A Triune God for our Interdependent World

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Abstract: Jesus has revealed God not as an undifferentiated, isolated monad but as *Tri-Une*, a Trinity whom we know and address as Father-Son-Spirit. Christians often overlook this *Tri-Une-ness* of God and hence the need to retrieve the God image in all its fullness. Theologians today seek to reinterpret the Trinity in consonance with the 'signs of specific times and places' in the field of 'social trinitarianism'. Basic to this approach is the Biblical insight that human beings are created in "the image and likeness of God." And the basic fact of our humanity is that a person achieves personhood only by being-in-relationship with others. The ideal of human relationship is not just dependency on an 'other' – for this could be a ruse for self-seeking – but interdependence with others. True love and genuine relationship between two persons is tested by openness to a 'third'. Thus, there is need to seriously examine the 'third' as the 'first point of community or conflict'.

Down the Christian centuries, theologians have sought to meaningfully evolve a God-image in consonance with Jesus' revelation of God as *Abba*, his Father, He, himself, as Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Counselor who are One. This revealed truth could only be articulated by analogical language and the analogy of human love and relationship gradually began to be used for developing a God image. More than striving to articulate doctrine, the Christian community found in the Tri-Une God a model for concrete Christian living that had its impact on their preaching and sacramental life.

In today's local and global context, rich in diversity and yet plagued by the evils of globalisation, casteism, postmodernism and fundamentalism, the Trinity could serve as a theological representation of interrelatedness – respecting diversity within the quest for unity and equality of all peoples. Besides, the Trinity provides us with an 'alternative paradigm of power' revealing to us the kenotic God who impels us to empty ourselves so that all God's children may enjoy the fullness of life. Finally, the Trinity

also holds a promise for what might be called 'trinitarian trilogue' that could bring together people of all religions and no religion whatsoever, based on the common ground of our interrelatedness that can only be nourished by the love, renunciation, compassion, self-sacrifice and self-giving preached and practised by believers of all religions, in general, and by all peoples of goodwill.

1. Introduction

"Christians are, in their life, almost mere 'monotheists'," wrote Rahner,[1] meaning, most Christians find it difficult to relate to the *tri-unity* of God. Daily we pray to "Our Father", invoke the name of Jesus and seek the Spirit's gifts. And though we begin and end our prayers with Trinitarian invocations, we tend to be speechless when it comes to saying something about the Trinity. It's not surprising, therefore, that the British Council of Churches' document on the Trinity is entitled "The Forgotten Trinity."[2] To compensate for this amnesia of the Trinity, theologians are today reinterpreting the Trinity in language intelligible to Christian communities in diverse contexts. This paper seeks to understand the Trinity in today's context. However, at the outset we note that, while expressing what is known about God through revelation (*Deus revelatus*), the Trinity always remains a mystery (*Deus absconditus*)[3] that, as the Church cautions, "even though communicated in revelation and received by faith, remains covered by the veil of faith itself and shrouded as it were in darkness."[4]

2. The Starting Point of Trinitarian Reflection

We could reflect upon the Trinity using a deductive method launching out from the doctrine of the Trinity in order to see how such a doctrine is meaningful for our context. Conversely, we could also begin with an inductive approach whereby we reflect upon the

contextual realities around us to get insights into the nature of God, who we firmly believe is the Creator of everything and everyone. Created as we are "in the image and likeness of God," it is fitting that we look at the human reality to grasp the mystery of God, even if imperfectly. Thus, in this article we shall move 'from below upwards' to develop a contextual understanding of the Triune God. Schoonenberg succinctly states:

> All our thinking moves from the world to God, and can never move in the opposite direction. Revelation in no way suspends this law. Revelation is the experienced self-communication of God *in* human history, which thereby becomes the history of salvation. With reference to God's Trinity, this law means that the Trinity can never be the point of departure. There is no way that we can draw conclusions from the Trinity to Christ and to the Spirit given to us; only the opposite direction is possible.[5]

Taking context as our starting-point, with an interdisciplinary approach, let's briefly look at the national and global contexts for these must mould our reflections.

3. Contextual Considerations: National Level

From among the many characteristics of the Indian context let us mention just three:

(a) *Diversity*: There is no country in the world with a diversity that can match India's.[6] Many speak of India not as a country but as a continent, for in it coexist peoples of many states (many of these with populations as large as European nation-states), with each state having its own language, culture, dress, regional traits and so on. Moreover, even within a state, there are diverse dialects as expressed by the Gujarati saying: *"Gaon, gaon, boli badlai,"* meaning, "Language changes every two or three miles." The fact of India being a 'nation' too is contested not just on the grounds of political theory,[7] but because of the fact that the Indian state encompasses peoples of diverse ethnic groups. Thus, on the one hand, one may argue that India must be proud of its diversity, on the other, diversity has often led to vociferous demands for separate homelands be they

of the Khalistan, Hindutva or Telangana brand, often breeding violence. The dangers of separatism notwithstanding, India has survived remarkably well as the world's biggest democracy for more than half a century with a commendable degree of *unity-in-diversity*.

(b) *Inequality*: India is characterised by gross and glaring inequality among its peoples. In the economic sphere, India can boast of the world's wealthiest citizens – the Mittals and Azim Premji, among others. But, according to the Planning Commission's poverty estimate, there are 30.17 crores of Indians below the poverty line, with 72% of these living in rural areas.[8] Besides economic inequality, there is widespread social inequality. The caste system has been effective since times immemorial. Many theorists have mapped the contours of caste,[9] and some argue that, to some extent, modernity has mitigated its evil effects. However, Béteille holds that, "from whatever angle we view the case, the modern principle of equality was largely absent in traditional Indian society. True enough, equality was acknowledged on the metaphysical plane, but it had hardly any place on the plane of everyday social and political existence."[10] This continues even today. It's not enough to declare, for example, that inequality has been abolished *legally* by the Indian State since, *in practice*, it is the basis upon which society is structured – overtly or covertly – into the so-called 'high castes' and the so-called 'low castes' whose members are often treated worse than animals. With complex issues like reservations to negotiate, caste considerations fragment the polity even further. Worse still, caste is not just something characteristically 'Hindu', for it is practised in religions like Christianity and Sikhism, that professedly treasure 'equality' as an ideal.

