Trinitarianism and Pentecostal Ecclesial Practices

A Review of a Hierarchical Model of the Trinity

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates a possible connection between a doctrine of the Trinity and Pentecostal ecclesial practices. I aim to show how a hierarchical model of the Trinity generally motivates a hierarchical church structure. Moreover, I argue that a hierarchical church structure has some potential problems; it can, among other things, lead to an expected loyalty by church members to their leaders. If the church is to dampen such problems, I suggest that not only organisational but also theological work is needed. Thus, I propose that an understanding of the Trinity as ontologically and functionally relational may benefit the Pentecostal church in upholding equality and reciprocity between leaders and members of a congregation.

Keywords: Trinity, Pentecostalism, ecclesial practices, church leadership, ecclesiology, church hierarchy, pneumatology

INTRODUCTION

The development of a doctrine of the Trinity may be seen as a post-apostolic need to sustain Christianity as a monotheistic religion while acknowledging the divinity of Jesus (Grenz, 2000). Classical trinitarianism, in general motivating a hierarchical model of the Trinity, is the Nicene consensus that God is one substance (*ousia*) and three persons (*hypostases*) (Tanner, 1990, p. 5). In social trinitarianism, the particularity of the three *hypostases* is central to God's being (Gunton, 1993). Pro-Nicene critics of social trinitarianism say that the model overstates the plurality of the three *hypostases* so that it undermines the unity of God (Ayres, 2004). Social trinitarians hold that the proper locus of divine personhood is the diversity of God and that the three *hypostases* are *one* being in communion (Holmes, 2012). In this article, I examine how the two trinitarian models potentially affect Pentecostal ecclesial practices and relations.

A Pentecostal theology of the Trinity is still in its infancy (Studebaker, in Vondey, 2020), and Pentecostal literature considering a hierarchical or a social model of the Trinity is limited. On the one hand, Pentecostal scholar Simon Chan professedly favours a hierarchical model, mainly because of the model's potential to bring ecclesial order and stability where there could be chaos and instability (Stephenson, 2013, pp. 45-46). On the other hand, Steven Land, also a Pentecostal scholar, suggests that Pentecostals should understand God's unity and identity with respect to the interrelatedness of the three divine persons. He offers that a relational model of the Trinity guarantees "the unity and diversity of the church" (Land, 2003, p. 197). Consequently, Land holds, social trinitarianism should be noticeable in ecclesial relations and organisations.

Perspectives of other Pentecostal theologians (e.g., Studebaker, Yong, Vondey, Macchia and Kärkkäinen) could be included in this article. Chan and Land, however, represent two contrasting views that may shed light on the following question: *How does a particular trinitarian model influence Pentecostal ecclesial practices, especially when it comes to church authority and church relations?*

To consider the above question, I begin by looking at how defenders of both a hierarchical and a social model of the Trinity may resort to reverse projection of cultural phenomena to accommodate their views. I then give an account of a model of the Trinity as presented by late Catholic scholar Terence L. Nichols. Nichols (1997) presents a mid-position between strict hierarchy and egalitarianism, both of which he claims are destructive ways of relating to divine and ecclesial authority. He does so by giving an account of what he calls a *participatory hierarchy*. Thereafter, I discuss Nichols' attempt to close the apparent gap between hierarchy and participation and suggest that his position leaves the church with some problems to be solved. I consider aspects of Nichols' model for Pentecostal practices regarding church authority and relations and the role of the Spirit. Other scholars besides Nichols consider *participation*, like Davison (2019), McGrath (2018), and also Zizioulas (2006). However, Nichols gives attention to participation *within* the Trinity, which is particularly interesting to this article's main question. In the discussion, I distinguish between a *pragmatic* (favoured) and a *normative* (theological) church hierarchy to see if they affect church relations differently. I touch on the *ontological Trinity*, which is God's eternal being, and *economic* or *functional* Trinity, i.e., God as revealed to humanity through the history of salvation (Grenz, 2000, p. 66; McGrath, 2007, p. 267) and how they relate to the point at issue. Finally, I reflect on how a social model of the Trinity may inform and sustain Pentecostal ecclesial practices.

TRINITARIAN MODELS AS PROJECTIONS OF HUMAN AND CULTURAL PHENOMENA

First, I consider aspects of methodology with possible consequences for ecclesial practices. In establishing a trinitarian theology, the early church fathers, and later the 12th Century scholastic theologian Peter Lombard, saw evidence of a triune God in the Old Testament, e.g., Deut 6:4; Gen 1:26; Psalm 2:7; Gen 1:2. They held that these passages present the Spirit and the Son as members of the Godhead (Rosemann, 2004; Oden, 1992). Contrarily, Arthur Wainwright (1962) asserts that a doctrine of the Trinity can only be derived from the New Testament, insisting that the Old Testament does not show proof of God as three persons. Without concluding on this point, the above Old Testament references probably do not affirm a *hierarchical* Trinity (except perhaps the Father-Son account in Psalm 2:7, which at least suggests a functional hierarchy, cf. Ayres, 2004). However, in the Old Testament, God chose specific men to be leaders of his people. Moses chose capable men to be leaders over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens (Exod 18:25). No women were among the chosen leaders. The question is, could it be that those who promote trinitarian hierarchy by studying the Old Testament look to scriptural content that essentially portrays a cultural and societal hierarchy?

