

Introduction

I. BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Christian church acknowledges its historical and contextual nature, and it commits itself to the call of imaging God's people in every historical era, as well as to be the servant of those who exist with the community of the triune God in the same, current living context. It believes that the gospel of its Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is a witness addressed to the world as a message that is substantially shaped by historical language and contextual, cultural bearings. Catholic theologian Piet Schoonenberg eloquently expressed the rootedness of the church and its theological discourse in people's living and thinking contexts when he said that "theology stands in history, not in eternity," and therefore those among the "theologians who thought that they wrote for all times show, through that very fact, that they were historically conditioned."¹ Throughout its long history, the church has always acknowledged that, as the community of God, it is called by its Lord and Master to become a religious community *in* history and *for* history at the same time. Everything the church believes in, or declares as its theological thinking, is an intellectual and spiritual discourse that is related to a specific historical and cultural context, and it should at least be spelled out in a language relevant and coherent to the life-setting in which this theological message is brought about.²

This historical and contextual nature of the church of Christ and its message—let alone the historical reality of the life of Jesus of Nazareth—has

1. Piet Schonnenberg, S.J., *Man and Sin: A Theological Review*, trans. Joseph Donceel, S.J. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), 192. Kathryn Tanner is not far from the truth when she argues, probably along the same lines, that it is questionable whether "Christians have a self-sustaining society and culture of their own, which can be marked off rather sharply from others." Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 96.

2. Graham Ward finds in this orientation toward history and context *the* core reason and the main significance of developing Christian apologetics. Far from circling around reflexivity, Ward argues that apologetics "orientates theological discourse towards a specific cultural and historical negotiation concerning public truth." "Without the orientation of Christian apologetics toward the world," Ward continues, "the theological task is merely an exercise in navel-gazing." Graham Ward, "Barth, Hegel and the Possibility of Christian Apologetics," in *Conversing with Barth*, ed. John C. McDowell and Mike Higton (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 53–67, 53.

made Christian theologians throughout history unquestionably sensitive to the intellectual and cultural context in which they exist and develop, all the while assessing, with the help of this setting's multifaceted means and methods, their theological thinking. Some theologians consider themselves revolutionary spokespersons of God's truth *for* or *before* the historical and intellectual context of their age. Others consider themselves prophetic theologians of God's truth *against* the historical and intellectual context, in which the church is called to challenge the prevailing culture by means of the gospel message. Yet others consider themselves theologians *of* history and context, who seek to interpret human experience and questions from a certain relational and interactive approach, drawing on the frameworks of meaning from within the context.

Be that as it may, it is natural, and even expected, to realize from studying the history of thought that Christian theology has always been part of the discussion on, and thinking about, each intellectual era's interpretation of the constitutive notions of human identity, notions such as "self," "person," and "relation." When the Platonic, dualistic view of reality was popular in the ancient, dominantly Greco-Roman world, various theologians developed an anthropological hermeneutics that speaks about personhood as an embodied soul containing in itself the conflicting elements of good and evil. Inspired by Origen of Alexandria, many fathers during the first Christian centuries believed that the selfhood, or personhood, of the human lies in an external objective reality, which is absolutely good in nature and elevates the human to an ontological level above all other existing species in the hierarchy of God's creatures.

When, on the other hand, in the Middle Ages Aristotle's opposition to Plato's dualism caught the attention of leading thinkers, the church's theologians, most notably Thomas Aquinas, conceded that the human soul belongs to the existing world and that it is not to be distinguished from the physical body by means such as hierarchical order or ontological existence. The goal of this emphasis on the body-soul unity was to give a metaphysical and intellectual value to the notion of "subsistence" besides the notion of "essence," especially in relation to the inquiry on the proper method of knowing. The core idea was showing that the self, or the personal substance, of the human being lies not only in *what* this self is but also in *how* this self is what it is.

Later on, when the modernist stress on the intellectual and the rational aspects of the existing subject dominantly characterized the Enlightenment's understanding of personhood and self, theologians became totally involved in thinking, negatively or positively, about the Boethian understanding of "person" as "an individual substance with a rational nature." Many of them

used and considered it as both the referential definition for understanding personhood in (and as) God, as well as in (and as) the human. The same manner of interaction or involvement in the intellectual discussion of the surrounding context clearly continues in today's theology too. With the escalating emphasis, in our so-called "postmodern" or "late-modern" intellectual context, on notions such as "personhood," "relationship," "participation," "event," "movement," "narrative," and so on, today's theologians are also reevaluating, and rapidly revising, Christian theology's previous understanding of "personhood" and "relationality" within the framework of the doctrine of God and theological anthropology. In this gradually broadening endeavor, theologians aspire to occupy leading positions in today's intellectual context by means of reinterpreting reality and understanding existence from different points of departure and distinguished inquiries.