(c) *Religiosity:* India has mothered major world religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism – and has been a gracious hostess to 'minorities' like the Muslims and the Christians, whose number often exceeds that in Christian and Muslim nations. Almost every Indian is deeply religious not only in the private space of the home, but also in the public sphere where temples and mosques, *yatras* and *pujas*, as well as religious symbols seek bold expression of Indian religious identities. Indian religiosity is characterised by the following: (i) There is great diversity in religious expression, (ii)

the problem of the 'one and the many' though philosophically important to India's elite scarcely affects the masses, (iii) Indian religions have witnessed prolific exchange of religious beliefs and practices with marked eclectism, (iv) there is nothing like pure *dharma* belonging to some 'sacred sphere' divorced from the so-called 'secular' since *dharma* also influences cultural practices, social structuring, economic exchanges and political alliances, (v) although early Vedic Hinduism advocated a *varna*-based hierarchical ordering of society, Hindu theism, Buddhism, Jainism, the folk cults, *bhakti* and local movements were expressions of anti-hierarchical attitudes that resulted in resistance and protest,[11] (vi) the values of detachment, renunciation, asceticism and compassion are integral to Indian religiosity, and finally, (vii) it is not easy to divide religion and politics in India since religion enters each and every facet of human life and affects them all.

4. Contextual Considerations: Global Level

For the purposes of brevity, we shall, once again, mention three movements or processes that seem to be shaping the global context:

(a) *From Nationalism to Globalism*: We live in the age of globalisation wherein the world has seemingly contracted into a 'global village'. While amazing advancements are seen in the realm of science, planetary exploration and InfoTech leading to a collapse of boundaries between nations and peoples, we confront newer borders among peoples on the basis of cultural and religious identities, economic and social inequalities, political and nationalist aspirations and the like at the global level. Thus, while the G-8 nations and MNC-entrepreneurs of the New World brag about exciting possibilities latent within global processes, many bemoan the loss of the 'person' and 'community' to the tsunami tides of market mechanisms[12] that affect the world's poor,[13] who mostly inhabit the so-called 'Third World' nations of South Asia and Africa. In its dynamics and sweep, globalisation tends to create common eco-socio-politico-cultural systems shared by the world's citizens, and thus, to understand its root repercussions, one must study it from diverse perspectives: economic, political, cultural, societal and religious. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the details

of the same, but we only note here that globalisation has irreversibly altered the way we think, act, live and relate to others.

(b) *From Modernism to Postmodernism*: From the sureties of modernism, today's world seems to float upon the unsure, unsettling foundations of postmodernism. Postmodernism fosters "incredulity towards metanarratives,"[14] and calls for respect to 'difference' in relating to the 'other'.[15] At root, while modernism has been monistic and unitary, postmodernism celebrates plurality and diversity. In repudiating all forms of totality and universalism, postmodernism seems to respect personal freedoms and differences; but it strikes at the root of religious certitude – especially that of a religion like Catholicism – to arrive at any form of universal truth. Moreover, it destroys any hopes of constructing meaningful community since any project of 'community building' itself is regarded as an oppressive, totalitarian enterprise that calls for some commonality, common ethic and responsibility, which are all bane to the postmodern mind. While modernity made an idol of rationality, postmodernism eroded the epistemic foundations of the Enlightenment and argued that language and meaning are entirely self-referential and can never make contact with the world. Understandably, such arguments undermine the very foundations of religion and theology, based as they are on meaning and claims to truth and universality. Thus, postmodernism poses a serious challenge to theology.

(c) *From Religious Hospitality to Interreligious Hostility*: It seemed that, with the rise of knowledge, the proliferation of democracies, the birth of multicultural nation-states and increased recognition of peoples' rights worldwide, the 20th century witnessed greater freedom to practise and propagate one's religion. The religious values of unity, tolerance, hospitality, compassion and service seemed to aid religious communities to respect the 'other' and foster what was good in them. However, recently, the world has witnessed widespread 'religious violence' with analysts arguing that we're heading towards bloody global clashes not between people of different countries but between religions and cultures.[16] Religiosity itself is assuming aggressive hues with Hindutva hostility directed against India's religious minorities, Islamic and Palestinian fanaticism in the Middle East, Christian fundamentalism in Europe and North

America, etc.[17] Furthermore, with advances in military technology, the degree of violence is greater and large sections of humankind are being victimised on religious grounds. Rather than 'binding' human beings globally, as it is supposed to do, religion is 'blinding' human vision and giving rise to frightening forms of violence.

5. Who is a Person? A Phenomenology of Personhood and Relationship

Having made some preliminary contextual observations, we now enter into a discussion of 'person,' to understand the axiom: "There are three 'persons' in one God." The main bone of contention in Trinitarian doctrine down the ages has been the concept of 'person'. Thus, we'll seek to understand personhood and relationship with examples from our context:

Early this year newspapers reported that a 27-year old woman, Rochom P'ngieng, who disappeared in the jungles of Cambodia at the age of eight, suddenly reappeared, and an elderly couple claimed that she was their long lost daughter.[18] Rochom reportedly got lost while herding buffaloes and lived in the jungles without contact with human beings. Journalists who saw Rochom said: "She can't speak any intelligible language," "She's half-human and half-animal," and "She's weird. She sleeps during the day and stays up at night." This was probably due to the fact that Rochom didn't have any personal relationships with human beings for a long time. She lived an independent life, so to say, and it wasn't surprising, therefore, that she could neither communicate in any intelligible language nor live as a normal human being and was described as being "half-animal".

