized in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, revealed to his people in a definitive manner.²⁷ This economy of salvation about the Triune God’s work and story with his people – God becoming present in human world and being involved in the affairs of humanity toward *telos* will be the focus of study.²⁸ This divine *oikonomia* is to be understood as an institution in distinction and contradiction to the various phenomena of economy with which we are confronted.²⁹

The “historical recognition” of God in the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Christ constitutes God’s Self-Revelation (in *oikonomia*). The divine *oikonomia* (Economic Trinity) and *theologia* (Immanent Trinity) are understood in their dynamic relationship. In this historical recognition of the Immanent Trinity, we can have a glimpse of the interlocking pattern of the relations of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as One God (Father sending his Son, Son coming in the power of the Spirit and Son sending the Spirit). God’s Self-Communication to humanity within the history of salvation has unveiled a “relationship paradigm” within the Trinity. This “relational” starting point, in terms of theologizing does signal a break with the previous tradition of “substance metaphysics.” Use of Greek philosophy, particularly the Aristotelian metaphysics, employed the binary of substance and accidents in order to understand the trinitarian inner relations.³⁰ Catherine Mowry LaCugna observes, if

²⁶ Kidwell and Doherty, *Theology and Economics*, 167.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Trinity and Revelation: A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World*, Volume 2 (Eerdmans, 2014), 246.

divine substance is made the “highest ontological principle – the substratum of divine and the ultimate source of all that exists – then God and everything else is, finally, impersonal.”³¹ While the “substance ontology” signifies that the ontological “principle” of God is to be found in the substance, that is, in the very “being” of God and not in the “person,” in the patristic theology of the Trinity, the unity of God -the being and life of God - does not consist in the one substance of God but in the *hypostasis*.³² Robert W Jenson notes that the Cappadocians arrived at a conceptual category, by ordering Origen’s hypostases and their idea of *homoousia*, “making the hypostases’ mutual relations structures of the one God’s life rather than risers of the steps from God down to us.”³³ This “communion theology” redefined the idea of “relation or person” (hypostasis ὑπόστασις) as the mode of God’s *ousia* (οὐσία).³⁴ Thus the Persons conceived as relations that subsist in God, as the possessor of Godhead provided an answer to the “substance” problem.³⁵

F. LeRon Shults observes, this “Relationality helps conceive of the nature and activity of God in a dynamic way, going back to the testimonies in Scripture.”³⁶ LaCugna also avers such a relational Trinitarian theology is primarily a theology of relationship that “explores the mysteries of love, relationship, personhood, and communion within the framework of God’s Self-Revelation in the person of Christ and the activity of the Holy Spirit.”³⁷ This relational understanding also specifies the way in which we can understand God – by observing the realm of God’s salvific sphere, the

³¹ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* ([San Francisco]: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 101.

³² Jean Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993), 38.

³³ Robert W Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God according to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 106.

³⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 243.

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 10.

³⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 1.

world. LaCugna notes that the terms “economic Trinity” and “immanent Trinity” (used interchangeably with *oikonomia* and *theologia*) are “ways of speaking about the life and work of God.”³⁸ The phrase “economic Trinity” signifies the manifestations of God’s activity in the world, associated with the names of Father, Son, and Spirit – in terms of the missions (Redemption and Sanctification) and these missions bring about communion between God and humankind.³⁹ Thomas F. Torrance points out that “the historical manifestations of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit [*oikonomia*] have evangelical and theological significance ... [as they] have a *transhistorical* and *transfinite* reference beyond to an ultimate ground in God himself.”⁴⁰ He further posits that this historical manifestations of the Triune God,

... cannot be Gospel if their reference breaks off at the finite boundaries of this world of space and time, for as such they would be empty of divine validity and saving significance—they would leave us trapped in some kind of historical positivism. The historical manifestations of the Trinity are Gospel, however, if they are grounded beyond history in the eternal personal distinctions between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit inherent in the Godhead, that is, if the Fatherhood of the Father, the Sonship of the Son, and the Communion of the Spirit belong to the inner life of God and constitute his very Being.⁴¹

He avers that the *theologia* and the *oikonomia* are inseparably united in Christ, the eternal Son incarnate among us, for in Christ “they are anchored in the one Being of the Holy Trinity.”⁴²

It is when we consider this movement from God toward man and from man toward God in Christ, together with the movement of the Holy Spirit in his mission from the Father through the Son and in his advocacy of the us before the Father, that we may discern how intimately and completely the Father, the Son and the Spirit are coordinated both in the economic fulfillment of God’s revealing and saving acts on our behalf, and in their inner union and Communion with one another.⁴³

³⁸ Ibid., 211.