The matter in hand is possibly not tangible in current theological discourse. Nonetheless, therein lies the potential for attributing human societal structures to the person of God and, later, to the church. This process can be described as *reverse projection of human and cultural phenomena*. Reverse projection is defined by Kevin Vanhoozer (2010) as "projecting human relationality onto the triune being" (p. 159). The problem of theological endorsement of contingent cultural phenomena has been pointed out by Karen Kilby (2000) when she relates reverse projection to the notion of perichoresis. She is concerned that contemporary theologians give content to perichoresis with concepts derived from experiences of human relations. Kilby (2000) suggests that "what is projected onto God is immediately reflected back onto the world, and this reverse projection is said to be what is, in fact, important about the doctrine" (p. 442). Henceforth, human concepts are used as a divine profile for societal order. Her concern may be relevant to this article's question, namely how a trinitarian model affects ecclesial practices: If human establishments are being used to predict God's being and his intentions for the church, especially regarding leaders' authority and women in church leadership, the church ought to be aware of such reasoning and consider its consequences.

Kilby (2000) also critiques how social trinitarianism is used as a model or ideal of social relationships. Similarly, Vanhoozer (2010) warns not to "fill the content of God's inner life with images drawn from what someone happens to regard as humanity's 'best practice'" (p. 161). Therefore, reverse projection is also a concern when developing a church structure after a social model of the Trinity. For example, if one looks at human relations characterised by compassion, equality, and reciprocal love and then attributes the same characteristics to divine relations, the danger is that ecclesial relations become the mirror the church uses to uphold a particular church structure. The result could be a church community that sees no need for organisational structure or a Christian fellowship that recognises loving relationships to be the sole goal of the church. Without commenting on this much further, defenders of both a hierarchical and a social model of the Trinity may be inclined to apply cultural and societal constructions to substantiate their views. With this as a backdrop, I will now consider an understanding of the Trinity that sees the deity as ontologically hierarchical.

NICHOLS' PRESENTATION OF A DIVINE PARTICIPATORY HIERARCHY

In his book *That All May Be One: Hierarchy and Participation in the Church*, Terence L. Nichols (1941-2014), professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas, Minnesota, suggests that there are two types of hierarchies (Nichols, 1997, pp. 6-14):

a. A hierarchy of dominance: The lower order is dominated, leading to disintegration and fragmentation.
b. A participatory hierarchy: Each part is expressed by its participation in, and submission to, the greater whole – without being suppressed.

When discussing a hierarchy of dominance, Nichols admits that the idea of hierarchy is problematic in today's society. However, he denies that hierarchy is equivalent to dominance and calls it "obvious that any sizeable society needs some kind of hierarchical structure to function as a unified whole" (1995, p. 281).

Nichols places egalitarianism at the opposite end of a hierarchy of dominance, calling them both extremes. He recognises that defenders of egalitarianism positively contribute to maintaining diversity within the church and gives them credit for upholding a "basic equality of *persons* before God" (Nichols, 1997, p. 7, his italics). However, Nichols retains that equality of persons does not preclude hierarchical roles within a society, and an attempt to eliminate hierarchy from the church dismantles unity within the church (1997, p. 20). He calls this attempt a betrayal of the church's essential nature and concludes that complete unity can only be preserved in a participatory hierarchy.

Having started his argument from an anthropological vantage point, Nichols moves on to consider a hierarchical deity. He contends that a hierarchy within the Trinity "represents a hierarchy of fullness, inclusion, and participation, not dominance" (Nichols, 1997, p. 276). For this reason, he sees trinitarian hierarchy not as dominance but as a hierarchy of participation. This, from Nichols' point of view, does not diminish the equality with respect to the nature, essence, and substance of the deity (1997, pp. 279-280). Those who fight to abolish hierarchy from trinitarian doctrine have misunderstood what a non-distorted hierarchy represents, Nichols holds.

Furthermore, Nichols maintains that the Father is both source and cause of the Son and the Spirit, and consequently, he sees the Father as greater than the other two members of the Trinity (1997, p. 280). However, as mentioned, Nichols upholds that God is a perfect communion of love who does not dominate the lesser. Thus, he aims to merge an ontological, relational hierarchy within the Godhead with an understanding that the three members of the deity are ontologically equal as persons. This divine participatory hierarchy is characterised by *equality of persons* and *hierarchy of relations* and serves as a model for how the church should be structured. Consequently, Nichols presents, a hierarchical church leadership that embraces equality of ecclesial persons is the only feasible way to organise the church.

A critique of Nichols' hierarchy of participation

In this section, I consider Nichols' argument for a divine participatory hierarchy and how a relational hierarchy within the Godhead is understood to be a model for the church.

Nichols proposes that divine hierarchical participation does not have to be dominative since God is a perfect communion of love. He criticises Jürgen Moltmann, a defender of a social model of the Trinity, for mistakenly understanding hierarchy to involve dominance. On the one hand, Nichols (1997) points to the patristic idea of perichoresis (mutual indwelling, or

interrelated partnership) and calls it the "summit of ontological hierarchy" (p. 276), emphasising that God is the ultimate whole who does not dominate lesser beings. Moltmann, on the other hand, argues that the concept of perichoresis invalidates any hierarchical view of the Trinity. He holds that even though the Father constituted the Trinity, being the origin of the Godhead, it does not apply to the "eternal circulation of the divine life, and none in the perichoretic unity of the Trinity" (Moltmann, 1993, p. 176). Thus, Moltmann maintains equality in regard to both divine persons and their relations. Transferred to human relations, a simple example could be the leader sent by his or her co-leaders to represent the company at a conference. The leaders who sent him or her are neither lesser nor greater than the representative being sent. Similarly, the eternal Father, sending the ontologically equal Son, does not have to be perceived as greater than the Son or the Spirit.