Based on Rochom's case, we could assert that, when a human being enters into various relationships, s/he grows into being a true 'person'. Indeed, every human being is necessarily born from relationship – irrespective of its quality – since the sexual union between man and woman causes the birth of a child. At birth, except for the genetic factors that could lead to differences in the development of different infants, all newborns equally have the potential to grow up to be responsible adults in society or irresponsible, antisocial elements. This is the whole 'nature-nurture

polarity' that depends largely on the relationships that a child has. Psychologists like Erik Erikson (and his 8-stages of development), Harvey, Hunt & Schroder (and their studies on cognitive development) and Lawrence Kohlberg (researching moral development), among others, have tried to explain psychosocial stages of development on the basis of a child's interactions with its family and environment. In India, Sudhir Kakar studied how Indian children are schooled in the Indian – mainly Hindu – context with interactions with family members and the larger landscape of Indian culture.[19] Without entering into details, we observe that, from an infantile stage of dependence, children grow through an adolescent, reactionary stage of independence and finally settle for interdependence, with the realization that we only survive in society through processes of mutuality, reciprocity, sharing and cooperation.

Discussing the indispensable role of relationships for the attainment of true personhood, we could examine the various types of relationships that can be built. One could certainly relate with animals, as in the case of my nephew, James, who was so attached to his dog, Benjy, that boy and beast could scare be separated. This is a one-sided affair since one can hardly say: "Benjy, the dog, loves James." The faithfulness of a dog doesn't stem from love and freedom but from necessity and instinct. Next, there's the possibility of one avoiding human relationships and isolating oneself with a degree of independence. I'm reminded of the lyrics of Simon and Garfunkel's popular 1970's song: "I am a rock, I am an island ... hiding in my room... safe within my womb ... I touch no one and no one touches me." The loner goes on to sing, "I have my books and poetry to protect me," and ends with: "and a rock feels no pain, and an island never cries." It's clear that the songster lives alone, has no friends, suppresses his emotions and 'protects' himself with books and poetry. It's likely, today, that one could protect oneself from entering into any meaningful relationship with others and yet mitigate one's loneliness by surfing TV channels or chatting in cyberspace. Such situations are rare, border on the pathological and do not require much comment.

Relationship requires more reflection in cases involving two or three persons. Earlier, I'd accept a saying like, "Two is company,

three is a crowd," that suggested that relationship between two persons is perfect, whereas 'three' implies imperfection or excess. However, after dabbling in youth and family counselling, I'd rephrase the saying as: *"Two is comfort, three is community or conflict."* I illustrate this with some examples: The Romeo-Juliet or *deshi* Laila-Majnu love relationships seem etched in popular consciousness with strands of immortality and unto-death faithfulness woven into them. However, there's another equally evergreen Bollywood theme, i.e., the *"hum-tuum-whoh"* or "I-you-s/he" one that attracts attention. Here, a boy falls in love with a girl and the two swear to love each other eternally. Life is heavenly. Suddenly, a 'he' or 'she' – the 'third' – enters into the relationship and creates heartache or heartbreak for one or the other of the friends. This 'third' turns what seemed like heaven into hell. Interestingly, Sartre's famous axiom, "Hell is other people" comes from his play 'No Exit' wherein three unknown and unrelated persons are locked together in a room with no possibility of escape.[20] Each one realizes how unpleasant the company of the 'other' is and how each of them creates hell for the other two – a case of "three is conflict."

Another example could be that of a married couple that enjoys marital bliss for years. The attention and energy of each spouse is exclusively directed towards the 'other'. The birth of a child could initially be a source of great joy, but could also lead to conflict because now, besides giving time and attention to each other, the couple must care for the child. There is the possibility of either spouse giving so much attention to the child as to neglect the 'other' spouse, leading to resentment and conflict. Or, it could also happen that the husband and wife are so lovingly lost in each other as to neglect the child. Seen from anyone's viewpoint – i.e., father or mother or child – it is easier to relate only to just the 'other' rather than to include a 'third'. Yet, it is only when the love of two opens out to a 'third' that true love is tested and 'company' (that can often be self-seeking comfort) blossoms into what could be called 'the first moment of community' with the possibility of either communion (positive) or conflict (negative).

The possibilities as well as the problems inherent in a relationship of 'three' can also be illustrated in the field of human communication.

For example, when two people enter into a conversation, they can either find some common topic to discuss and agree or disagree with each other, or they might choose to remain silent. Suppose another person, a 'third', enters into the conversation, a new situation arises whereby whoever is talking must make sure that the other two are drawn into the conversation. If not, it will happen that only two persons will be involved and the 'third' will be left out. Now, what will happen should a fourth person arrive? The numbers four, five, six or 'many' can be broken up into smaller units of 2s and 3s and are not problematic since, if, for example, a fourth person arrives, there's the possibility of the group of four breaking up into 2 sets of 'couples' and the level of 'comfort' can again be reached.

The reason for my insistence of testing authentic relationships on the basis of 'three' and not 'two' is simple: what often appears to be true love between two persons might not really be so, for, what is initially a close relationship could really turn into a 'closed relationship' unwilling to accommodate the 'third' – be it in the form of children, or other people, or of viewpoints very different from what the 'two' hold as ultimate, or even in the form of an Absolute. The danger of an 'exclusive two' is that each one is likely to so totally depend – or 'over depend' – on the 'other' as to lose one's freedom and personal identity and seek to control and manipulate the 'other' for one's 'needs', even if unconsciously.

Dependency in relationships is, to some extent, natural. We all depend on each other for 'basic needs' like food, shelter and clothing, as well as for 'higher human needs' like acceptance, affection, appreciation and so on.[21] However, there is another nuance to 'being dependent' as in the case of being 'alcohol dependent' or 'drug dependent'. Here, the word 'dependence' has the connotation of "inability to do without ——." In the case of a relationship between two persons, over-dependency can cause a blurring of identities, give rise to unreasonable expectations and needs from the 'other', which, if unmet, can lead to disappointment, disillusionment and depression. Given the risks and problems involved should a person seek to be independent or overly dependent on the 'other', we must admit that the only viable option left for us to relate effectively with the 'other' and with society, at large, is in being 'interdependent'.