It is quite essential for the role of the Christian church in the world that theologians are responsibly aware of the necessity of their involvement in the contemporary context's intellectual discussions. Theologians are to be commended and encouraged further about their conspicuous willingness to participate with secular and non-Christian intellectuals in their occupation with reunderstanding and reassessing the traditional hermeneutics of the notions of "self," "subject," "personhood," and "relation." By opting to participate, theologians are confessing before the world that producing a contextually relevant theological hermeneutics is part of their academic and religious cause, and not something that diverts theology away from its main mission. Having said that, the more crucial and important question before any theologian in today's context is this: How is theology, as an ecclesial reflection, supposed to execute this involvement, and what kind of contribution should it make to the running discussion on these notions? In other words, in their attempt at interacting with other thinkers in today's intellectual context, theologians find themselves confronted with the question of how they can relate to the present intellectual context without compromising the core message of the Christian faith; or how, that is, they should relate the content of the Christian texts to the context(s) of today's world, without either letting the text authoritatively dictate the context, or allowing the context exploitatively to twist the claims of the text.

It is by virtue of this very historical-contextual nature of the church's involvement in the surrounding intellectual space, and not in spite of such a nature, that the question of the proper relation between theology and culture was first raised in the history of Christianity. The inquiry about the appropriate form of such a relation is even more obviously demanded, and more tangibly required, within the context of the modernity-postmodernity curve that we are

witnessing in our era. The primary direction of Christian theology at the edge of this new human intellectual turn, as Diogenes Allen correctly notes, is either accepting “the principles and outlooks of the modern world and [minimizing] the distinctive content and basis of Christian doctrines, or [retaining] Christian doctrines verbally while isolating them from the present day and, in effect, [remaining] pre-modern.”³

II. BUT, WHAT RELATIONSHIP WITH CONTEXT?

It is inevitable, in today’s theological scholarship, to address these questions: What is the appropriate relationship(s) between Christian faith and the historical context in which it exists? What kind of relationship should Christian faith have with philosophy, culture, reason, and, in the postmodern age, with the applied sciences? More challenging still, should theology be a follower, or a leader, of other disciplines of knowledge? Should theology justify, or rather challenge, human secular/nonreligious thought from the angle of the belief in an absolute external reality called God? Should Christian theology try to prove itself *the* criterion for understanding truth, or should it rather merely make do with gaining the intellectual context’s recognition of it as one hermeneutical tool among many equal others? Should theology unreservedly and unconditionally adopt the rational axioms and cultural convictions that are prevalent in its historical context, or should it rather criticize this context and its constituents unreservedly and indistinguishably? Or, more specifically, should theology succumb to the contemporary criterion of validity, which, as Ingolf Dalferth shows, appears to be only allowing “a market of possibilities of meaning and sense, from which we choose according to our own individual wishes and needs, but not from the perspective of truth and untruth”? Should theology, as Dalferth continues, become just a religious language that is merely expressive of an extreme relativistic form of belief, where each man has his own god and each woman her own goddess, and where for every life situation there is a theological discourse that justifies and promotes its appropriate deity?⁴

In this systematic-contextual study, I endeavor to tackle these questions by tracing a particular model of a relationship between theology and the contemporary intellectual context of postmodernity. I attempt to show the

3. Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 7. Italics are mine.

4. Ingolf U. Dalferth, “Time for God’s Presence,” in *The Future of Theology: Essays in Honor of Jürgen Moltmann*, ed. M. Volf, C. Krieg, and T. Kucharz (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1996), 127–41, 137.

negative aspects and consequences of relating theology to the intellectual context of postmodernity without first discerning each side's particular nature and allowing each one to contribute to this relationship by means of its own distinction from, and sometimes contradiction of, the other. What I offer here is not a contextual theology, or a theology of contextuality, in the crude sense of the word. It is rather a systematic analysis and assessment of how theology attempts to relate to its postmodernist context, and the ramifications of the relational choices it makes on Christian faith.

