

Friends in God: A Foundational Motif in Classical Reflections on the Divine Economy

F. GERALD DOWNING*

A “social” model of the Trinity, warmly debated in the last century, seems to have lost influence (witness the recent Oxford Handbook of the Trinity). It is argued here, however, that far from being a modern innovation, as suggested, a “friendship” model was integral to Pauline and Johannine and then Cappadocian reflections on Father, Son, Spirit. Some of the key terms in ancient discussions of friendship are collated here in supportive illustration. A critically appraised model of friendship, it is then proposed, is fitting for those who trust we are being creatively sustained, redeemed, hallowed, and transformed to share in the divine life.

“There is something peculiarly ‘modern’ in the question of the relationship between the doctrine of the Trinity and how one might think about politics.” So observed, quite recently, Frederick C. Bauerschmidt, in the *Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*; and here one might readily substitute “society” for “politics.” Following Augustine, we are taught instead to find in the doctrine implications for each individual, not directly for community. That this is a common conclusion finds implicit support when only two out of more than forty contributors to the *Handbook* reflect at any length on the Trinity and society.¹ What I try to argue here, by contrast, is that reflections on God as Trinity

* [Francis] Gerald Downing is retired from Anglican parochial ministry and from ministerial training. He is the author of a number of articles and books, most recently, *Order and (Dis)order in the First Christian Century: A General Survey of Attitudes* (Brill, 2013). He is an honorary research fellow at the University of Manchester, United Kingdom.

¹ Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, “The Trinity and Politics,” in Gilles Emery, O. P., and Matthew Levering, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 531–543, citing 531. The one other (but valuable) discussion of “community” is in Nonna Verna Harrison, “The Trinity and Feminism,” *Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, 529–530. Four others mention it, but only in passing.

were in “social” language from the start, in terms of friendship talk. But from this being obvious in the early centuries it has been occluded by other, more formal, more purely hierarchical, even imperial models.² I can only speculate on the causes of this loss, but would quote Malte Hossenfelder, “In a time when even free male Greek citizens were politically powerless, a basic shared principle was an acknowledgement of those needs and only those needs whose satisfaction lay in one’s own power.”³ Power clearly did not lie with local social groupings, and friendships now had little social force. By our day, instead of friendship seeming foundational, based in the “nature” of each, it will appear elective, adventitious, insecure: “ontologically weak,” one might suggest.

“Friendship,” in any of its varied uses, is now itself lamentably rare in our theological reflections (even in this *Review*, on my own recent retrospect). And it seems not to be considered at all in most analyses of relationships within the divine Trinitarian “economy.”⁴ Yet if we are concerned with the ethics and practice of relationships (again, in any sense), it is worth noting that in the world of Christian origins, “friendship” could designate the deepest and strongest and best relationship imaginable between human beings, based, in effect, in the nature of those who discover their existing commonality. It is in this socio-cultural context, I here argue, that deep “friendship” motifs in fact figure significantly in the theologies of Paul and John and elsewhere in the New Testament collection, and later, in the formative Cappadocians. The latter have been crucially important for those positing person-to-person relationships among the “persons” of

² The *ATR* reviewer drew my attention to Gijsbert van der Brink, “Social Trinitarianism: A Discussion of Some Recent Theological Criticisms,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16, no. 3 (July 2014): 331–350, which offers quite a full survey of recent discussions, touching on part of the argument here.

³ Malte Hossenfelder, *Die Philosophie der Antike, 3: Stoa, Epicureismus und Skepsis*, second edition (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1995), 24, my translation; see F. Gerald Downing, *Order and (Dis)order in the First Christian Century: A General Survey of Attitudes* (Lieden: Brill, 2013), 86.