To ideally be person-in-relationship is not merely to manage 'two-way affairs', so to say, but to realize and relish the fact that I am interdependent with 'many' – be they persons or other beings. This implies sharing, cooperation, give-and-take and solidarity at every level of existence. Moreover, any relationship with an 'other' person always brings the relationship within the purview of a 'third' of any type. This demands great caring, caution and even critique in relationships. For, e.g., even in interdependent relationships, the question of 'unequal interdependence' or *de facto* interdependence',[22] arises as when two groups are interdependent, but function on a principle of inequality. We mentioned above that inequality is glaring in India since casteism, feudalism and bonded labour still exist. Here, the dominant group's socio-economic status depends on the loyalty and labour of the subordinate group, and the latter, due to deprivation and subordination, has no choice but to depend on the upper class/caste or master/employer for survival. Such interdependence is unethical since the relationship is based on power, inequality and exploitation. Thus, to foster a human community, interdependence must be ethical and based on respect and reciprocity, sharing and solidarity.

Having argued that relationships of interdependence constitute our personhood, we now trace trajectories that could orient what we could call a 'Trinitarian Theology of Interdependence'. To do this, I offer three propositions – interrelated and each flowing from the previous one – by drawing upon Christian Tradition, as well as the contextual considerations and previous discussions on 'person' and human relationships:

6. Proposition One: The Trinity is a Theological Representation of Interrelatedness

Throughout the Christian era,[23] trinitarian theologizing arose not in order to expound trinitarian doctrine divorced from life, but in order to *re-present* God by means of a *'theological re-presentation'* in the light of the new religious experiences arising from the life-death-resurrection of Jesus, who not only claimed to be God's Son, but whose claims were validated by his resurrection. In the early Christian *re-presentation* of God, we find 'traces of trintarianism'

in three reference-points: (a) God, who Jesus addressed as *Abba*, Father, (b) the Spirit, who Jesus promised would be their Teacher and Counsellor, and (c) Jesus himself, whose self-awareness seemed that of Son claiming a unique relationship to God. There is no well-developed trinitarian theology in the NT,[24] and Paul, for example, can at best be called a 'latent trinitarian' whose main purpose was to proclaim God's salvation through the *experience* of Christ and the Spirit.[25] Note that, on the one hand, the trinitarian passages in the NT are not dogmatic assertions but descriptive theological affirmations; and, on the other, these were being widely used by newborn Christian communities in their sacramental and liturgical practices, uppermost among which was the baptismal liturgy.[26] Common to early trinitarian confessions was the aspect of their *relevance for community life*. This new life was possible only through their 'experience of salvation'[27] in the Spirit and in Jesus who taught them that God is *Abba*,[28] Father – intimate and approachable (Gal 4:4-7; Rom 8:15-6). This relationship of God's nearness and intimacy animated their own teaching and liturgy, as well as their daily life. And soon there emerged discussions about 'person' and the nature of love in reflecting about God.

It was Tertullian [160-220] who first used the word *Trinitas* for Trinity,[29] and *persona* for 'person,' in the sense of an 'actor's mask' or a 'face' to signify a juridical subject (*homo, vir*).[30] The focus here was on individuality and legality. Boethius's [480-524] definition – popular for centuries – "an individual substance of a rational nature," added the dimension of rationality.[31] Much later, Aquinas [1125-74] held that 'person', with regard to God, signified a 'subsistent relation' in the inner life of God.[32] And, closer to our day and supporting Aquinas, Rahner substituted 'person' with "distinct manner of subsisting."[33] All these theologians were employing philosophical terms familiar to people of their contexts;[34] yet, rather than capture the essence of personhood and relationship, their focus seems more individualistic, legalistic and rationalistic.

Alongside the philosophical reflections on 'person', Trinitarian theology was being articulated by analogies;[35] for, truly "we have no choice whatever but to speak of God in terms derived from our experience of creaturely reality – that is, by analogy."[36] And, in

keeping with Jesus' use of imagery to speak about God, the most widely accepted analogy for traditional speech about God was drawn from the nature of love. Augustine [354-430] first used 'relationship' and the analogy of love to explain how the divine substance exists in the three Persons: the Father being lover (*amans*), the Son being the beloved (*quod amatur*) and the Spirit being the mutual love (*amor*) passing between the Father and the Son, proceeding from both, and uniting the three divine 'persons'.[37] Later, Richard of St. Victor [d.c.1173] further developed the analogy of love in terms of a movement from self-love (Father) to mutual love (Father-and-Son) and to shared love (Father-Son-Spirit).[38] However, while Augustine started from nature and the human person being created in the *imago Dei*, the "image and likeness of God," Richard began from 'persons' and analysed love in human relationships. For both, love was not some abstract philosophical notion, but a concrete attribute that fostered interpersonal relations.

If, like Augustine, we begin with the basic Biblical insight that we are created in the "image and likeness of God," then, the basic fact of human interrelatedness must necessarily tell us something about God. Note that we earlier only discussed about the interrelatedness of human beings. But, quantum theory today stresses an even deeper underlying fact that the cosmos comprises webs of interrelatedness,[39] and that all natural phenomena are intimately and inseparably connected to each other.[40] Indeed, quantum theologians, today, find that recent research gives rich insights into trinitarian theology:

> God is first and foremost a propensity and power for relatedness, and the divine imprint is nowhere more apparent than in nature's own fundamental desire (exemplified in the quarks) to relate – interdependently and interconnectedly. The earthly, the human and the divine are in harmony in their fundamental natures, in their common propensity to relate and to enjoy interdependent coexistence.[41]

Thus, from God's created world and activity (the *oikos*, economy) we get a glimpse into the nature of God (*ontos*, divine immanence): that in God there is interrelatedness. Yet, it is not enough to assert that God is a "propensity and power," for, Christian revelation

discloses the *personal nature* of the Divine expressed by the relationship Father-Son-Spirit. Thus we state: "Trinity is a theological re-presentation of interrelatedness."