What motivates my study is my increasing realization that in the recent scholarly arena there is a noticeably rapid spread and publicity of some contemporary theological discourses, which one can safely call "postmodern theologies." Though versatile and far from monolithic in claims and conclusions, these theologies seem to disclose a common, collective concern: they all demonstrate a Christian intellectual endeavor to invest in various contemporary, dominant, and popular rationales, and epistemological hermeneutics and notions, and appropriate them to the theological, doctrinal discourse on God and his triune nature. The promoters of such an appropriation are seemingly zealous about redeeming theology and retrieving the role and influence theology once had; yet this was denied during the age of modernity. They are trying to overcome all the constraints imposed on theology by the Enlightenment, by convincing the world that theology can prove its validity and regain its legitimacy in the eyes of the nonreligious, atheist, and secular surrounding culture, if only given a chance. These theologians, in addition, argue that theology before any other side must be held accountable for the depreciation and marginalization it suffered in modernity. For, instead of becoming good news for the modern human of that era, Christian faith became one of the representatives of the unreasonable, meaningless heritage of the irrational, premodern past. Aiming at sheer survival regardless of the consequences, these postmodernist theologians argue, theology in modernity decided to adopt unreservedly all the dominant and prevailing key concepts and epistemological rules of inquiry in this context and to apply them slavishly to its interpretation of God's reality. This eventually forced the Christian church sometimes to pay the high price of turning its theology from a discourse on God *for* and *before* the historical context into a discourse about the historical context itself, into a historical story about the human *for* and *before* his or her free, autonomous existence and perfection. The striving for survival and recognition-gaining led the church to twist its discourse into an anthropocentric rather than a theocentric one.

Against this old history of submission to modernity, numerous theologians in the postmodern era aim at retrieving theology's central place and claiming its referential validity one more time in the general intellectual and cultural context. In this, they are reacting bluntly against the modernist trends of theology, and postulate instead that theology should, and can, be reliably referential in, and relevant to, the contemporary forms and rules of intellectual inquiry. In the worst-case scenarios, and even if it is no longer feasible to consider theology the "first and best" discourse available, theology can still be plausibly construed as a valid hermeneutical discourse among many other equally reliable ones, and it should be neither undermined nor marginalized in comparison with them.

Such postmodernist theological trends are at bottom discourses that are different in character and thinking strategies from the theological discourses we had in modernity. They set before their eyes the task of remembering today's intellectual context of theology's equal validity, and they highlight the authenticity of its intellectual particularity in relation to other available contextual discourses. Their efforts stand as a serious warning against any remaining conventional, modernist allegation that theology cannot contribute uniquely to the postmodern world because: 1) it is just one old-fashioned form of thought among some surviving others, with which the world today has benevolently to coexist, yet is not obliged to use. 2) Since what theology offers can be stated and gleaned in an even more efficient and coherent intellectual manner by other intellectual discourses, theology can then be dispensed with and replaced. Against such allegations, many postmodernist theologians claim that only the theological rules of intellectual inquiry and interpretation can help today's world-context to read coherently and authentically the nature of human existence. The Christian hermeneutics of notions like "future," "hope," "love," "trinity," "relationality," "personhood," "redemption," "eschatology," "charity," "otherness," and so on, enables humanity to glean new webs of meaning and encounter unique readings and expressions of reality about itself and creation. In postmodernity, many theologians believe that theology needs only to show the contemporary intellectual context that Christian belief in God is essentially nothing but a special linguistic reflection on the possibility of human progress and human self-actualization. The Christian discourse on God is the tool needed to formulate new intellectual discourses that exceed and overcome the ideological and oppressive discourses that prevailed in modernity.