⁴ I note Kathryn L. Reinhard, “Joy to the Father, Bliss to the Son: Unity and the Motherhood Theology of Julian of Norwich,” *Anglican Theological Review* 89, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 629–645, concentrating, albeit perceptively, on other issues (but see further, below); Don Saines, “Wider, Broader, Richer: Trinitarian Theology and Ministerial Order,” *Anglican Theological Review* 92, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 511–535; Robert Davis Hughes III, “Catching the Divine Breath in the Paschal Mystery: An Essay on the (Im)passibility of God, in Honor of Elizabeth Johnson,” *Anglican Theological Review* 93, no. 4 (Fall 2011): 527–539.

the Trinity, affording a “social” model, although any such reading has been vigorously disputed.⁵ I suggest this fresh approach.

In the wider Greco-Roman world there is a pervasive agreement on the topic of friendship, already noted in Aristotle, even if details differ. “Friendship” can be motivated by sensuous pleasure, by usefulness (material or social gain), or, best and most truly, by the desire for shared fulfillment and flourishing (*eudaimonia*). Slaves are for use, as living tools; husbands and wives, parents and children are related on a basis of need. “Real” friends have to be equal. True (usually male!) friends are (find themselves to be) of one mind in everything, able to be frank with one another. They have a common ethos, a shared sense of the good and the just. They place in common their possessions. Friends are usually from the same social milieu.

However, any such deep unanimity of opinion and purpose and community of possessions is agreed to be very rare, and obviously quite impracticable and unobtainable with each and every fellow (male) citizen.⁶ It is worth, however, quoting from Plutarch a summary of the rarely instanced ideal: “In our friendship’s consonance and harmony there must be no element unlike, uneven, or unequal, but all must be alike to engender agreement in words, counsels, opinions, and feelings, and it must be as if one soul were apportioned among two or more bodies.”⁷ Friends, as noted, do not have to school each other into agreement; rather, discovering how much they have in common establishes their friendship. Further, a true friend would want to share even another’s pain, and is willing to die for the other: a commonplace noted by Jesus at John 15:13; compare Paul at Romans

⁵ In support, see John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985); BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today, *The Forgotten Trinity*, 1 and 2 (London: British Council of Churches, 1989); Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991). In opposition, see Sarah Coakley, ed., *Re-thinking Gregory of Nyssa* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) = *Modern Theology* 18, no. 4 (2002), and her more recent *God, Sexuality and the Self: A Essay ‘On the Trinity’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁶ See David Konstan, “Are Fellow Citizens Friends? Aristotle versus Cicero on *Philia*, *Amicitia*, and Social Solidarity,” in Ralph M. Rosen and Ineke Sluiter, eds., *Valuing Others in Classical Antiquity*, Mnemosyne Supplement 323 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 233–248, here esp. 240–242.

⁷ Plutarch, *De amic. mult.*, 8 (*Moralia* 96EF).

5:6–11.⁸ Similar accounts remain current for following centuries among influential Christian thinkers.⁹

By contrast, families are unreliable. Even brothers have disputes over property.¹⁰ Reference to friendship among women occurs only rarely in surviving literary texts, but does appear in plebeian grave inscriptions.¹¹ However, only among small groups, such as Epicurean or Pythagorean or Cynic communities, might such ideals (for women as well as men) be thought plausible or worth attempting.¹² Indeed these close friendships and associational ones in particular may well themselves conflict with family and civic obligations and concord.¹³

We may here ignore other distinct uses of “friend,” including the very formal “Friend of the Emperor,” or friend-adviser to a governor.¹⁴ But can we be sure that what is meant by such talk of ideal friendship “means” what we would mean by it? I can only offer a Wittgensteinian response: Ask what in any situation makes you doubt whether someone is a real friend, and then ask why you think the question worth asking. Known action, including speech, is basic.¹⁵

It is also worth noting that important elements of friendship vocabulary have a significant role in ancient metaphysical speculation. Dio, for instance, deploys it (likely dependent on Plato, *Timaeus*) in

⁸ Compare Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1169a; Seneca, *Epist. Mor.* 1.9.10–12; *Epictetus, Diss.* 2.7.3; John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Thessalonians*, 2.