There is a great difference when we say, "human beings are interrelated" and "The Triune God – Father-Son-Spirit – is interrelated." In the former case, we refer to the *capacity* or *potentiality* to enter into relationships and thereby to develop 'personality', which is the sum total of the moral, attitudinal and behavioural qualities one imbibes and possesses. Here, as we earlier discussed, the more and better relationships that one *'has'*, the more and better are one's chances of growth and actualizing one's personhood into a balanced personality.[42] In this sense, when we speak of a person being relational, we mean that s/he *has* relationships or is relational in a secondary sense. But, when we say 'God is relational' and speak of 'person' in God, we assert that being relational belongs to the *essence* or *nature* of God.[43] While we *have* relations, God *is* the relations that God has.[44] Or, in other words, for God, *'to be'* and *'to be in relation'* is one and the same thing. Trinity thus tells us about the fullness of God, eternally in *Tri-Une* communion,[45] with the love and goodness of each 'person' flowing out to the other two and with each 'person' dwelling in the other two:[46] a Divine Interdependence.

Trinitarian interrelatedness implies that God is a 'community of inclusion' – always One, a unity; but this unity is a *Tri-Une*-ness that always includes and reconciles the Three. While unity is maintained, the distinction between persons is also retained with perfect equality, transparency and reciprocity. Thus, trinitarian interrelationship challenges our context at three levels: [a] it is a critique to ideologies and structures built on bases of inequality and duality like casteism (high-low), patriarchy (man-woman) and racism (white-black); [b] it condemns the 'communities of exclusion' created by processes of globalisation that maim and marginalize the world's poor, and, [c] it challenges the selfish individualism and narcissism of ideologies like postmodernism and secularism that surreptitiously undermine the foundations of family and community.

7. Proposition Two: The Trinity Provides an Alternative Paradigm of Power

We observed earlier that religion today is being abused to subserve the interests of fundamentalist groups, worldwide. These groups tap the 'power of religion' to construct a 'religion of power' that seeks to subjugate and alienate others. This they do by evolving and manipulating religious symbols thereby unleashing what Bourdieu terms 'symbolic violence'.[47] Likewise, Christian thinkers too have submitted to the authoritarianism of emperors rather than authoritatively preach the salvific message of Jesus. Eusebius of Caesarea [c.265-339], for example, developed the idea that the Kingdom of God was replicated on earth as 'image' in Constantine's empire. As a result, Constantine was regarded as an image of *Logos*-Christ-King, reproducing the image of God, the Father,[48] on earth. Eusebius set the Church so firmly in the Christian empire that it became difficult to distinguish the two. Later, though he did not identify the City of God with the earthly city besieged by evil, his theology became a 'political Augustinianism' that inspired a political monotheism.[49] Here, the conflation of religion and politics neither respected the mystery of the Triune God nor promoted the life of the community.

After stressing that the Trinity is a theological representation of interrelatedness, we go further by stating that this interrelatedness will be fostered only if, in consonance with the true logic of love, there is not self-seeking but self-donation. In Jesus, this self-donation reaches its zenith in his *kenosis* or self-emptying (Phil 2:5-11), most forcefully manifest in his death, which is neither merely a Christological nor a Pneumatological event, but a deeply Trinitarian one. In Jesus' passion, death and resurrection, we see how the Tri-Une God is not the apathetic, unaffected God of Greek philosophy, but the involved, Crucified God who becomes "a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles," yet in whom the Christian community experiences the "power and wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:23-5). The *kenosis* in the Trinity can be seen right from the first moment of the Incarnation with God moving out of Godself, so to say, to assume human form. God's activity unfolds at the margins and among the marginalised of Bethlehem, and reaches its climax at Calvary,

"outside the camp" (Heb 13:11-3), which is the space beyond the religious world of Law and the cult,[50] the space where the defiled victims of sacrifice are burned.[51] Here, God's perfect love is revealed in self-sacrifice.

Jesus' passion is his Father's willed action. It is a trinitarian act since: first, Jesus does not escape his passion but surrenders to his Father's will; second, the Father silently suffers through the passion and refuses to free Jesus from the cross, and third, from the core of this act of sacrificial love there is the offering "through the eternal Spirit" (Heb 9:14) and the outpouring of the Spirit (Jn 19:34).[52] The historical abandonment and the eschatological surrender coincide on the cross as "unity in separation and separation in unity."[53] In the cross, Father and Son are totally separated by Jesus' abandonment, and yet, intimately united in surrender. It is a deeply trinitarian event because, between the Father who forsakes and the Son who is forsaken, between the loving Father and the beloved Son, there proceeds the sacrifice itself, the Spirit, who justifies the ungodly, rescues the forsaken, forgives and reconciles the sinner, and, eventually, vindicates the victim and raises the dead. Besides supported by Scripture,[54] this dynamic of trinitarian action-passion-restoration reveals the power of the kenotic God whose love is not manifest, so to say, as 'couple love' between Father-Son or Son-Spirit or Father-Spirit, but as triune communitarian self-surrender, which is the ultimate act of faith disclosing the supreme, paradoxical power of love in apparent powerlessness.

Traditionally, the so-called 'great' religions speak about the Divine in terms of fullness – be it Hinduism's *purnam* or Christianity's *pleroma*,[55] the latter having its roots in Aristotle's 'unmoved mover' developed by Aquinas for whom God was *Actus Purus* (pure act).[56] But, applying a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' to constructions of fullness that are cognitive conceptions, often esoteric and alienating, the Trinity also provides an alternative paradigm of power with a focus on kenosis. Besides being more amenable to postmodern thought, a kenotic God more importantly becomes a source of inspiration and strength for India's crucified masses who see in Christ's kenosis a God in suffering solidarity with them. Simultaneously, the kenotic God also critiques and condemns those who appropriate power for themselves and exploit and enslave others

be it in the realm of politics or economics or religion, or be they individuals, MNCs or G-8 nations.