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Thomas F Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 6. *Italics* mine.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ *ibid.*

Within the relational paradigm, this intra-trinitarian movement establishes the “historic” salvation mission of Christ as essentially the mission of the Triune God. He further summarizes this, saying:

... the pattern of coactivity between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the economic Trinity is through the Communion of the Spirit a real reflection of the pattern of the coactivity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the ontological Trinity. It is indeed more than a reflection of it, for it is grounded in it, is altogether inseparable from it, and actually flows from it, the intrinsic oneness between the coactivity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the economic Trinity and their coactivity in the ontological Trinity are soteriologically and epistemologically absolutely essential.⁴⁴

The relations within the immanent Trinity as truly reflected in the Economic Trinity exemplify the communitarian fellowship in effecting the redemption of humanity. This perfect correlation and coactivity of the three Persons in the Trinity can be captured by the concept of perichoretic relation. Perichoresis is also referred by the terms “*circuminsessio* (mutual indwelling), and mutual *inhabitation* (habitation in)”.⁴⁵

Jürgen Moltmann expresses this beautifully by saying,

According to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, the three divine Persons exist with one another, for one another and in one another. They exist in one another because they mutually give each other space for a full unfolding. By existing mutually in each other, they form their unique trinitarian fellowship. ... If, as John 14.9-11 says, the Son exists “in” the Father and the Father “in” the Son, then the Father is the dwelling of the Son, and the Son the dwelling of the Father. The Spirit who “proceeds” from the Father and “rests” in the Son and radiates from him, finds in the Son the place of his eternal indwelling. Through their complete self-giving, the trinitarian Persons are “beside themselves” and wholly in the others. Thus, mutually and together, they become the eternal dwelling. In the doctrine of the Trinity it is not sufficient just to talk about the divine Persons and relationships; their reciprocal indwellings must be perceived as well. Only then do we understand their trinitarian fellowship and their unique divine Being.⁴⁶

This perichoretic relationship captures the essence of God’s “nature” in terms of this indwellings in the Immanent Trinity as it is manifested in the Economic Trinity. Colin Gunton defines the concept of perichoresis as the “reciprocal eternal relatedness.”⁴⁷ He adds, “God is not God apart from the way in which Father, Son, and Spirit in eternity give to and receive from each other what they essentially are. The

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, First Edition edition. (Augsburg Books, 2004), 301.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 298.

⁴⁷ Colin E Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 164.

three do not merely coincide, but dynamically constitute one another's being."⁴⁸ When this divine "economy" rightly conceived as the God's sphere of salvation for the humankind and creation at large, and contrasted with the modern individualistic, consumerist economy, we can glean certain principles that will provide the cure to the malady. The first such principle is the creation of "mutual space".

A. Mutual Space:

Moltmann understands the perichoretic relationship as eternal love: "The "circulation" of the eternal divine life becomes perfect through the fellowship and unity of the three different Persons in the eternal love."⁴⁹ He further expands this in terms of creation and sustenance of a mutual space in the trinitarian relations. He says, "Just as through their reciprocal indwellings the divine Persons also form a common space, so community on the creaturely level forms the social space of reciprocal self-development."⁵⁰ This mutual space becomes the prototypical model for organizing the human sphere:

Created beings have to exist side by side and together, and for this they need wide spaces in which they can move freely. There is no subjective freedom without these free spaces in social life, spaces opened up by respect and affection, and secured through legal systems. It is only these free spaces that make us able to approach one another and to withdraw, to open ourselves or close ourselves to others. Shared living space is the medium for human relationship and for history. This living space is formed by the interpersonal relationships of a number of people. It is "our space" not "my space".⁵¹

The trinitarian relations as manifested in God's economy of salvation exemplify such a space where coordination and coactivity of Father, Son and Spirit effect the redemption of the creation. In the context where the economic space is increasingly shrinking for many in the present world, this concept of mutual space where we coexist

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 175.