Elaborating on perichoresis, Miroslav Volf distinguishes between divine mutual indwelling and human interaction (1998, pp. 210-211). He argues that since a human person can never indwell another person as subject, God's *otherness* is reinforced. Furthermore, Volf holds that ecclesial relations differ from divine relations in that the ecclesial community is held together by a will decision (1998, pp. 206-207). In light of Kilby's (2000) and Vanhoozer's (2010) concern regarding reverse projection of human and cultural phenomena: Seeing divine relations as *other* than church relations is instructive in comprehending the differences between divine and ecclesial communion. Thus, both Moltmann and Volf seem to have valid points: Divine mutuality provides a basis for human equality, while God's otherness postulates a need for humility when attending to church affairs and interactions. If not, the church may be tempted to accept dysfunctional structures because 'this is how we have always done it' or 'this is how the church reflects divine communion best'. Consequently, the flexibility essential to forming a dynamic and organic church community may be overlooked.

Nichols argues that earthly subordination by the Son to the Father validates a distinction between persons and participation. He claims that since the Father is *sender* and the Son *sent*, this disregards an egalitarian understanding of trinitarian relations. Thus, according to Nichols, the Son's earthly subordination suggests equality of persons and yet ranked participation. Contrarily, Catherine LaCugna (1993) holds that earthly subordination by Jesus to the Father was temporary and not illustrative of the Son's eternal nature and divine relations. Hence, according to this view, Jesus assumed subordination through incarnation for the missional purpose of salvation (Bird & Harrower, 2019, p. 207).

LaCugna, like Karl Rahner (1975), asserts that the ontological Trinity is the same as the economic (or functional) Trinity. Similarly, Stanley Grenz (2000) holds that the economic Trinity points to the ontological Trinity and that the "three members of the Trinity build an eternal, ontological unity in diversity" (p. 68). Thus, from LaCugna and Grenz's point of view, it makes it difficult to separate between equality of persons and a hierarchy of participation, as Nichols does. It can arguably be compared to a marriage comprising a hierarchy of roles. Can such a reality tell us anything about their equality as a couple? If not, Nichols' reasoning concerning trinitarian persons/participation seems unsustainable.

Hierarchy implies rank, order, status, and authority, while participation refers to equality, mutuality, and shared involvement (Blau, 2001, p. 68). Nichols' understanding of participation seems restricted to task, action or role in a relationship. His argument is based on a distinction between identity (person) and role (participation). However, Nichols fails to address the question: When are we eligible to comprehend God as mutual persons and when as hierarchical relations? By separating person and participation, as Nichols does, role takes precedence over person since the Father is comprehended as greater than the other two members of the Trinity. If they are equal as persons, *greater* must refer to a hierarchy of participation,

which indicates that the actions of God are something other than his being. Eberhard Jüngel (2001), however, notes that "God's revelation is the criterion of all ontological statements in theology" (p. 77). Karl Barth (1936) elaborates by saying that the revelation of God "does not differ from the person of Jesus Christ nor from the reconciliation accomplished in Him" (p. 119). Therefore, if God's *being* is seen in God's *actions*, as Barth holds, I would suggest that it is possible to invert the argument and say that the actions of God show aspects of his being. For this reason, a separation between divine persons and participation seems implausible.

Unapologetically, I question Nichols' *hierarchy of participation* when understood as a model for the church, simply because I find it hard to relate to a mere *perception* of ecclesial mutuality and reciprocity within a pre-ordained church hierarchy. For example, suppose the church as *person* (i.e., the body of Christ) is a reciprocal communion of love as an expression of God's mutual indwelling and a hierarchy of *relations* when it comes to participation. In that case, how can a community of believers experience reciprocity if mutuality is reduced to a perception of being the body of Christ? *Hierarchical relations* naturally enacts subordination, while *mutual persons* attends to reciprocity in terms of value and identity. However, a sense of equality is of little value if it does not find its way into church relations. Thus, it seems inapplicable to implement a division of persons and participation, as Nichols does, in church relations. Hierarchy, albeit understood as participation and not domination – when presupposed to be a God-ordained settlement – is more likely to advance church structures (a way of organising relations) that generate an imbalance of power and authority. Thus, the *lesser,* in terms of participation, will presumably experience that they stand below those of higher authority, and subsequently, we are left with a hierarchy of dominance.

Consequently, when seen as a manifestation of a presumed trinitarian hierarchy, pre-ordained hierarchical church structures are in danger of imposing submissiveness, which can lead to the very disintegration and fragmentation Nichols warns about. This does not rule out the need for a hierarchy of roles in the church. However, it is eligible to ask whether church hierarchy can and should be rooted in a concept of a trinitarian participatory hierarchy.

IMPLICATIONS OF A HIERARCHICAL MODEL
ON ECCLESIAL PRACTICES

Defenders of both a hierarchical and a social model of the Trinity hold that the Trinity has practical relevance for church life (Deetlefs, 2019, p. 2). Moltmann (1991), a social trinitarian, assume that a divine communion of love is to be reflected in ecclesial relations. Nichols (1997), as presented, advocates a relational hierarchy in the deity that translates into a hierarchical church structure. Nichols would agree with Moltmann on this matter, so what separates them is their view on the ontology of divine relations and its supposed influence on ecclesial relations.

In the following, I consider how a hierarchical model of the Trinity possibly impacts church practices regarding structure and distribution of power, perceptions of human relations, and the Spirit's participation in the church.