It is within this broad context of the relation between theology and its contemporary (modernist and postmodernist) intellectual inquiries that I attempt to examine the validity of contemporary theology's understanding of

“personhood” and “relationality.” I intend to do this by examining the role that postmodernist theologians and other thinkers bestow upon the notions of “personhood” and “relationality” in the theological and nontheological reasoning on both the human and the divine natures. Pursuing this examination immediately places the doctrine of the Trinity at the center of my study and makes it the key subject of my analyses and arguments. Why the doctrine of the Trinity rather than any other teaching from the storehouse of Christian faith? Because, first, I follow the theological approach which emphasizes that the doctrine of the Trinity is *the* content and the foundation of any intellectual discourse or theological interpretation of Christian faith. And, secondly, because one cannot ignore or undermine the strongly renewed interest in the concept of the Trinity, let alone the Christian doctrinal hermeneutics of the Trinity, in today’s intellectual arena. Christoph Schwöbel draws our attention to this intensive interest in the Trinity by pointing to the growing realization in today’s context of the central relevance of the primary idea of “Trinity” or the notion of “triadic reality.” There is a noteworthy admittance today, as Schwöbel notes, that the idea of “Trinity” is not only relevant in relation to entire subjects that are constitutive of the whole project of Christian theology, but is also equally relevant to the other social and scientific areas of knowledge in general.⁵

Having stated the above, it is not my intention here to study the relation of theology to the surrounding intellectual condition from the dimension of the doctrine of the Trinity per se. I would pursue my study, rather, from the perspective of two specific notions that are conceptually inherent to the content of the doctrine of the Trinity and enjoy a central place in this doctrine’s terminological package. I will focus on the trinitarian hermeneutics of “personhood” and “relationality” and see how some key modernist and postmodernist trinitarian theologians deal with these two notions.

III. “PERSONHOOD” AND “RELATIONALITY” AS A CONTEXTUAL- CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

But why study the relation between theology and other intellectual forms of inquiry specifically in relation to “personhood” and “relationality,” rather than in the light of other notions? If the claim that “what we and our institutions are

5. Christoph Schwöbel, “The Renaissance of Trinitarian Theology: Reasons, Problems and Tasks,” in *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*, ed. C. Schwöbel (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), 1–30. “In being relevant for the main doctrinal topics, trinitarian theology also reflects the interface these topics have with non-theological forms of inquiry” (2).

is largely a matter of persons in relationship”⁶ is correct, then even the rational, philosophical, and theological reasoning per se, and not only the institutions that practice it, is also reflective of, and founded on, an understanding of “person” and “relation.” It is founded on these notions to such an extent that the attention they enjoy in the research arena even underlies the relationship between theology and any existent intellectual context. In principle, every thought-form is expressive of someone making an intellectual, experiential, sensual, or physical connection with someone or something else. So, every form of existence *in* or existence *with* is formed by two components: personal identity and relational connection. In this elementary presumption, I side with many other philosophers of religion and theologians who believe that the concepts of “person,” “personality,” “relation,” and “relationality” represent the central focus for theological and philosophical reflections⁷ on God and humanity alike. The inquiry about the meaning of personhood, as Schwöbel states, similarly dominates a wide spectrum of recent public issues. These issues extend “from the ethics of genetic technology and medical research and practice to the debates about the character of legal responsibility and very practical issues of penal reform.”⁸

In this study, I aim to tackle questions such as: How should theologians evaluate and implement some contemporary notions of “personhood,” “selfhood,” and “relationality” in the light of the Christian trinitarian doctrine of God? Should theology adopt, or rather reject unqualifiedly the prevailing intellectual understanding of these notions in today’s intellectual arena? Or should it instead exceed the two previous options of either “following” or “standing over against” other forms of intellectual inquiry, with these two options’ dangerous extremism, toward another more convenient form of interaction with, and relatedness to, its historical, intellectual context? The validity and necessity of raising these questions today stem, as I will argue in this study, from a recent problematic submission and subordination of the trinitarian hermeneutics of God to the contextually and anthropologically centered interpretations of “personhood,” “selfhood,” and “relationality.” I will argue that there is today an emphatic adoption of a postmodern obsession with certain interpretations of “personhood,” “selfhood,” “communal/relational existence,”

6. Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 83.

7. C. Schwöbel, “Editorial Introduction,” in *Persons, Divine and Human: King’s College Essays in Theological Anthropology*, ed. Colin Gunton and Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999),

1. Schwöbel attributes the pioneering anticipation of the coming to age of this focus to John R. Illingworth, *Personality—Human and Divine* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1894).

8. Schwöbel, “Editorial Introduction,” 6–7.

and “otherness” as well as an uncritical, and even sweeping, incorporation of them into the Christian theology of God. I will show that this is the case especially in the theologians’ adoption of a contemporary postmodernist tendency to pursue a total identification of “personhood” and “relationality,” to collapse ontology into epistemology, and to reduce “substance” or “being” to mere “subsistence” or “existence.”