8. Proposition Three: The Trinity as Model of Humanistic and Interreligious Trilogue

God's kenosis as seen in trinitarian light has important implications not merely for 'dialogue' as commonly understood, but also for what we shall term 'trilogue'. Whether in general terms,[57] or as literary form,[58] or in a more technical sense as used in the academy by the disciplines,[59] 'dialogue' refers to an exchange between two subjects or communities, most commonly identified by the binary *I-Thou*,[60] or *Self-Other*. Even if, at times, more than two persons/parties are involved in this exchange, the 'more-than-two' factor is again either identified as *Thou-Other* or simply as 'plural' or 'many'. Barring Homi Bhabha and Martin Buber who speak of *thirdspace* or *Third* as *hybridity* or some Absolute, respectively, *Thirdness* is not taken seriously. However, in our reflection on human relationship, we noted that the 'third' is the first point of community or conflict. Moreover, many of the world's religions have trinitarian conceptions of the Divine like Hinduism's *Trimurti* (Brahma-Vishnu-Siva) or *Saccidânanda* or Buddhism's *Trikâya (dharmakâya-nirmanakâya-sambhogakâya)* or the Zoroastrian trio of Zurvan, the mighty god of time, and his two sons, Ahriman (active force) and Ormazd (passive force) and so on. The three, thus, seems to be one of the archetypes of religious consciousness, which calls for further reflection that is not possible within the confines of this article.

To explain 'trilogue' I use the words of the French Marxian thinker, Lefebvre, who writes: "Triadic analysis distinguishes itself from dual analysis just as much as from banal analysis. It doesn't lead to a *synthesis* in accordance with the Hegelian schema ... [it] links three terms that it leaves distinct, without fusing them in a *synthesis* (which would be the third term)."[61] Thus, while the aim of dialogue normally seems to be some *synthesis* or *consensus*,[62] *trilogue* maintains a *three-one tension* and *always* takes the two towards the 'three', ever uniting, yet, retaining their individual identities. Thus, in the interrelatedness of any two entities – in this case two 'religions' – trilogue will demand not only making space

for the 'other' but also for a 'third'. We are accustomed to simplify realities in terms of simple binaries: black-white, high-low, good-bad and so on. The challenge of Trinitarianism is to view reality neither solely in terms of binaries (which would be too simplistic) nor just in terms of pluralism (which could run the risk of not taking difference seriously) but as 'three-dimensional'. This always involves a tension.

In the meeting of religions, Trinitarian trilogue will seek to bridge the apparent tension between the 'prophetic religions' or the 'word religions' (like Judaism and Islam) with a strong focus on the One, and the 'mystic religions' (Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism) accommodative of the Many.[63] Moreover, there is the possibility of creating space for humanistic, even atheistic, ideologies, since at the heart of trinitarian theology is kenosis or what has been called 'weak ontology of the divine'.[64] This could also be the starting-point for interfaith encounters, especially with religions like Buddhism:

> If we dare to continue to search for parallels with Buddhism, it seems to me that we should start by comparing it with Emptiness or, better still, with the "Great Death" that is necessary in Buddhism to awaken persons to the "Great Life." The *kenosis* of God in Christianity, God's self-emptying at the cross, has to stand at the center of interreligious dialogue. The transcendence of God, who transcends our religions, is revealed for Christians more in suffering than in resurrection ….. Emptiness in Zen may be a parallel to the *kenosis* of God in consequence of God's love in Christianity. However, they are not identical, because God's love in Christianity is a love that manifested itself in history, specifically in the cross. Precisely because it is such self-emptying love, it has to deny any claim of absoluteness and superiority of one religion over another.[65]

Much of 'religious terrorism', today, is aimed at gaining power of various types.[66] But, as we've seen, religions also value detachment, renunciation and compassion. While stressing this commonality of values, Trinitarian trilogue will strive to respect and reaffirm differences. Thus, whether one promotes peace and life on

account of *shûnyatâ* and compassion of Buddhism,[67] or moved by kenotic Trinitarian love, or impelled by the *karuna* (mercy) or *tyaga* (sacrifice) enjoined by Hinduism, or opted for a *weak ontology*[68] to combat the evils of secularization and so on, we would all be striving in the same direction rather than claiming absoluteness and superiority over the others. Trilogue will ever make us aware that beyond one's own view, there is not only an 'other' viewpoint, but also a 'third' – ever present on the horizons that call for the building of community.

9. Conclusion

Today, scientists propose that the whole cosmos is interconnected. Split down to its minutest subatomic particles called 'quarks', matter can be seen and studied only in groupings of twos and threes, thereby proving that the capacity to relate is at the very heart of Nature.[69] Scientific theories apart, we've tried to examine the 'person' and the fact that personhood is realised only when the human potentiality to relate with others is actualised in the building of human relationships. We looked at relationships of twos and threes and tried to stress that it is only when the love between two persons is open to some 'third,' that such love is genuine and fosters growth. From our reflections on the context and human interrelatedness, we posited three propositions that are tentative and yet provide pointers for further theologizing along Trinitarian lines. Our arguments hinge around the power of love manifested not by 'other-domination' but through 'self-donation' or kenosis or *shûnyatâ* or *karuna* or *tyaga*, which is the condition for the possibility of building up relationships between individuals, religions and nations, at large. Therein lies our future.

More than a century ago Fedorov held that "The Trinity is our social programme."[70] The past fifty years, in particular, have seen 'social Trinitarianism' being developed with pregnant possibilities for fostering life in community. If God created us in the divine image and likeness, then, we can neither be 'mere monotheists' nor 'dualists' for this would amount to reductionism and a refusal to recognize the God of Jesus Christ revealed in history. Only when we believe in, worship, and orient all life towards the Triune God do we become fully Christian, truly Indian, deeply human – after

all, these are not-one, not-three, but tri-une. That is what the kenotic God *is*. And intends us to be.

Notes

1. Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, London: Burns and Oates, 1986, p. 10.

2. See *The Forgotten Trinity: Report of the BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today*, London: British Council of Churches, Inter-Church House, 1989.

