TOWARDS PERFECT CHARITY
Divine Sonship in Richard of St. Victor’s
Trinitarian Theology and the Challenges
of the Third Millennium

Robert N. Rivera, S.J.

Introduction

... they will see things in the perspective of Christ: in the perspective of the “Father who is in heaven” (Mt 5:45), from whom the Lord was sent and to whom he has returned (cf. Jn 16:28).¹

Tertio Millennio Adveniente no 49

In his apostolic letter Tertio Millennio Adveniente (TMA), Pope John Paul II calls for a program of spiritual and societal renewal as Christianity faces its third millennium. Towards this goal, each of the years leading to the “Great Jubilee” of the year 2000 has been dedicated to a divine person in the trinitarian Godhead. For 1999, the last year of preparation, the focus is on God the Father. Among the challenges presented to the Christian for the “Year of the Father” is the emphasis on authentic conversion and the virtue of charity (TMA, no. 50), which will in turn lead to a more vigorous response to various persistent global and societal problems (TMA, no. 52).

Aside from these pastoral considerations, the Year of the Father also provides the opportune moment to highlight another need, that
of theological reflection on God the Father. Jean Galot, for instance, readily admits that relative to the work that has been done on the Son and the Spirit, there is a definite lack of theologizing on God the Father. Insights into the first person of the Trinity seem to be presumed as background knowledge implicit in the more dominant fields of Christology and Pneumatology, or subsumed within a more general study of God.  

The two sets of exigencies are certainly interrelated. The Church's millennium preparations urge the faithful to face the problems of our contemporary times, drawing from the inspiration of the Father. This source of inspiration, however, can only be fully harnessed if it is reflected upon carefully. We have to ask what precisely it is in our relationship with the Father which can make us more determined in our resolve to face the challenges of society and the world. We need to relate our theological reflections to our life of sonship with the Father, to our over-all life of grace, as we strive to strengthen our Christian commitment by the empowering Holy Spirit.

It is in the context of grace as intersubjectivity with the Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit that this essay will try to deepen our knowledge of the Father. Using the optic of Richard of St. Victor's trinitarian theology, this study reflects on the idea of God the Father and God the Son's mutual relationship as undergirded by perfect charity. It is this Divine Sonship, as illumined by Richard of St. Victor, which will be the model for our own human relationship with the Father, enriching in turn our participation in a life of grace that is a sharing in the Risen Incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. Finally, in the spirit of Pope John Paul II's exhortations, this modest essay will examine how the Philippine church has moved forward to establish a "culture of love" in response to a basic societal problematic, the economic situation.

**Divine Filiation: Scriptural Survey**

A necessary first step is to look at the scriptural warrants for Jesus' own experience of unity with the Father, of sonship, as well as
the biblical basis for the invitation to share in the same sonship which is extended to all who follow him. The following is a “preview” rather than an in-depth treatment of the scriptural grounds for the experience of divine filiation, the starting point for a theology of God the Father. Taking a look at the biblical sources for divine filiation is important because it allows us to see relevant aspects of Jesus’ relationship with the Father in very specific and precise terms, and thus, how we are called to the very same relationship.

THE SYNOPTICS AND PAUL

One overarching characteristic of Jesus’ relationship with the Father that is evident throughout the Synoptics is the intimacy which marks the bond. This is manifested above all in Jesus’ use of the word “Abba” to designate his relationship with the Father. Much has been made of Jesus’ use of this term, of how in the prosaic and everyday usage of the Aramaic it allows Jesus to express familiarity with the Father. Two important repercussions of Jesus’ use of the term should be brought out here.

Familiarity with the Father

First is the fact that with the intimate knowledge in which the use of the term is couched, Jesus is unique in Jewish history. Never before had anyone ever dared to address God in such familiar terms, an action that is almost scandalous from a Jewish point of view. With the Hebrew perception of a God that is all powerful and holy, Jesus’ use of the term certainly upsets the conventions of his time. There is good reason to believe that Jesus’ use of the term was his regular invocation for God in his prayer as well—as evidenced in his prayer in Gethsemane (Mt 26:39)—which again must have been disconcerting for Jewish piety which viewed God in very transcendent terms. Jesus, however, remained steadfast to this familiarity to the very end, with his dying words on the cross (Lk 23:46).