Church structure and distribution of power

Supposedly, distribution of authority from church leaders to congregants implies that members who are not in a position of power have less influence on decisions than those in authority

(cf. Dunn, 2006). This is visible in the structure of the Roman Catholic church, in this paper represented by Nichols, by their papal institutions. In contrast, the much younger Pentecostal movement cannot be considered a contiguous entity since it does not consist of a single, unifying institutional structure with one leader at the top (cf. Archer, in Vondey, 2020; Haight, 2005). Also, as noted, it is liable to say that Pentecostals do not embrace *one* particular doctrine of the Trinity. However, like Nichols, Chan (1998) distinguishes between hierarchy and dominance, suggesting that reciprocity is a "prerequisite for the good ordering of a hierarchical relationship" (p. 51). Both Chan and Nichols see a structure of hierarchy as a necessary means to organise society and the church. However, Nichols ratifies functional church hierarchy in a relational hierarchy within the deity, while Chan proposes hierarchy as a structural model for the church mainly because of the model's organisational benefits.

The leadership structure of a modern Pentecostal church can be compared to – yet not equalled with – organisations and businesses with an executive board [church board], a CEO [lead/senior pastor], a leadership team [elders], and department leaders [team leaders]. Lower-level leaders report to leaders above them and receive instructions from those in higher positions (Åkerlund, 2018; Van Gelder, 2007). As Chan indicates, comparable ecclesial structures establish predictable lines of decisions in the local church. Distribution of power thus hinges on leaders in positions to administer their authority in a way that equips church members to live the Christian life and fulfil the church's mandate. Defenders of a hierarchical church structure would say that members without positional power are bequeathed authority, for instance, by being invited to participate in democratic processes in the congregation. How this is outworked in the daily life of the church most likely varies from congregation to congregation, depending on leadership style, devotion to the church's missional mandate, and treatment of necessary processes to sustain the church's inner life. Congregational autonomy within the Pentecostal movement also speaks for various ways to ensure congregant participation in strategic processes and decision-making.

As mentioned, Land suggests that social trinitarianism should be visible in ecclesial relations. It could be that a Pentecostal model of the Trinity includes both Chan and Land's perspectives, a model that values hierarchical structure for practical reasons and, at the same time, emphasises relational equality. If this is the case, relational equality functions as a qualifier for a hierarchical church structure and thus limits the exercise of power and authority since one must recognise equality of persons. Nevertheless, one may ask whether Pentecostals anchor a hierarchical structure in a doctrine of God or if it is a pragmatic way of organising church life. This is a question I am unable to give a clear answer to, given that available resources on a Pentecostal doctrine of the Trinity point in both directions.

Moreover, empirical evidence is not essential to my argument; it is not crucial whether trinitarian theology actually triggers or motivates church hierarchy. Instead, in an overall theological system, I assume a natural connection between theological understanding and church practices which coheres well with church hierarchy. Thus, I propose that a hierarchical church structure, pragmatic or normative, has implications for human relations in the church, which I will look at in more detail in the section below.

Ecclesial relations

Next, I consider a normative rationale for a hierarchical church structure and how it impacts human relations in the church. Then, I suggest that a theologically grounded church hierarchy may lead to some problematic practices of loyalty and submissiveness. Next, I address a potential objection: What if the rationale is pragmatic rather than theological; does the problem

disappear then? Most likely, there are still some potential problems. The normativity of church hierarchy as such is not a concern at this point but rather the effects of a normative approach to the matter.

Influences of a normative church hierarchy

Nichols sees trinitarian relations as ontologically asymmetrical, and therefore, in his eyes, hierarchy within the Trinity serves as a model for church relations (1997, p. 276). Through his presentation of a hierarchy of participation, Nichols aims to eradicate the mishandling and ill-treatment that a hierarchy of dominance progresses. Likewise, he maintains that hierarchy is unbiased and serves a purpose, i.e., to organise church relations in ways that benefit both individuals and the church community as a whole. Thus, Nichols sees church hierarchy as the embodiment of trinitarian hierarchy, a participatory hierarchy. Consequently, structural hierarchy in the church is not optional; it is the route every church community must be committed to taking. Alternative arrangements do not reflect divine relations, Nichols holds. Therefore, they are not qualified as constituents of church fellowships. Dedication to such a layout can consequently be expected, rather than recommended, by all members of a particular congregation or church denomination.

In all likelihood, loyalty, submissiveness, and willingness to serve are examples of virtues that are approved of and needed to make a hierarchical church structure function well (Jenssen, 2018, pp. 8, 13). Given that loyalty and submission are necessary in both directions between leaders and congregants, a hierarchical structure depends on such virtues, among others, to be demonstrated voluntarily – as acts of love and appreciation. The word *voluntarily* is key here. When loyalty is expected rather than given, it presumably has implications for ecclesial relations. Expected loyalty, in all probability, bridles both communication and participation in the church, and since distribution of authority in a hierarchical church context is understood as a vertical movement from top to bottom (leaders to congregation), expected loyalty is likely to appear in the same direction in a member-leader relationship.