⁹ Compare John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Thessalonians* and Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 31 (Fifth Theological)*, 1–10, on relationships, and 14, on unity of will and power; see also Gregory of Nyssa’s *Life of Macrina*, his sister. I note a brief discussion in Augustine: *De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII*, 71, but with no reference to the Trinity.

¹⁰ See David Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 147, citing a fragment from Quintilian.

¹¹ See Konstan, *Friendship*, 47–49, 90–91, 146; among poor families, see Robert Knapp, *Invisible Romans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 71, but without reference to sources.

¹² See Konstan, *Friendship*, 108–115.

¹³ See Konstan, *Friendship*, 131–137.

¹⁴ See Konstan, *Friendship*, 105–108, citing Dio, *Discourse on Kingship* 3, Plutarch, *Precepts of Statecraft, Moralia* 798A–825F; but compare also Dio, *Discourse* 41, *To the Apameians on Concord*, 7, 10.

¹⁵ One may compare discussions of whether the ancients acted roles rather than being selves: for example, Charles Taylor and Bruce Malina, in chapter 2, “Persons in Relation,” of F. Gerald Downing, *Making Sense in (and of) the First Christian Century*, JSNTS 197 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 43–61.

talk of the whole cosmos displaying harmony, concord, common purpose, and justice.¹⁶

So to some inter-human examples of these common ideal friendship motifs among New Testament and other early Christian documents, embedded as they are in their Greco-Roman world. Important aspects of the conventional ideal of friendship are realized in the sketch of the early community in Acts, where members are of one mind and have all in common (Acts 2:43–47; 4:32–35; see also *Did* 4.8; 1 John 3:16–17; Heb. 10:23–24; 13:1–2, 16; compare Ignatius, *Eph* 13, 20; *Sm* 6).¹⁷ These motifs are current and taken as formative. For Paul friendship does not replace family, at least in theory; but in fact he regularly assumes or urges important elements of this ethos. All should be “of one mind” (Rom. 12:16, 15:5; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 1:27, 2:2, 4:2; see also 1 Pet. 3:8). Pressing the case for the collection for “the saints” Paul urges that resources be “held in common” (*koinonia*) so as to even out differences, even if not as far as Acts’ actual pooling of possessions (Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4, 9:13).¹⁸ Even so, as L. L. Welborn has recently argued, and cogently, Paul’s insistence on general, not “socially proportional” equality “would have appeared as a dangerous attempt to reverse the established social relations of power [between patron and client] within [more formal] Graeco-Roman friendship,” but also in civic (that is, “political”) decision-making.¹⁹

The expectation and/or encouragement in the passages cited immediately above is for followers of Jesus the Christ to offer conventionally recognized true and costly friendship to one another, among

¹⁶ Dio, *Discourse* 40.35–36.

¹⁷ See also Alan C. Mitchell, S.J., “The Social Function of Friendship in Acts 2:44–47 and 4:32–37,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111, no. 2 (1992): 255–272; and Todd Penner, *In Praise of Christian Origins: Stephen and the Hellenists in Lukan Apologetic Historiography*, Emory Studies in Early Christianity 10 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 262–287.

¹⁸ As argued recently by Julien M. Ogereau, “The Jerusalem Collection as Κουρώνια: Paul’s Global Politics of Socio-Economic Equality and Solidarity,” *New Testament Studies* 58, no. 3 (July 2012): 360–378.