3. David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*, New York: Seabury Press, 1975, p. 183, points out the dipolar nature of God: "a concrete pole which is eminently social and temporal, an ever-changing, ever-affecting, ever-being-affected actuality, and an abstract pole which is well-defined – if 'concretely misplaced' – by traditional Western reflection upon the metaphysical attributes of the Wholly Absolute One."

4. J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, 6th ed., New York: Alba House, 1996, nn. 131-2.

5. P.J.A.M. Schoonenberg, "Trinity – The consummated covenant: Theses on the doctrine of the trinitarian God," *Studies in Religion* 5/2 (1975-6), p. 111.

6. See, for instance, André Béteille, "Indian's Heritage of Diversity," in *Antinomies of Society: Essays on Ideologies & Institutions*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 198-204; also M.S. Gore, Unity in Diversity: The Indian Experience in Nation-Building, Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2002.

7. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, New York: Verso, 1996, questions the very possibility of 'nation' and terms these as 'imagined communities'.

8. See *The Hindustan Times*, Thursday, March 22, 2007, p. 8.

9. See, for instance, M.N. Srinivas, *The Dominant Caste and Other Essays*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987; Louis Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988; Nicholas Dirks, Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India, Delhi: Permanent Black & New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002; and Steven M. Parish, Hierarchy and its Discontents: Culture and the Politics of Consciousness in Caste Society; Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, among others, for good analyses of the dynamics of the caste system.

10. Béteille, Ibid., p. 203.

11. See Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, vol. 1, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1966, pp. 67-9, 214-6, 308-13.

12. Noam Chomsky, *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order*, Delhi: Madhyam Books, 1999.

13. See Michel Chossudovsky, *The Globalisation of Poverty: Impacts of IMF and World Bank Reforms*, Goa: The Other India Press and New Delhi Madhyam Books & Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, 1997; also Michael Amaladoss, ed., Globalization and Its Victims: As Seen By Its Victims, Delhi: Vidyajyoti & ISPCK, 1999; also Jon Sobrino and Felix Wilfred, eds, "Globalization and Its Victims," Concilium 5 (2001), for analyses on the effects of globalisation on the world's poor.

14. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p. xxiv.

15. See Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. Derrida does not define 'difference' (French, *'différance'*); but, in Margins of Philosophy, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 11, explains: "Différance' is the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences."

16. See, for instance, Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New Delhi: Viking and Penguin Books, 1996, who hypothesizes that in the near future the world will increasingly be polarised on the basis of religio-cultural configurations.

17. See Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001, for insightful analyses of the various cases of religious violence.

18. This news item appeared in *The Hindu*, Friday, January 19, 2007.

19. See Sudhir Kakar, *The Inner World: A Psychoanalytic Study of Childhood and Society in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980.

20. See Jean Paul Sartre, No Exit and Three Other Plays, New York: Random House, 1955.

21. One can think here of Abraham Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' with 'physiological needs' at the base of the pyramid and the 'self-actualization needs' at the top, or even of Henry Murray's list of 20 human needs.

22. Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Bandra, Mumbai: St. Paul Publications, 1988, 43-6, n. 26, distinguishes between '*de facto* interdependence' and 'moral interdependence'.

23. See, for e.g., Bertrand de Margerie, *The Christian Trinity in History*, Massachusetts: St Bede's Publications, 1981; also Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972, for concise histories of Trinitarian theology.

24. It can be said that: "The NT contains no doctrine of the Trinity;" see, Donald H. Juel, "The Trinity and the New Testament," *Theology Today* 54 (1997), p. 313; also, Fortman, ibid., p. 32.

25. See Gordon D. Fee, "Paul and the Trinity: The Experience of Christ and the Spirit for Paul's Understanding of God," in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium*, ed. S. T. Davis et al., New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 49-72, for details. In brief, Fee argues that Paul has an 'economic trinitarian' idea of God, and perhaps an 'ontological trinitarian' one, as well, although its philosophical and theological nuances are unclear to theologians.

26. This emerges from the arguments of de Margerie, ibid., pp. 39-44. He argues that the presence of Mt 28:16ff in Scripture and its incorporation into the baptismal liturgy of the early Church indicates the significance of the Trinity for the community. He also discusses other NT trinitarian texts

27. Fee, "Paul and the Trinity," ibid., p. 52, stresses that Pauline Trinitarianism emerges out of Paul's 'experience' of 'salvation'. Footnote 9 says that Paul's God/Christ/Spirit triad is changed to God/Spirit/ Son in Gal 4:6.

28. See Luis M. Bermejo, *Abba, My Dad!* Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2003, for a good scriptural and systematic exposition of God as Abba of Jesus and Abba of all human beings.

29. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978, p. 113.

30. See Fortman, p. 113, for nuances of what Tertullian meant.

31. Ibid., p. 163. What Boethius stressed about 'person' was substantiality, intellectuality & incommunicability.

32. In *Summa Theologica*, Ia.29. Note that Aquinas begins with divine internal relations rather than human.

33. Rahner, Ibid., p. 113.

34. Joseph T. Lienhard, "Ousia and Hypostasis: The Cappadocian Settlement and the Theology of 'One Hypostasis'," in *The Trinity*, ed. S.T. Davis et al., p. 103, holds that such terms are "crafted on the workbench of theologians, and even for them, it is more of a convenient abbreviation than the last word that might be uttered."

35. Theological language is always metaphorical, symbolic and analogical. Though 'analogy' imputes 'likeness' it also always implies 'unlikeness'; hence, never exhausts the truth contained in reality-in-itself.

36. See William Hasker, "Tri-unity," *Journal of Religion* 50/1 (1974), pp. 1-32, who develops this thesis. The quote is from p. 2; see also John A. Thurmer, "The Analogy of the Trinity," Scottish Journal of Theology 34/6 (1981), pp. 509-15.

37. See his De Trinitate, book IX, especially ch. 8, for this point. See also J.N.D. Kelly, ibid., pp. 276-9, and Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, New York: Herder, 1970, pp. 232-4, for details on Augustine's analogies

38. For further details on the Trinitarian theology of Richard St. Victor, see Fortman, 191-4 and Ewert H. Cousins, "A Theology of Interpersonal Relations," Thought 45 (1970), pp. 56-82.