How, then, does a theologically motivated hierarchy lay the grounds for an expected loyalty in the church? When Nichols argues that an ontological hierarchy within the Trinity is transferable to church relations, this tells both the leaders and the members of a congregation that church hierarchy is God-ordained. Consequently, members of a particular church must accept that church leaders have the authority to make and implement decisions without their consent. The result can be an expected loyalty, where church members assume they must contribute to feeling valued. Also, when church hierarchy is theologically inspired, even though the church leaders lead with grace and the congregants' best in mind, it can leave congregants with a sense of obligation to support, adjust to, and carry out what the leaders decide. This is obviously not always a bad thing. When experienced as freely given in both directions of a relationship, loyalty demonstrates commitment and builds trust in a member-leader relation. This also applies to leaders and members on the same level in a church organisation. To consider it the other way around: trust and commitment between two parties demonstrate a degree of loyalty. However, a sense of obligation to leadership is reinforced by an understanding that God particularly acknowledges decisions made by church leaders. The experience of such an obligation may lead to an expected loyalty.

Expected loyalty in the church may be prescribed to covenantal faithfulness demanded of the people of Israel to Yahweh (cf. Exod 19-24; Deut 27-28). The Sinai covenant justified covenantal loyalty at the time of Moses. Vanhoozer et al. maintain that the loyalty expected of Israel is usually not portrayed in Scripture as covenantal, but instead, it is connected to warnings about sin (2005, p. 629). However, the Sinai covenant has been interpreted

as a suzerain-vassal treaty, a covenant agreement that required faithfulness and loyalty from the client (Israel) to the patron (God) (Georges, 2019, p. 42). The patron then offered loyalty in return to the client when the latter fulfilled their obligations given by the covenant.

Covenant theology, a framework for biblical interpretation, "explains the relationship between God and humanity in terms of divinely initiated covenants that also structure the history of redemption revealed in Scripture" (Duncan, 2022). In an Ancient Near East society like Israel, loyalty had to do with allegiance to a superior party – in Israel's case: Yahweh. Thus, it is likely that expected loyalty was related to God's covenants with his people. Transferred to God's relationship with the church, one may say that God expects loyalty to his covenant with his people: a covenant of grace and redemption. Hence, within this understanding, expected loyalty does not apply to a church leader-member relationship. This does not mean that church members should not respect and honour leadership. On the contrary, Paul encouraged church members to support, respect and honour their leaders. The point is that loyalty, which can be understood to be required and expected by both members and leaders of a congregation, should instead be directed toward God and his covenant with the church.

Nichols' way of distinguishing between equality of persons and participatory hierarchy of relations may resolve some of the issues raised above. If a hierarchical structural model is justified by a theology that God appoints the leader, there is a danger that expected loyalty would be suffocating and unhealthy. However, if it is combined with a theology of *mutual persons*, as Nichols does, the concern does not have to be so prominent. Nichols holds that the church should have a hierarchical structure because the deity demonstrates a hierarchy of relations, with the Father as the institutor of divine relationships. Nichols does not, as it seems, prescribe how the roles in the church hierarchy should be filled and outlived. Thus, a leader of authority in a hierarchical church may demonstrate a servant attitude toward the church. Suppose the church – leaders and congregants – experience a deep sense of mutuality and reciprocity among them. In that case, a hierarchical church structure may be conceived as a means to an end: an organisational tool that promotes church goals pertaining to the health and growth of the church as organism.

However, a distinction between persons and relations most likely does not solve all problems. As pointed out earlier, a real sense of reciprocity can be hard to maintain when church relations are seen as ontologically hierarchical. Therefore, a theologically motivated church hierarchy, which assumes loyalty to the structure, will probably develop into an expected loyalty to the people who fill the structure. This also seems to be a concern for Moltmann (1993) and Volf (1998) when they argue for a theology that upholds mutual relations – not just mutual persons.

Influences of a pragmatic church hierarchy

I have now considered influences of a normative church hierarchy on ecclesial relations. How about when structural hierarchy is a pragmatic way of organising church rather than a result of theological discourse; does this change the effects of hierarchy on church relations?

Chan (1998), like Nichols, prefers a hierarchical church structure, and he seems to do so for practical rather than theological reasons (or possibly a combination of the two). Goal efficiency concerning church growth appears to be a significant motivating factor (Jenssen, 2018). Consequently, strategies that aim to facilitate growth in the congregation require organisational structure and people willing to submit to those strategies. Thus, the church must work together to see growth happen. Subsequently, leaders who own the vision are needed to create

momentum and motivate church members to pull in the same direction. Church hierarchy can thus be justified pragmatically to achieve church growth.

Nevertheless, as Jan I. Jenssen (2018, p. 4) and Darrel L. Guder (1998, p. 71) propose, the organic nature of the church should take precedence over organisation when developing and leading a local church. Accordingly, organisation (the tool) should serve the organism (relations), not vice versa. If not, relations can easily be sacrificed in favour of tools/structures, especially when the structure is considered to advance the growth the church seeks. Thus, theological and ecclesial considerations are needed to qualify, adjust, and give direction to organisational church models and affairs.

Nichols suggests that a hierarchical church structure is a given since church organisation is understood (theologically) as a reflection of hierarchical divine relations. This stance, as I have accounted for, may lead to a power imbalance in the church that imposes loyalty and submission on its members. However, when a pragmatically reasoned church structure becomes the norm, the implications for human relations in the church are probably not very different from when it is theologically motivated. It can quickly happen that pragmatic considerations be given too much attention when making decisions about the direction of the church and its main priorities. Thus, the organic, inner sides of the church may be forced to adapt to structural boundaries and guidelines instead of the other way around. This is especially troublesome if the organism suffers due to decisions made by leaders whom the church members perceive as remote or unaware of real church needs. The consequence may be a church organism that submits to church organisation out of obligation, which is basically an expression of expected loyalty.