It is well known that these two notions, “personhood” and “relationality,” are inherently central to the Christian discourse on God the Trinity, and they are no less constitutive of the other doctrinal interpretations of the Christian faith’s components, such as Christology, pneumatology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Although the history of doctrine clearly discloses that these two notions always had a central place in Christian pedagogy, it is not far from truth to say that they occupy a much more central place, and they continue playing an indelibly foundational role in the postmodernist theological thinking about God and the God-creation relationship. They still enjoy this significance simply and primarily because these two notions occupy an equally central place in the postmodernist, nontheological context of the intellectual inquiry on the human self and the human-world relationship. In order, therefore, to perceive postmodernity’s recent impact on theological reasoning, and to understand the negative impact of some theologians’ obsession with overcoming modernity and breaking out of its preconditioning boundaries with the help of postmodernist intellectual tools, I will study how some recent theological trends invest the postmodern understanding of “personhood” and “relationality” in the doctrine of the Trinity. I will argue that this investment distorts the integrity and balance of the biblical and creedal theology of God and presents an inappropriate ontology that cannot be unreservedly or uncritically adopted by Christian thought. I will show how in this investment the notion of “personhood” was conceptually collapsed into the notion of “relationship” in such a way that turns God, and eventually the human person as well, into mere event or mere relational movements, that is, into a mere idealist network of activities. Instead of a balanced theo-logical ontology that maintains a distinction between God’s personhood and God’s relations—a lack of this distinction suggests separation between God’s personal identity and God’s relationships—there are postmodern theological trends, which I will point at, that propagate an ontology in which “personhood” means merely “relationality” or relational events: personhood connotes “being a relationship,” rather than “being *in* relationship.” I will show that such a reductionist ontology distorts the infinity of God’s being by turning God from a wholly-other being into a conceptual expression of an anthropological, ideal form of existence. It

equally denies God's personal mystery by turning the divine Trinity into a mere linguistic expression of humanity's searched-for state of "openness to otherness."

Be that as it may, the core issue this study discusses—insofar as the question of the relation of theology and other intellectual forms of inquiry is concerned—will not be whether theology should or should not develop a hermeneutics of "personhood" and "relationality" by the help, and in the light, of the available, prevailing intellectual rules of inquiry that are offered by other disciplines. It is rather whether or not every understanding of "personhood" and "relationality" that is offered by other discourses in today's context is congenial with the Christian doctrinal teaching on the triune God and on the human being within the framework of God's relation with creation. Within the dialogue between theology and other intellectual forms of inquiry, the case this study essentially aims to argue is the necessity of maintaining and revalidating a theological ontology that distinguishes (not separates) "personhood" from "relationality," God from humanity's communion with God, and God's personal being from God's relational presence with the human being. The importance of such ontology, as Colin Gunton correctly notes, lies in admitting the necessity of rooting the concern about relating theology to culture, and about renewing Christianity in relation to the external surrounding context. This cannot be achieved except by the aid of a theology of personhood and relationality that prevents conflating theology and every rational element definitive of a specific, historical, and narrow cultural context into each other.⁹ I will explain this necessary distinction between theology and context, which Gunton points at, by talking about the importance of the ontological differentiation between "personhood" and "relationality"—the differentiation, that is, which both modernist and postmodernist theological trends fail to maintain.

I attempt to argue for this failure by displaying modernist and postmodernist theologies that are not principally different from each other in the way they treat "personhood" and "relationality" within the context of the doctrine of the triune God in general, and the theological understanding of the human self in particular. My argument will reveal that I do not principally agree with the general claim that "there exist in the Western tradition two distinct, sometimes overlapping, views of the person, one of them believed almost everywhere, but wrong; the other neglected but right."¹⁰ Instead, my discussion will state that the spectrum of the notions of "personhood" and

9. *Ibid.*, 22–23.

10. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 83. Gunton speaks specifically about Descartes' individualistic view of personhood, on one side, and about the relational view of personhood that,

“relationality” in modernity and postmodernity is much more multifaceted and complicated than a “black-and-white” framework suggests. Nevertheless, my study will also suggest that what some postmodernist theologies emphasize and rely on are trends for which earlier modernist thinking on selfhood and subjectivity, both theological and philosophical, paved the way. The conflation of “personhood” with “relationality,” and the reduction of “three persons” into three “relational movements,” are not pure postmodernist inventions. The seeds of these tendencies are actually sown in the soil of the modernist theological and philosophical interpretations of “selfhood,” “subjectivity,” and “individualism.” These interpretations pave the way for, rather than stand over and against, the postmodernist reduction of God’s being and the human self into a mere process of relational movement or a collection of communal activities. Eventually, this culminates in the reduction of the triune God’s divine persons into mere movements of relationality, the existential reenactment and imitation of which the human is called for in order to be his or her full self. This reduction invites me to believe that the inconvenient relationship which theology found itself trapped in with modernity witnesses its ultimate extension and bears its ripest fruits in postmodernity.

IV. THIS STUDY’S STRUCTURE

This study is divided into three main parts. The first part is titled “The Roots,” and it deals with the relation between trinitarian theology and some of the intellectual forms of inquiry that are related to the notions of “self” and “personhood” in the context of modernity. It maps what I believe to be the roots of the main theological and philosophical hermeneutics of “personhood,” “selfhood,” and “relationality,” which we see scholars entertaining and emphasizing in postmodernity. I start with an analysis of Boethius’ understanding of “person” and then trace the interpretation of this Boethian understanding in the philosophy of transcendent subjectivism. After this, I discuss its implementation in the ontology of subjectivity and personhood that characterize major theological discourses on the relationship between God and humanity in modernity. I view how Paul Tillich and Karl Barth interact with this modernist understanding of selfhood and subjectivity, and how they deal with its anthropocentric connotations. I examine whether their discourses on God counter and challenge, or follow and succumb to the modernist criterial

according to Gunton, finds its beginning in the philosophy of people like Macmurray and Coleridge, on another.

rules of inquiry and understanding. I show that though these theologians depart in their theological projects from challenging their contemporary intellectual era, their ultimate conclusions, thought-forms, and methods of interpretation in essence do not go beyond the boundaries of reasoning that were delineated and certified by the modernist context. By pointing at the argument, methods, and intellectual implications of the theological discourses of Tillich and Barth, I attempt to show the shortcomings of the theological reasoning related to the modernist context, which ensues later in postmodernity, though it takes different forms and pertains to other dimensions.

In the second part of the study, which is titled “The Challenge,” I demonstrate how the inappropriate relation that theology constructed within modernity’s intellectual context continues within, but does not substantially transform, the postmodernist context. Instead of liberating theology from a blind subjection to other forms of inquiry by means of launching a balanced and mutually influential relationship with other forms of inquiry in today’s context, there is a tendency among theologians today either to 1) continue the borrowing-following strategy by adopting postmodernity’s popular rules of inquiry and unreservedly applying them to theological reasoning, or to 2) jump to an opposite reactionary extreme by endeavoring to prove that postmodernity is from beginning to end theologically conditioned (in reaction to the modernist demand from theology to prove that it is from beginning to end “rational”). I argue that either stance expresses an inappropriate attitude toward other forms of inquiry and reflects a secondary and useless role for theology in today’s world.

After setting the general framework of this interaction between theology and postmodernism, I study specifically how trinitarian theology deals with the postmodernist centralization of “relationality” and “otherness” in opposition to the modernist centralization of “individuality” and “self-centeredness.” I argue that instead of examining the validity of these notions’ postmodernist trends in interpretation, there are trinitarian theologians who unquestionably borrow these interpretations and apply them to the trinitarian doctrine of God. By doing this, they reduce God to the linguistic expression of an idealist image of relationality, in accordance with which the human is called to live in order to be his or her real self. Against this phenomenon, I refer back to the Christian tradition, and specifically to Thomas Aquinas’s theology of “relation” and “participation,” from which I borrow what I deem to be a balanced interpretation of “relationality” that can correct both recent hermeneutics of “relationship” and “otherness,” and a contemporary obsession that turns the doctrine of the triune God into a discourse on relational ontology.

If theology wants to free itself from the chains of modernity's rules of intellectual inquiry and contribute positively and uniquely to today's arena of knowledge, then theology should examine the one-sided postmodernist emphasis on "relationality" and "otherness" by means of the hermeneutics of the relation between "person" and "relation," and "being" and "existence," which we find in the doctrine of the Trinity. It should not turn this doctrine into a discourse that reflects a specific reduction of "personhood" into mere "relationality," and of "being" into mere "existence," that is dominant today. Theology should not allow this if it wants to maintain the particularity of the theological rationale that underpins the Christian understanding of the triune God.