¹⁹ L. L. Welborn, “‘That There May Be Equality’: The Contexts and Consequences of a Pauline Ideal,” *New Testament Studies* 59, no. 1 (January 2013): 73–90, here citing 80, and referring to 76–81, noting a contrast with Philo’s conventional (Aristotelian) interpretation of the same “proof text,” Ex. 16:18, at 2 Cor. 8:15. Robert Knapp allows that the poor themselves shared the Aristotelian idea of equality, “each according to his [or her] due” (*Invisible Romans*, 120).

fellow humans.²⁰ In John 15:13, however, the focus is on the friendship granted by Jesus as Son of God to his followers, the Son of God's friendship with them. And one may usefully compare (or, if it seems called for, contrast) this with John 3:16–17, "God so loved the world." Whether in John's Gospel "love" is reciprocal is unclear. Unlike the epistles, it is never actually stated that we are expected to love God, nor even that the Son does. However, it may be implicit in John 15:12, in the command "love one another as I have loved you," and in chapter 17, in talk of abiding in the Father's love.

Then in Romans 5:6–11 there is already at issue a befriending from God's side, a befriending beyond any that might be expected or at least hoped for among fellow human friends: this is to death for love of enemies. We, however unlikely, are taken as friends by God through his closest representative, his Son. This closeness of friendship is also, of course, implicit in Paul's comparison between "us" and Moses (2 Cor. 3) where, by contrast, we are unlimitedly "face to face." But it is also the implication of Paul's insistence (1 Cor. 2:16) that having the Spirit—the Spirit that designates God's own self-awareness—we possess "the mind of Christ": on some issues at least, we are of one mind with him. And not only so, but we have all things in common together with Christ, and so, with God (1 Cor. 3:21–22). On this passage it is then worth noting in support that John Chrysostom makes the friendship motifs here explicit, and that specifically in the light of John 15:15.²¹

The "one mind" theme recurs in Paul's Romans 8, albeit there rather outshone by filiation. Here, through the Spirit, God is able and willing to share the mind of each one of us (Rom. 8:26–28). And, again, that seems to involve a part in all things: the whole creation waiting with us, and nothing in all creation able to separate us from God. Further, in Paul, love is clearly taken as a reciprocal relationship (for example, Rom. 8:28, 1 Cor. 2:9). We are "at-oned" with God (2 Cor. 5:18–21).

And these two authors do also seem to suggest a person-to-person friend-like relationship within God, at least between Father and Son: this goes beyond the expected model of parent and child. In John, Son

²⁰ On this strand in John there is a detailed discussion in Sjeff van Tilborg's *Imaginative Love in John* (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

²¹ John Chrysostom, *Sermons on 1 Corinthians* 7, ignored by the modern commentators consulted.

and Father are clearly of one mind (for example, John 5:30, 8:28), and all that the Father has the Son has (John 16:15, 17:10).²² Articulated explicitly, it is enacted in deeds and teaching throughout the narrative, as a perfect friendship actuated within a perfect filial relationship. Admittedly, such a Father–Son relationship is not as plainly stated in Paul, but it is forcefully implied throughout. Having “the mind of Christ” is being granted “the depths” of God’s mind (1 Cor. 2:10, 16). God, Lord, and Spirit are at one in granting us wisdom, knowledge, faith . . . (1 Cor. 12:4–11). The Spirit transforms our minds into images of Christ and so of God (2 Cor. 3:14–4:4; compare Rom. 12:2). We can together be of one mind with Christ in his saving compliance with the Father (Phil. 2:1–13). Christ’s love is God’s love (Rom. 8:39). To share the mind of one is to share the mind of the other, in their relationship with each other. And that is, as already noted, to share everything as “God” and “Son” do (1 Cor. 3:22–23; Rom. 8:37–39).

There is much less reflection on the relationship of the Spirit to “God” or to the “Son of God.” The Spirit belongs to both, and in a sense seems to constitute the shared mind of both, and is taken to effect the will of both in human lives. But I do not find the Spirit imagined in the sustaining or renewing of all things anywhere in John, nor in Paul: not even at 1 Corinthians 8:6, nor Romans 8:19–25. Nor is there any talk in either of love between Spirit and Father or Son (but then, Paul does not talk of love between Son and Father, either).