Without entering a discussion on different leadership models, I will give some attention to servant leadership within a hierarchical church structure (cf. Greenleaf, 1977; Stott, 2006). Can an emphasis on servant leadership, which focuses on serving first, then leading, help avoid expected loyalty that may lead to disintegration and resistance towards leadership? As revealed in the New Testament, Paul recognised leaders (1 Cor 16:16-18; 1 Tim 5:17; 1 Thes 5:12). However, he did so not with regard to their position as leaders but rather based on what they accomplished in the congregation (Clarke, 2008, p. 85). In this manner, Paul showed how position itself has little relevance since leadership is more about influence demonstrated in practice (cf. Maxwell, 1993). Likewise, Lars Råmunddal holds that spiritual authority is grounded not in position but in "practical service and in care and responsibility in homes and congregations" (Jenssen, Råmunddal & da Silva, 2018, p. 30, my translation). The church's calling is to have the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5) and follow his example (John 13:15). Therefore, humility, compassion, and service lay the foundation for exercising authority.

Correspondingly, Andrew D. Clarke (2008) submits that "Jesus, Paul and Peter are each presented as resisting the notion of leaders 'lording it over' their subjects" (pp. 102–103). Jesus washing his disciples' feet (John 13:4–17) – an unheard-of act even for a Jewish enslaved person at the time (Åkerlund, 2015, p. 6) – exemplifies Clarke's assertion. Even so, Clarke (2008) expounds that the Gospel of John "includes the pericope of Jesus taking the role of a servant in washing the feet of the disciples, yet simultaneously and rightfully being recognised as teacher, lord and master" (p. 98). Therefore, based on the inference that Christ's position as leader over his disciples can be assigned to church relationships, servant leadership need not contrast with a hierarchical leadership structure (cf. Tangen, 2019). Furthermore, a servant leadership model can be used manipulatively, for example, if motivated by economic concerns rather than the mandate to serve and equip the church. However, an understanding of authority as influence, not dominance, has the capacity to ensure that selfish ambition and pursuit of position have little space to grow (Maxwell, 1993).

To conclude this section, I suggest that a normative and a pragmatic church hierarchy affect church relations in somewhat different ways. While a theologically grounded leadership hierarchy perceives a top-to-bottom distribution of authority, a pragmatic hierarchy pays more attention to the practical advantages of such an organisation. Nevertheless, a pragmatic hierarchical structure, established and maintained over some time, will presumably sooner or later be professed as norm. Moreover, if this occurs, does a decided-upon church hierarchy lead to a sense of expected loyalty by congregants to their leaders? Or can a reciprocal experience of collaboration within a hierarchical structure contribute to both qualitative and quantitative church growth? Ethical leadership, which sees itself as servant leaders, may prevent the former. Still, it is conceivably hard to escape any negative influence of a hierarchical church structure on ecclesial relations, pragmatic or not. Therefore, both a pragmatic and a normative church hierarchy are in danger of imposing loyalty requirements on the church members. Consequently, a responsibility to counteract expected loyalty rests heavily on church leadership.

The participation of the Spirit

In what follows, I examine another aspect of a hierarchical model of the Trinity, namely possible influences on ecclesial perceptions of the Spirit's role and participation in the church. This is relevant in a Pentecostal context since Pentecostal ecclesiology draws a connection between the Spirit and the church's behaviour (Chan, 2011). First, I will investigate how Nichols depicts the Spirit in relation to the Father and the Son. Then, I will discuss how a hierarchical model relates to the church's assessment of the work of the Spirit in the church.

Nichols maintains that the Father is the generating source of the Spirit and the Son. Thus, following a patristic understanding of the Trinity, he holds that God the Father is greater than the Son and the Spirit. When divine relations, in such a manner, are perceived to be hierarchical, it reinforces an approach to pneumatology that places the Spirit at the bottom of the hierarchy. A trinitarian doctrine that depicts divine relations as asymmetrical and hierarchical presumably shapes how the church views the Spirit's participation in ecclesial practices.

In this respect, I have found little evidence of what Nichols considers to be practical consequences of his pneumatology. He, nonetheless, boldly claims that a "*loss* of a credible conception of ontological hierarchy means an inability to believe in, conceive, or even experience transcendent or sacred reality" (1997, p. 11, his italics). Thus, he asserts a connection between acknowledging trinitarian hierarchy and ecclesial experiences of the Spirit. Also, Nichols maintains that Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12:28, proposes a hierarchical order among the *charisms*, which, in Nichols' estimation, reinforces a participatory hierarchy in the church (1997, p. 92). Additionally, Nichols emphasises the Lordship of Jesus Christ since Jesus, by Paul, is depicted as the head of the body – which is the church. When holding together Nichols' schemes about the gifts of the Spirit and Jesus as the head of the church, I propose that our understanding of the role and authority of the Spirit can get cluttered: If experiencing the Spirit's participation in the church rests on a realisation of trinitarian hierarchy, does this not contribute to placing the Spirit under the authority of Jesus Christ?

Clark Pinnock warns about a doctrine of the Trinity that sees the Spirit as subordinate to the Son and asserts that a hierarchical model of the Trinity may lead to an ecclesiology where the church sees the Spirit as its helper (1996, p. 115). An unfortunate misunderstanding that might erupt is that Christians (as Christ-like) have similar authority and can 'lead' the Spirit instead of being led by the Spirit. Råmunddal (2013) recognises Pinnock's concern by stating that "God the Creator and Christ the Atonement can be emphasised so strongly that the Spirit 'disappears' in general creation theology and/or in Christological orthodoxy" (p. 15, my

translation). In the same manner, Moltmann (1993) insists on the equality of the three divine persons, and he highlights that "they live and are manifested in one another and through one another" (p. 175). Thus, a hierarchical model of the Trinity may reduce the scope, the level of authority, and the Spirit's participation in the church.