In the third part of the study, "The Proposal," I suggest "correlation" as a model of interaction between theology and secular forms of intellectual inquiry. I argue that "correlationality" is a more appropriate relational model to express the link between the notions of "relationship" and "personality" in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Since the notion of "correlation" is widely and intensively used in modern theological and philosophical scholarship, I start this part with a chapter on the notion of "correlation" that, in my view, theology should avoid and even criticize. As examples of an investment into such an inappropriate correlation in today's trinitarian theology, I outline the proposals of David Tracy, Gordon Kaufman, and Mark Taylor. I argue that their models of correlation do not take sufficiently into consideration the particularity and integrity of theological scholarship, but tend, rather, to transform theology into a form of inquiry that primarily proves itself congenial with the contextual and rational presumptions, and rules of thought, that are already dominant in today's intellectual arena. As an alternative to this form of correlation, I point in the following chapter to the correlational model of relationality proposed by Francis Watson and Hans Frei. I see in their understanding of the relationship between theology and other forms of inquiry, as well as between the theological fields of research, a model of correlation that exceeds any form of hierarchism or subordination.

In the last two chapters of the book, I take the search for a proper correlation between theology and other forms of inquiry back to the specific issue of the notions of "personhood" and "relationality" in the particular context of the doctrine of the triune God. I suggest here that the trinitarian theologies of Jürgen Moltmann and, more emphatically, Wolfhart Pannenberg, as reliable and balanced understandings of the relationship between "person" and "relation" on one side, and between "unity" and "particularity" on the other. In Pannenberg's theology, in particular, this understanding is based on a "unity-

in-self-distinction” model of correlation, which is similar to what Watson and Frei suggest when they speak about a nonhierarchical relationship between theology and other forms of intellectual inquiry. After I outline the trinitarian thinking of Moltmann and Pannenberg, I end the study with a chapter on how these two theologians implement their trinitarian logic of “unity-in-self-distinction” in their understanding of the relationship between theology and other fields within the general scholarly context of reasoning. I propose their implementation as a reliable model that theology today can follow in its attempt at interacting with other forms of intellectual inquiry in the postmodern context.

I hope the reader will be able to perceive that this study presents two layers of inquiry: a general one on the relationship between theology and other intellectual forms of inquiry (theologizing on the relation of theology to the context), and a more specific one, which functions as a case study, on the relationship between trinitarian theology and the main hermeneutical trends regarding “self,” “personhood,” “relationship,” and “otherness” (reshaping the theology-context relation from a trinitarian perspective and by means of trinitarian notions). It is a combination of systematic, analytical, and critical assessment, and of the construction of trinitarian hermeneutics of relationality, by means of looking at some major segments from the history of contemporary theologies of God and humanity on one side, and the history of philosophical anthropology in the modern age on another. It is not a comprehensive display of that history of thought, and not a detailed commentary on its theological and philosophical milestones. It is a selective display of what I believe to be major stations on the way toward situating theology’s relationship with contextual forms of intellectual inquiry within a framework of questions on the meaning of “selfhood,” “personhood,” and “relationality.”

This stated, it is my hope that this study will invite today’s theologians to explore more acutely and critically Christian theology’s role in today’s context, and to examine whether the strategies of thinking and interpretation we use to do theology today are fairly expressive of the particular nature and claims of Christian faith or not. More specifically, I call for doing this examination in relation to the contemporarily developed Christian understanding of the triune God and its ambition of making an impact on, and becoming a referential criterion for, understanding human existence and nature in today’s context. The doctrine of the Trinity can undoubtedly transform our understanding of the meaning of “selfhood” and “otherness,” and can take human thinking beyond the limits and mistakes of any contextually limited and one-sided mindset. But it can do this only when it correlates with other nontheological hermeneutics of

human nature and selfhood in a nonhierarchical, nonsubordinationist mode of relationality. It can do this when it reflects theology's uniqueness and maintains its integrity, and when it does this with the aid of a relationship-hermeneutics based on the "unity-in-self-differentiation" correlation between the three divine persons in the eternal Godhead.