⁵⁰ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 301.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 302.

and grow in solidarity with others has to be appropriated in the lives of individual believers as a counter-cultural value. This concept of space-creation based on the mutual indwellings of the Triune God challenges us to redefine our personal space (that seems to ever widening!) to constitute a mutual spaces where others can participate and share in the blessings of God. This liminal space is the place where we come in contact with “others” in order to empathize with them and expend ourselves and our resources for them. This is definitely in stark contrast to the modern economic model of self-accumulation of wealth by few individuals that effectively exclude others from participating. But, this would not happen unless consciously we provide space for others to co-inhabit. The creation of such spaces amidst the relentless pursuit of self-interest will reorient the lost meaning of *oikos* as intended “household.”

B. Poesis / Co-creation

John Milbank locates an external reality to which the intra-trinitarian relation is extended to – i.e., the creation. He says,

[T]he harmony of the Trinity as “not the harmony of a finished totality but a “musical” harmony of infinity.” Just as an infinite God must be power-act, so the doctrine of the Trinity discovers the infinite God to include a radically “external” relationality. Thus God can only speak to us simultaneously as the Word incarnate, and as the indefinite spiritual response, in time, which is the Church.⁵²

In the Economic Trinity, the incarnation of the *Logos* is God’s Self-Communication of the infinite mystery of the Triune God. As Long notes, “ God is conceived neither as pure power nor as pure act, but as both at the same time, as a “power-act” that is not “stasis,” but is dynamic and moving, always flowing beyond unity, being or any self-contained act.”⁵³ This out-flowing of God’s power to creation is captured as “poesis” (co-creation). Milbank speaks of “human co-creation,” in a

⁵² Long, *Divine Economy Theology and the Market*, 245 citing John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1990), 242.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

theological sense, as the Trinitarian surplus.⁵⁴ By drawing on the Trinity, Christology, and the primacy of the church, Long notes that Milbank concludes “God’s “radical external relationality” makes possible a human participation in God’s creative power that can be designated as co-creation, or *poesis*.”⁵⁵ It is essentially a participation in divine understanding - in God’s “continuously generated *ex nihilo*” creative power-act.⁵⁶ This *poesis* or human co-creation is a powerful concept in re-visioning our understanding of modern economics. The source of this power to co-create is an outflow from the trinitarian God that enables humans to continue (in a qualified distinction) in the creative act of God that leads toward redemption of the creation. We are not here to helplessly witness the juggernaut rolling of the contemporary economics, but are called to plug into the power source – that is the Triune God – in order to challenge its presumptions and establish a “household of God’s creation” that is to be nurtured and preserved.

C. Economy of Grace

Kathryn Tanner is expounding a relation between grace and economy as she understands the economy of grace as is evident in the Trinity, where God is understood as the One “constituted by exchange among the persons of the Trinity, a God who aims, in creating and saving the world, to distribute to it the good of God’s own life to the greatest degree possible.”⁵⁷ She says,

In the distribution of grace, distinctions of status make no difference. In the first place, certainly, they make no difference because the distribution of grace does not follow the lines of already established differences of status. But in the second place they are irrelevant because the distribution of grace need not itself produce or foster any new competitive markets in status. The distribution of grace need not, in other words, establish simply an alternative competition for status, with new standards to replace the old, discriminating between high and low now, not on the basis of economic achievement or social standing, but with reference to one’s holiness or the genuineness of one’s conversion experience.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Fortress Press, 2005) Kindle Loc. 43.

⁵⁸ Ibid., Kinlde Loc. 374.

This economy of grace is based on a non-competitive basis that is counter to the existing economic practices that are driven by cutthroat competition. In the economy of God's grace, God intends to elevate the receiver of the grace and the gift is freely given to all. It is only limited by the recipient's capacity to receive, "The whole is given to each or at the very least is continually being offered to each, awaiting the expansion of the recipients' capacity to receive the whole, which God and the followers of God are also trying to bring about."⁵⁹