Also, concerning charismata and the Spirit's participation in the church: Volf contends that spiritual gifts are not incidental, meaning that the Spirit does not merely bestow gifts of grace to the gathered community of believers; rather, the Spirit *indwells* the church (Volf, 1998, p. 240). Volf's assertion opens a larger discussion. Nevertheless, if the church assumes the congregation's authority to allow – or not allow – the Spirit to have a central place in the church, such a notion presumably sets limits to the Spirit's participation in the church's life and ministry. This is allegedly not restricted to a hierarchical model of the Trinity. However, if the emphasis is on the Spirit being sent by the Father (and by the Son) to assist, preserve and equip the church, it may reinforce a perception of the Spirit as a servant of the church rather than the church being dependent on the Spirit to serve.

Furthermore, scriptural depictions of Christ as the head (*kephalē*) of the church and the Spirit as helper and advocate (*parakletos*) (Eph 1:22; John 14:26; Rom 8:26) may underpin an ecclesiology where the Spirit as *sent* is seen as subordinate to Christ in the actualisation of redemption. The discussion on *kephalē,* meaning either *source* or *authority over,* is necessary and relevant; however, it is a discussion for another article. A traditionalist view, nevertheless, understands 'head' to entail authority (cf. Giles, 2018). With Christ as head – understood as having authority over – and the church as his body: where does this place the Spirit in the Christ-church relationship? Is it sufficient to depict the Spirit as the bond of love and peace that brings unity to the church – as one body? (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 4:3). I assume that Augustinian considerations about the Spirit as the bond of love (*vinculum amoris*) between the Father and the Son (Williams, 2004) and the Ambrosian assertion that the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son (Jenson, 1997) may lead to a reductionist view that considers the Spirit as an abstract metaphysical entity rather than an equal part of the deity. This has also been a concern within the Orthodox church, as pointed out by Gerald O'Collins (1999, p. 135).

As suggested, an apparent conflict between a hierarchical and social model of the Trinity has to do with subordination and the Spirit being sent. However, in the greater scheme of trinitarian theology, Jesus' proclamation: "the Kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15; Matt 4:17; cf. Luke 10:9, NIV), is of great importance. The coming of Jesus was the coming of God's kingdom on earth. So, when Jesus knew it was time to leave, he announced the coming of the Spirit (John 16:7). Allegedly, the *coming* of the Kingdom is as significant as the *sending* of the Son and the Spirit. The sending, in trinitarian terms, brings attention to *who* did *what*. The coming brings light to Kingdom realities: the presence of God on earth. The presence of Jesus Christ was God's presence among created beings and the presence of the Spirit all the same. Therefore, when presented as helper and advocate, the Spirit is *God's* help and advocacy. Hence, when Jesus said: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt 28:20, NIV), he promised to be with his people by the Spirit. Therefore, the coming of the Spirit is not just a fulfilment of Jesus' promise; it gives substance to *God with us* (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23) and reveals the Spirit as God's Spirit. The Spirit is thus not merely a representative of God's kingdom; he is the presence of God's kingdom on earth (cf. Eph 1:3).

A hierarchical understanding of the Trinity may miss the above perspective if it gives immoderate attention to the sending of the Spirit. Also, a perception of a linear, vertical distribution of divine authority from the Father to the Son and the Spirit may be prone to marginalise the role of the Spirit in the economy of the Godhead. Thus, a consequence may be that the Father and the Son are seen as worthy recipients of the church's worship and that the

Spirit becomes more of a bureaucrat who directs worship upwards. Even if the church admits a functional, economic subordination of the Son to the Father or the Spirit to the Son, it does not ascertain that the Spirit is lesser than the Father. Moreover, if the Spirit is fully God, as also the Son, the Spirit is functionally and ontologically equal with the Father and the Son.

IMPLICATIONS OF A SOCIAL MODEL ON ECCLESIAL PRACTICES

The problems outlined above can perhaps be solved within a hierarchical understanding of the Trinity. However, Nichols, with his model of a participatory hierarchy, does not seem to provide us with all the solutions. In the final part of this article, I summarise a few traits of a social model of the Trinity that might be pertinent to Pentecostal church practices.

Firstly, social trinitarians recognise church structure as a necessary means rather than a normative assembly (Volf, 1998, p. 222). Like a marriage or a company, the church needs arrangements, guidelines, and structures that help the community be stable and sustainable. Systematic theologian Daniel Migliore acknowledges that institutional structure is an integral part of church life since some form of structure is necessary for any human community. At the same time, Migliore warns against a church model where the institution is locked in form and structure – as if they are God-given and exalted structures. When this happens, there is a danger that the church sees its purpose as "institutional survival and increase of power rather than faithful witness and costly service" (Migliore, 2004, p. 255).

On the one hand, as presented, Pentecostal scholar Chan prefers a hierarchical church structure mainly for pragmatic reasons, while Nichols seems eager to transfer a presumed divine hierarchical order to church relations. On the other hand, a social model is more concerned with care-taking and edifying routines and practices subject to continuing evaluation and adjustments. Thus, a social model of the Trinity seems to support a more dynamic and flexible approach to organising the church.