It remains the case that the relationships conveyed between God (the Father), Christ (the Son), and to a lesser extent, the Spirit are significantly discussed in language redolent of friendship. And that is not only in their relationships with humans, but also with one another. They are narrated as persons interacting as ideal friends.²³

But could this be more than vivid metaphor in a context dominated by Second Temple Judaism’s insistence on the absolute unity of God? Certainly, it was read “ontologically” by later Christians with a Platonizing bent: but was it read as such by Paul and John, with their strong reliance on Jewish tradition?

²² On this, see for instance Alicia D. Myers, “‘In the Father’s Bosom’: Breastfeeding and Identity Formation in John’s Gospel,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (July 2014): 481–497.

²³ In his “Social Trinitarianism,” 342–343, van der Brink allows considerable weight to narrations of the Father–Son relationship among New Testament writers. The index to *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity* lacks any reference to the “friendship” model.

It certainly could have been plausible with their contemporary, Philo of Alexandria, had he become a Pauline or Johannine sort of Christian. For Philo, metaphors that scripture had God apply to himself or accept from “Moses” had strong ontological force. They had by definition more truth, “more reality,” than anything that could be said about evanescent and inconstant humans.²⁴ Neither Paul nor John had adopted the amount of middle Platonism that we find in Philo. All I can say is that something of the same ethos is nonetheless to be discerned in their writings: see, for instance, Paul on the Christ already in action at the Exodus (1 Cor. 10:1–5), or John on Abraham seeing Jesus’ “day” (John 8:54–59).

Early Christian experience, as affirmed by changed lives and other wonders, seemed as a whole to demand articulation in term of involvement in divine interpersonal interaction. And this was not to be taken as rhetorical ornament, any more than was what God had affirmed of God’s self in the inherited scriptures.

My argument thus far, then, is that Paul and John deploy widely a conventional contemporary vocabulary of active interpersonal friendship, and carry this usage over into their narrative of divine saving activity, with an ontological force at least a possibility. And now I hope to show that Cappadocian theologians later read this matter in this way, and the Jewish scriptures underlie and deeply color the new reflections, in these very obvious terms: divine action is importantly interpreted on the model of the loving interaction of friends.

These later theologians are often discussed primarily or solely in terms of their metaphysical abstractions, their analyses of individual nouns (as titles). But, as Kathryn Tanner points out, in such of their “popular” expositions as have reached us, they are at least as likely also to follow the narrative of the authoritative scriptures—in effect noting the common and harmonious purposes and actions of the (variously) named divine beings. And these, I hope to show, model ideal friendship.²⁵

I offer as my main examples, Basil (the Great) of Caesarea (the oldest of the Cappadocian trio), *On the Holy Spirit*; Gregory of Nyssa

²⁴ See F. Gerald Downing, “Ontological Asymmetry in Philo and Christological Realism in Paul, Hebrews and John,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 41, no. 2 (1990): 423–440; reprinted in Downing, *Making Sense in (and of) the First Christian Century*, 188–207.

²⁵ Kathryn Tanner, “The Trinity as Christian Teaching,” in *Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, 349–358.

(Basil's younger brother), *Catechetical Discourse*; and Gregory of Nazianzus (their friend), *Oration 6, Eirenikos prōtos*.

Basil had been challenged for occasionally using different prepositions in the *Gloria Patri*, suggesting to some hearers a different relationship from what they took to be traditional, in effect a superior status, especially for the Holy Spirit. Basil's response begins with noting (chaps. 5–8, §§7–19) that scripture refuses to be bound by alien grammarians' niceties. Basil then concentrates on the relationships of the creative Word and the Father, where there are more texts to work with, focusing on passages agreed, it would seem, to refer to these respectively, but stressing already in the grammatical argument their common action, purpose, intent, understanding, as well as the shared title of honor, "Lord."²⁶ Obviously, for Basil, the question (5.7), "Who has known the mind of the Lord?" expects the answer, the Word, in the light of early lines of Hebrews and the assurance in John that the Father has shown the Son everything and that the Son is in tune with the will of the Father. There is no hint in the prepositions used of any servility (5.8), nor any other inequality (6.13–15). That the Father works by way of (*dia*) the Word does not make the Word a temporary slave or instrument, for everything is always his (8.19), nor does talk of obeying an "order" (John 14:31) imply any such, for communication, totally assimilated unity of mind (*tēn oikeian gnōmēn*), of Father and Son is forever complete (8.20). Implicitly but clearly, they are related as friends, with nothing to disqualify friendship being posited between them.