This is an interesting way of looking at the economic transactions within the divine economy of grace; "The good is distributed without the giver suffering any loss thereby. The recipients of such gifts do not amass them in a static way, as goods simply to be kept, but become givers in turn. The recipients do not hold the good simply for themselves, as a form of exclusive possession."⁶⁰ "Freely received, to freely give" is the principle of giving and receiving under this economy. She extends this application to the human domain saying, "The good is distributed by God and is to be distributed by us in imitation of God, in an indiscriminate, profligate fashion that fails to reflect the differences in worthiness and status that rule the arrangements of a sinful world."⁶¹ Despite the differences in the social standings, endowments and abilities, transaction of grace should be equally extended to all. But the problem with such a conception is, it could be asked, whether this idealization is practical at all in the world? Tanner herself ponders on this question and replies,

God creates the whole world, in all its aspects - material and spiritual - according to such a noncompetitive economy, so that it should be such a noncompetitive economy to every degree possible; it holds us as creatures of body and soul up to its measure. The social worlds of economics and politics as we find them certainly do not run according to principles of a noncompetitive economy, but as modern people we are aware of their malleability by our own efforts, the way such structures are maintained only by way of our own complicity with them.⁶²

⁵⁹ Ibid., Kinlde Loc. 378.

⁶⁰ Ibid., Kinlde Loc. 386.

⁶¹ Ibid., Kinlde Loc. 386.

⁶² Ibid., Kinlde Loc. 437.

In response to the condition of the fallen world, Christians should not resign themselves to the fate of the world, but, because in God's economy, the material and spiritual aspects of creation are assumed and redeemed, we need to appropriate the principles of the noncompetitive economy. Tanner positions her argument on the basis of what happens within the Economic Trinity – the scope of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ:

In Christ what humanity has becomes the Word's own and the reverse. ... [B]ecause the Word assumes to itself, unites with, becomes one with what is so very different from itself - the humanity of Jesus suffering under the sins of the world. Through the Word's identification with the humanity of Jesus, the Word acquires all the property of that humanity ... All that the humanity of Jesus accumulates over the course of his life - all that accrues to the humanity of Jesus by virtue of what he does and suffers - one can also now say that the Word does and suffers. Because all that happens to that humanity is in this way its shared or common property, the Word is able to give the gifts of its own property to that humanity.⁶³

Jesus by his incarnational identification with humanity has assumed its property and now is distributing the gifts according to the noncompetitive principle of the economy of grace. As followers of Christ, we ought to follow these principles in propagating a countercultural alternative that accommodates everyone irrespective of every divisive category present in the world to freely distribute the grace (and money!). Tanner is boldly comparing the economy of grace with the economy of the world to suggest this alternative of non-competitive economics. This inference drawn from the trinitarian relations further enhances our understanding of the problem with the mundane economics that needs to be supplanted by the economy of grace.

D. Re-visioning the *Oikos*

Christ, who has assumed humanity for us, unites us as believers into the fellowship of the Triune God. While this union is not ontological, yet is relational and real. Rowan Williams emphasizes this union in Christ with God “as having an organic quality, a common identity shaped by the fact that each depends on all others for their

⁶³ Ibid., Kindle Loc. 1088.

life.”⁶⁴ We are not united with God as fragmented individuals, but as an organism, in a symbiotic relationship with each other. In this regard, Williams relate the task of theology to the process of evaluating the economic decision-making to raise questions about how policy making “grants or withholds liberty for the most disadvantaged.”⁶⁵ He asserts the fact that as Christians we should actively involve in the welfare of every individual or group and acknowledge that that no one is “either exempt from damage or incapable of gift within the human community as God intends it.”⁶⁶ He stresses the need also to take great care at evaluating “human motivation, about character and integrity “of the economic practices.”⁶⁷ Going back to the original notion of term “economy” as “housekeeping” he observes,

A household is somewhere where life is lived in common; and housekeeping is guaranteeing that this common life has some stability about it that allows the members of the household to grow and flourish and act in useful ways. A working household is an environment in which vulnerable people are nurtured and allowed to grow up (children) or wind down (the elderly); it is a background against which active people can go out to labor in various ways to reinforce the security of the household; it is a setting where leisure and creativity can find room in the general business of intensifying and strengthening the relationships that are involved.⁶⁸

Williams is challenging the very notion of evolutionary economics that argues for the “survival of the fittest” and advocates a “household” metaphor where the vulnerable members (like children and aged) receive more care along with the contributors to the household. He calls for each believer to perceive himself or herself as equally helpless when alone but gifted in relationship.⁶⁹ He proclaims, “Helpless alone and gifted in relationship: this is where we start in addressing the world of economics from a Christian standpoint.”⁷⁰ While economic relations are generally conceived as self-pursuits driven by self-interest, Williams is calling for Christians to find strength in our relationship modeled on the trinitarian relations. He avers,

⁶⁴ Williams and Elliott, *Crisis and Recovery*, Kindle Loc. 518.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Kindle Loc. 613.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, Kindle Loc. 565.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Kindle Loc. 614.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Kindle Loc. 493.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Kindle Loc. 528.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Kindle Loc. 530.