Secondly, a social model of the Trinity appreciates egalitarian relations and sees women as equal to men in leadership and participation in the church, not only in how they are valued but also in function (Boff, 1988). Still, a social model with influences on church structure does not ensure an opening for female leaders in the church. There are hierarchical churches and denominations where women are welcomed as leaders and churches with a flat structure that hesitate to recognise women in church leadership. It is a complex question for many, and theological objections seem to play an important role (Smidsrød, 2016). Therefore, church structure itself does not determine whether women are accepted as leaders in the church. Nevertheless, a social understanding of the Trinity presumably influences ecclesial relations in a way that helps the church value and estimate men and women as leaders based on calling, character, and competence instead of gender.

Thirdly, as Land (2003) affirms, a social model of the Trinity understands church leadership in terms of relations rather than positions. Even so, human nature carries a propensity for sin, which may impact ecclesial relations in all church models. Thus, a church leadership with a flat structure faces the same challenges as a formally hierarchical leadership. A fully flat organisation does not provide for accountability and thus allows the appearance of informal power players (Freeman, 1972). Consequently, flat-structured churches may contest divergence of opinions and informal power in ways that make it challenging to discover where the authority to make decisions in the church lies (Conder & Rhodes, 2017, p. 37). Hence, conflicts and disagreements are not omitted from an egalitarian church motivated by a relational Trinity. Therefore, a measure of submission by congregants to leaders' decisions – serving the

common good of the church – cannot be avoided. However, submission to leadership within a flat structure is, as suggested, not a built-in requirement; instead, it is an expression of trust and confidence in the intentions and capability of the leaders to make good decisions. This should obviously also be the case in churches with a normative or pragmatic church hierarchy.

Finally, but not exhaustively, a social model of the Trinity highlights ontological equality and unity, implying shared participation and authority in the deity (Moltmann, 1993). Suppose the church recognises the Spirit as present and partaking in all of God's work and purposes for the believer and the congregation. In that case, the church may also anticipate the direction and involvement of the Spirit in all spheres of the local church, including strategic processes and church administration. The measure of the Spirit's involvement in church affairs is clearly not pertinent to the Pentecostal movement alone. However, pneumatological ecclesiology plays a vital role in explaining why and how the Spirit empowers the believer to live the new life in Christ (cf. Chan, 2011). Thus, the church needs to ensure that the Spirit is not reduced to someone who merely moves into and indwells the heart of a believer. At the same time, the church should recognise the work of the Spirit in and through the church – as part of God's redemptive plan.

Nevertheless, how a particular church (Pentecostal or other) approaches the work of the Spirit, administrates the use of charisms, and dedicates time to seek the guidance and leading of the Spirit, most likely varies due to the congregation and its leadership's understanding and history of experience concerning these matters (cf. Tilley, 2004; McGrath, 2007). Still, a pneumatological ecclesiology can possibly be deepened by valuing and trusting the work of the Spirit throughout the church.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored how a particular model of the Trinity influences ecclesial practices within a Pentecostal church context, particularly in terms of leadership authority, church relations, and the participation of the Spirit in the church.

Discussing Terence L. Nichols' presentation of a *participatory hierarchy* within the Trinity, I have looked at how his perspectives resonate with Pentecostal scholars Simon Chan and Steven Land's different approaches to Trinitarian doctrine and its consequences for the church. The study suggests that church hierarchy does not need to be based on theological discourse, as Nichols insists. Instead, it can, in line with Chan's reasoning, result from a more pragmatic decision concerning functionality. I have found that a theologically motivated (normative) church hierarchy seems to validate a higher degree of authority to church leadership than what a pragmatic church hierarchy encompasses. Also, within a pragmatic organisational framework, it is allegedly easier to adjust structural instalments to demographic and seasonal changes in the church than when the church is to reflect a presumed divine hierarchy. The discussion maintains that a hierarchical church structure has some advantages, especially regarding goal efficiency and predictability. Nevertheless, both a normative and pragmatic church hierarchy has the capacity to inflict expected loyalty on its members.

I have presented aspects of a social model of the Trinity and suggested that understanding the deity as essentially relational may advise the Pentecostal church, and the church in general, to give proper attention to the health of the church as organism. The primary purpose of church organisation is to attend to the church's inner life while ensuring that it fulfils its God-given mandate (Jenssen, 2018). Therefore, highlighting the Trinity as a community of love may aid the church in sustaining healthy structures that focus on the church's well-being

rather than preserving the church as an institutional entity (Moltmann, 1993; Guder, 1998). Not to suggest that a social model is a remedy that delivers the church from the presented concerns. For example, churches motivated by a relational Trinity may still have to deal with difficulties related to informal and formal power structures and other relational issues (Tangen, 2019). However, a relational model may assist in broadening the church's perspectives on, e.g., church structure, ecclesial relations, and the Spirit's participation in the church.

Furthermore, church leadership and participation in the church ought to be hall-marked by reciprocity and love and not by power struggle and dominion, as also Land (2003) holds. A social model may help the Pentecostal church, and presumably other church denominations, avoid expected loyalty and uneven distribution of power. Additionally, an advantage of a social model of the Trinity for Pentecostal pneumatology is the model's affirmation of the equality of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Thus, a social model does not see the Son or the Spirit as lesser than the other two members of the Trinity. Consequently, a pneumatological ecclesiology motivated by social trinitarianism may inspire a willingness to be led by the Spirit, in obedience to Christ, under the care of the Father, in all spheres of church life.

More specifically, how a hierarchical and a social model of the Trinity practically impact the daily affairs of church life and which church practices could benefit from giving prominence to a social model needs to be further explored. My hope, however, is that the presented perspectives may lead to more discussion and reflection within the fields of Pentecostal ecclesiology and a Pentecostal theology of the Trinity.

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