What I would stress here, is that Basil's reading of scripture is in line with what I have suggested earlier. Scriptural narrative is read as indicating interpersonal relationships between Father and Son. I would then argue that we give this due weight, rather than stressing the rather different picture that can be drawn from his and the others' metaphysical speculations.

Within this perfect amity, friendship by nature, the Holy Spirit must be taken to be included (chaps. 9–30). The Spirit's activity as "perfecter" is inseparable from that of Father and Word. And the Spirit is able as friend within the divine friendship to assimilate us into that friendship (9.23; compare 19.49), using the same terminology: *oikeiōsis*. By the Spirit we too are being made of one mind with God, being brought to an awareness of the indescribable beauty of

²⁶ Compare Basil, *Six Days of Creation*, 2:14BC, 26C; 6:51B

God—which, I am arguing, can only be as friends among friends. The possibility of creation, its actualization, and its perfecting can be attributed to Father, Son, and Spirit respectively, but that is one single initiative in common (*koinōnia*, 16.38, marking friendship) and one single rule, *monarchia*, of all three (not of the Father alone, 18.45).²⁷ Educated citizens of the Empire knew the temporal importance of avoiding a divided rule. The titles of honor accorded indicate commonality with Father and Son (19.48), but even more significant and determinative are the actions in scripture attributed to the Spirit (19.49–50; and so for succeeding chapters). Here for sure the Spirit is neither slave nor animate tool, but equal friend.²⁸ One might doubt, then, whether Basil or either Gregory would have been happy with or easily persuaded to accept the Spirit simply as the *energeia* of love, even though infinite, between Father and Son.

I end this exegetical sketch with a passage from Gregory Nazianzus:

Now, belonging to the One, we have become one; belonging to the Trinity, we have gained unity; become of one nature, of one soul, of equal worth; belonging to the one Logos-Reason, we have escaped [divisive] unreason; belonging to the one Spirit, we are stirred, but together; belonging to the one who is the Truth, we reach the same conclusions; belonging to Wisdom, we are of one mind; belonging to the Light, we live together “as children of light”; belonging to the Way, we act in unison. . . .²⁹

I argue, then, that we should read what the Cappadocians say about the “persons” of the Trinity and their unity in the light of the common ancient understanding of the “personhood” of friends who are “of one mind.” Such a reading leaves the Cappadocians’ conclusions at least compatible with, and possibly encouraging a social model of the divine Trinity, into whose divine life we are being drawn. Their metaphysics may seem to contradict their personalist conclusions; but, then, why prefer the metaphysics?

²⁷ On *monarchia* see Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Discourse* 3.

²⁸ Compare Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 31.6.15 and Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Discourse* 3.3. Similar scriptural passages to those chosen by all three in fact formed the basis for Leonard Hodgson’s insistence on the “personhood” of the Spirit, in his *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Nisbet, 1943). On the other hand, a quest for a similar account of the Spirit in Augustine, *De Trinitate*, drew a blank.

²⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 6, *Eirenikos prōtos*, 4.10–16, my translation.

Gijsbert van der Brink would have us accept that, yes, in “the economy,” in God’s outer dealings with us, the divine *personae* act as persons in our sense, but then accept that this tells us nothing of the inner life of the Trinity.³⁰ But what better indications of that inner life can metaphysical speculation achieve? If God’s inner life is unknowable—as most would accept—then our metaphysics offer less than a more vivid imagined narrative of sustained and constantly renewed creation.

