Title: Dancing as Equals: A Trinitarian Model for Social Entrepreneurship

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Abstract:

Social entrepreneurship seeks alternatives to corporate models for improving the situation of the poor, but can social entrepreneurship be grounded theologically? Do the doctrines of the Christian church support corporations or alternatives to corporations? Max Weber, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, suggests that the doctrines of Protestantism support the development of corporations. According to Weber, the very development of Protestantism created the ideal societal conditions for the occurrence of capitalism and its corporations. Recent accounts of Trinitarian theology provide an alternative societal model that challenges Weber's connection between Protestant theology and corporations.

 My presentation will argue that the doctrine of the Trinity provides an alternative to corporations for the construction of society. Theologians from a variety of backgrounds including Protestant Jürgen Moltmann, Roman Catholic Catherine LaCugna, and Eastern Orthodox John Zizioulas work within a Trinitarian framework to prioritize community as an institutional model. Based in the tradition of the Cappadocian Fathers, communal Trinitarian theology challenges hierarchical understandings of the Godhead by suggesting that the Trinity exists in an equal, cooperative, and loving relationship. A perichoretic dance of reciprocal relationships characterizes the Trinity. If God dances as an equal community of self-giving love, then humanity, as bearers of the divine image, and participants in the divine life, also could relate in a similar type of community. The equality present in the inter-Trinitarian relationships challenges the hierarchical structures of corporations. The relational God described by the doctrine of the Trinity grounds a societal model that provides an alternative to hierarchical corporate structures. Trinitarian theology suggests the need for social entrepreneurship committed to a bottom-up, communal approach.

What is entailed in the alternative model to corporate structures suggested by a communal Trinitarian theology? A Social Trinitarian model for society recognizes the possibility for equal contributions from diverse groups of people. This model devalues forms of society that emphasize work production (the production of ideas or the production of concrete material goods) as the highest contribution to society and validates the diverse contributions to society made by people of different ages, sexes, races, and cultures. Concretely, the Trinitarian model gives voice to the poor. The validation offered by Social Trinitarian theology is sensitive to culture and tradition. Recognizing the equality of positions, the ideals of the "upper-class" or "first-world-nation" should not be forced upon the "lower-class" or "third-world-nation". Thus, a society based on Trinitarian theology improves the physical and social conditions of the poor through a mutual contribution from local and outside sources.

The Social Trinitarian model for social entrepreneurship offers a corrective to other bottom-up approaches. The biggest challenge facing the bottom-up approach to social entrepreneurship is the conflict of local understandings and universal values (human rights, women's rights, environmental rights, etc.). How do outsiders respond when locals suggest a solution that calls for the degradation of

women? What happens when the bottom-up approach leads to the subjugation of women, racial groups, or the environment? While other bottom-up approaches may be tempted to preference the local voice, the Social Trinitarian model emphasizes the equality of all voices. Utilizing the Social Trinitarian model, locals and outsiders work together in order to develop solutions to common problems. This approach does not assume a collective voice of the poor, but emphasizes the plurality of poor voices and respects the variety of unique contributions. Together, locals and outsiders solve problems in a conversation of equals.

In order to present this material, I will articulate a social understanding of the Trinity as it grounds social entrepreneurship. My articulation involves synthesizing the projects of Moltmann, LaCugna, and Zizioulas. My project attempts to utilize the insights of these Trinitarian theologians, not to gloss the major differences within their unique theological systems, but in order to produce fertile ground for future conversations between traditions with the goal of addressing common concerns. Then, my presentation will move to concrete suggestions for a bottom-up approach, arguing that the Social Trinitarian model avoids a key pitfall of other models for social entrepreneurship.