39. See, for instance, Paul Davies, *The Mind of God: The Scientific Basis for a Rational World*, New York: Touchstone Books, 1992, who argues for the existence of God on the basis of the world of nature.

40. See, for instance, Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, London: Flamingo, 1991; esp. chs 10 & 11.

41. Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Quantum Theology*, New York: Crossroad, 1998, pp. 82-3.

42. See Harriet A. Harris, "Should We Say that Personhood is Relational?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51/1 (1998), pp. 214-35, for an insightful analysis of the questions of 'person', 'personhood' and 'relation'.

43. See E. Schillebeeckx and B. Iersel, eds., "A Personal God?" Concilium (1977), for diverse aspects of God as person.

44. See Nicholas Lash, *Believing Three Ways in One God: A Reading of the Apostles' Creed*, Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1992, p. 32.

45. Abhishiktânanda, Saccidânanda: *A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1974, p. 98, asserts: "God's life is indeed Communion; Being is essentially Communion." Hence, he coins the word samsat, meaning, 'being-with' for the divine existence.

46. Theologians have tried to express this in various ways. In the East, John of Damascus [675-749] first used the word perichoresis (Greek, for co-penetration or co-inherence) to describe the relationship between the three divine persons: Father, Son and Spirit. Its Latin equivalents, circuminsessio or circumcessio used by Thomas Aquinas [1125-74] and Bonaventure [1221-74], respectively, convey the same meaning.

47. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991. 'Symbolic violence' is a term used by Bourdieu and quoted by Joe Painter, "Pierre Bourdieu," in Thinking Space," ed. M. Crang and N. Thrift, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 246.

48. See Remi Brague, "On the Christian Model of Unity: the Trinity," *Communio International Catholic Review* 10 (Summer 1983), p. 153.

49. See Yves Congar, "Classical Political Monotheism and the Trinity." God as Father? Concilium (March 1981), pp. 33-5; also Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993, pp. 194-7.

50. Dom Aelred Cody, "Hebrews," in *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, ed. R.C. Fuller et al.., London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1969, p. 1238, interprets this as the world outside of cultic religion.

51. Myles M. Bourke, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," in *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. R. E. Brown et al., Bangalore: Theological Publications of India, 1968, p. 402, sees this as referring to the Day of Atonement where the flesh of the victims was burned outside the camp. In Jesus' case, he was crucified outside the gates of Jerusalem, the holy city.

52. This passage speaks about "blood and water" flowing out of Jesus' pierced side. In John's gospel, water is the sign of the Holy Spirit (see 3:5; 4:10,14; 7:38-9). This symbolizes Jesus giving up the Spirit

53. Jürgen Moltmann, "The Crucified God: A Trinitarian Theology of the Cross," *Interpretation* 26/3 (1972), p. 293.

54. There are many Scriptural passages that support this interpretation; for instance, "God so loved the world that he gave [up] his only Son" (Jn 3:16). Paul, likewise, alludes to its eschatological dimension: "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?" (Rom 8:31). God abandons his son in the darkness of sin, evil and death. Christ is "made to be sin" (2 Cor 5:21) and he became "a curse for us" (Gal 3:13). In the cross, not only does the Father give up the Son, but the Son also gives himself: "[T]he Son of God, [who] loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20)

55. Plerosis and pleroma (Greek, meaning 'plenitude') refer to the "fullness of God" and the full measure of Christ's divinity (Col 1:19, 2:9). It is the opposite of kenosis or kenoma (Greek, meaning 'emptiness').

56. Earl Muller, "Real Relations and the Divine: Issues in Thomas's Understanding of God's Relation to the World," *Theological Studies* 56 (1995), pp. 673-95, addresses issues raised about Aquinas's thought.

57. 'Dialogue' (Greek, dialogos, meaning 'through word') commonly refers to a conversation carried on between two or more persons or to a verbal interchange of thought between them.

58. As literary form it is "a carefully organised exposition, by means of invented conversation, or contrasting philosophical or intellectual attitudes." See *New Encyclopaedia Britannica,* 15th ed., s.v. "Dialogue."

59. See, for instance, Sundar Sarukkai, "The 'Other' in Anthropology and Philosophy," *Economic and Political Weekly* 32 (June 14, 1997), pp. 1406-9.

60. The I-Thou is the term popularised by French philosopher Martin Buber in a book by the same name.

61. See his *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life,* London & New York: Continuum, 2004, p. 12.

62. One will immediately think of Hegel's 'synthesis' and John Rawls's 'overlapping consensus', respectively. While not excluding them, our trialectic thinking transcends these two concepts.

63. This thinking is in line with Raimundo Panikkar, *The Trinity and World Religions: Icon-Person-Mystery,* Bangalore: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1970; also see his "Toward an Ecumenical Theandric Spirituality," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 5/3 (Summer 1968), pp. 507-34.

64. This is a term coined by Gianni Vattimo, *Belief,* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999, pp. 20-68, who develops the idea of kenosis within a secularist and atheistic context.

65. Sybille Fritsch-Oppermann, "Trikâya and Trinity: Reflecting Some Aspects of Christian-Buddhist Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 30/2 (Spring 1993), pp. 258-9.66 See Juergensmeyer, ibid., pp. 187-95, for a good analysis on the power sought by the perpetrators of such violence. 67 Donald W. Mitchell, Spirituality and Emptiness: The Dynamics of Spiritual Life in Buddhism and Christianity, New York: Paulist Press, 1991, chs. 1,3,4 develop creation, redemption and sanctification as the kenosis of the Father, Son, Sprit, respectively, and see points of convergence between Christianity's kenosis and Buddhism's shûnyatâ.

68. Vattimo, ibid., 65, sees the 'weak ontology' of kenosis as an antidote to secularisation of the present.

69. O'Murchu, ibid., 79.

70. Nikoloi Federov [1829-1903] was a Russian Orthodox philosopher and theologian.