Having stayed, admiringly and gratefully, with the early pioneers, I have to come clean. Their contemporary ideal of friendship is itself limited, elitist, cerebral, male.³¹ It does not allow for a willingness to depend on the other’s (or others’) responses. But it does point forward. We then may fruitfully further compare the reflections of the medieval Western theologian Richard of St. Victor. His conclusions are that the relationships between the persons of the Trinity are to be taken as genuinely being between individuals, sufficiently for love between them to be not in effect mirrored self-love but genuinely self-giving love, love seeking love in return, and overflowing.³² Or, with Paul in Romans 8, we may prefer a family model, supplemented by friendship motifs. But it seems to me that on either model, to imagine our God in terms of loving interpersonal relationships is fitting. In such loving and generous relationships as we achieve or are granted we may imagine we are being drawn prayerfully into that divine life.³³

The life of the Trinity, in effect then, may be taken to model and enable an ideal friendship in and for us together. We trust we are being made at one with God by God in Christ, being formed and transformed by the Spirit into the divine image.

³⁰ Van der Brink, “Social Trinitarianism,” 342–344.

³¹ Though compare the expressed attitudes of Gregory of Nyssa and of Augustine, mentioned above, n. 9.

³² Richard of St. Victor, *The Trinity*, Book 3, available in Grover A. Zinn, ed. and trans., *Richard of St. Victor: The Twelve Patriarchs, The Mystical Ark, and Book Three of The Trinity*, Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1979). See also Dominique Poirel, “Scholastic Reasons, Monastic Mediations and Victorine Conciliations: The Question of the Unity and Plurality of God in the Twelfth Century,” in *Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, 168–181. Richard is taken up by Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), chap. 8, esp. 190. And note also my own “Theological Breadth, Interconnection, Tradition, and Gender: Hildegard, Hadewijch, and Julian Today,” *Anglican Theological Review* 86, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 423–450, esp. 442–450.

³³ Compare Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, 111–121, despite her rejection of any family model.

Reading Kathryn Tanner's 2005 *Economy of Grace* only after drafting the foregoing, I am struck by the unremarked similarities between her theological imagining (her term, as well as mine) of a gracious economy and elements of ancient ideals of friendship, precisely as an uncompetitive, unobligating, shared well-being.³⁴ Much of her detail is relevant to what I here suggest. We see ourselves as being brought deeper into the divine life with a growing if never to be completed awareness of the reality of our God. God in Trinity has taken us as friends, being drawn into fuller and fuller appreciation of and active socio-political response to the depth and wonder of the love of creator, redeemer, hallower. But I would take issue at just one point. Tanner insists, in accord with tradition, that God loves us without needing our response. I would prefer to trust that in love God wills to be vulnerable here, too. For creation, redemption, hallowing to be complete we must come to love enough, if never perfectly, enough to flourish within the divine life to which we are invited and drawn. God is willing to need us to complete the united divine purpose of love. God's love is unconditional, but God never says, "Of course, your love does not matter." True love is unconditional, but never self-sufficient.

And though we may believe this, or edge toward believing this, and though we may accept that we have not yet comprehended God, we remain stubbornly unwilling to travel in company with those equally uncomprehending who do not share our imperfect orthodoxy or biblicism or liberalism or whatever. God may have taken us as friends unconditionally, yet we insist "they" must accept God's love on our terms.³⁵

³⁴ Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2005), though clearly without drawing my conclusions; see her more recent *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), chap. 4, 140–206.

³⁵ For the foregoing exposition in a still wider context of Christian life, see my *Formation for Knowing God: Imagining God At-oneing, Transforming, and Ultimately Self-Revealing* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books/Wipf and Stock, 2015). This essay is an expansion of much briefer arguments there.