No process whose focus is the limited or exclusive security of an individual or an interest group or even national community alone can be regarded as unequivocally good in Jewish and Christian terms, because of the underlying aspiration to a state of security in isolation which it reveals.⁷¹

He issues a clarion call to the Church as a “household” by challenging them to evaluate:

If my wellbeing is inseparable in God’s community from the wellbeing of all others, a global economic ethic in which the indefinitely continuing poverty or disadvantage of some is taken for granted has to be decisively left behind.⁷²

Another lesson taken from the trinitarian relations helps us to reconstitute the *oikos* as the household (as social unit) where the care for the vulnerable becomes the responsibility of the abled. This is again in contradistinction to the contemporary economic perspective (survival of the fittest). As Christians, professing to follow Christ, who emptied himself to identify one with us, to redeem and give hope to us when we were hopeless, we need to take this learning seriously in order to work toward the flourishing of human society as a whole – comprising also of the poor, oppressed and outcasts.

VI. Conclusion

It is conspicuous that modern economical perspectives thrive on self-pursuit, self-accumulation and mutual exclusion. The original intent of *oikos* to constitute the welfare of a “household” as a small social unit has been replaced by the individualistic, consumer-oriented culture. Continuing with the current trends in economics that favors minority rich against majority poor and oppressed makes no sense to human existence and purpose. More so, to us, as followers of Christ, as part of the “household of God,” these serious anomalies are matters of great concern. By trying to unearth the intended communitarian scope of the word *oikos* and setting it in juxtaposition to the “Rational

⁷¹ Ibid., Kindle Loc. 535.

⁷² Ibid.

Economic” and “Rational Consumer” model, we are able to realize the corrosion of principles and practices in the modern economics. *Oikos* was also incorporated to denote the Church as the “household of God.” We explored the trinitarian relations in the Immanent Trinity as being truly reflected in the Economic Trinity. The coactivity of the Triune God in the Creation, Redemption and Sanctification of the creation is manifested in the divine economy – through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. This accomplishment of human redemption by Christ in the history of the world was not in isolation, but within perfect harmony of the Triune God. This trinitarian understanding in relational categories helped us to infer certain models that will challenge and transform the economic structures of the world. Jürgen Moltmann’s “mutual space” as the coexisting space in the divine Persons’ indwellings is related to the creaturely space where humans and creation ought to mutually coexist in space. If this space is denied to anyone, it causes imbalances in the equilibrium of human existence and hence the economical structures are to be reconstituted to create space for the vulnerable and the weak. The unbridled greed of capitalism that constricts space to both many humans and also to creation ought to be challenged and forced to yield such spaces for coexistence. The *poesis* / co-creation model of John Milbank is derived from the outflow of divine creative energy of the Triune God, in which humans are expected to be partakers. This invitation to be co-creators with God gives us the power over oppressing economic structures and to establish economical practices that promote the welfare of the human household. The “economy of grace” model by Kathryn Tanner offers a non-competitive model of economics that is countercultural to the existing economical perspectives. As the Economic Trinity – in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – brought forth the identification God in Christ with the fallen humanity and its redemption through the distribution of divine grace to one and all – the economical

working ought to be reconceived as free distribution of wealth to the needy. Finally, Rowan Williams redefined the *oikos* as the household where the aged and children are taken care of irrespective of one's ability to contribute. He asserts the fact that every one of us are weak in isolation and strong in relationship and advocates an economy where the welfare of the poor and marginalized are the priorities for formulating and implementing economic principles. These models derived from the trinitarian relationship of God serve as countercultural and also corrective to the present consumerist trends in economics. By applying these principles within our personal lives, in the church and in the society, we can serve as God's agents working toward the welfare of the humanity.