Secondly, also evident in the Synoptics is the invitation for us to share, as it were, in the usage of the term. This is clearly seen in Jesus’ exhortation to his disciples to call God “Father” in their own
prayer (Lk 11:1-2). In this vein, what began as a unique address for God takes on even more significant proportions. If Jesus’ intimacy with the Father is unique, then his invitation for us to partake of the same intimacy is truly revolutionary. It is also indicative of the approach that Jesus has chosen to teach his disciples. Galot notes that “...while Jesus wanted above all else to establish his disciples in a relationship of filial intimacy with the Father, he also wanted them to strive to better understand this mysterious Father.”

Adoption

It is important to note that the two features inherent in Jesus’ use of the term “Abba”—the novelty of the precedent and the extension to others of the “right” to address the Father in the same manner—find definitive expression with Paul as our collective call to adoption. In Rom 8:15-16, Paul writes that “...you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry “Abba, Father!” it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” Similarly, in the letter to the Ephesians, the Pauline author affirms that the Father has “...destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will...” (Eph 1:5). This is reiterated in Gal 4:4-6 where Paul proclaims: “So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.” In these passages, we can see how the unique perspective introduced by Jesus in relating with the Father has now become normative for the Christian life, and is animating the life of the early Church. What the Christian has received is not just some material birthright, but a new life that truly transforms, through the Spirit.

The Johannine texts

Moving over to the Johannine texts, we find echoes of the ideas presented by Paul. At the same time, we find some of the ideas which will be taken up in a more analytic manner by Richard of St. Victor.

Gospel of John

In the gospel of John, again the sonship with the Father through
Jesus is transformative in a total way. We are changed in our very being because we are born of God. The gospel of John states that all who have received Jesus have been given the "...power to become children of God..." (Jn 1:12). Thus, it is through Jesus that we share in sonship with the Father, and our being children of God constitutes our definitive identification as Christians.

1 John 4:8ff.

The first letter of John goes a step further and tries to establish the quality of this God that has graciously invited us to share in the filial relationship with him. The query finds its logical answer in love, which becomes the enduring quality characterizing the bond between the Father and us. God is identified as love (1 Jn 4:8ff.), and we are sustained by that love in relating to God and in relating to others.⁵ William Hill affirms that it is this Johannine notion of God as Love which is the cornerstone of Richard’s treatise on the Trinity as the “community of love.”⁶

Father and Son Relate in Perfect Charity
Richard of St. Victor’s Trinitarian Theology

The previous section sought to show how divine filiation is firmly rooted in scripture. In this section, we shall explore how our understanding of the bond between Father and Son is deepened when viewed as a relationship of perfect charity, within the community of infinite love which the Trinity represents, according to the reflections of Richard of St. Victor.

BACKGROUND: RICHARD OF ST. VICTOR

Richard of St. Victor (ca.1123-1173) emerged as one of the noteworthy figures in medieval thought, a luminary of twelfth century monastic theology. Richard “aims to provide necessary reasons in favor of the faith,” following the lead of Anselm who preceded him, in the path of fides quaerens intellectum.
**Social Model for the Trinity**

Because of his work in explaining the nature and import of the Trinity as a "community of love," Richard has been designated as the one who inaugurated a "social model for the Trinity." Richard, however, is in continuity with one strain of Augustinian trinitarian thought in which love is the main theme in the soul’s ascent to the Trinity, but which would later be "overshadowed by the dominant influence of Thomas Aquinas with his masterful use of the psychological analogy to probe and illuminate the inner being of the divine Trinity." Richard takes up this former theme, which would in turn be developed by Bonaventure. Hill, quoting Michael Schmaus notes:

> There are only two major trinitarian theories in the medieval theological world: the Augustinian, mediated by Anselm and Peter Lombard and culminating in Aquinas; and the one inaugurated by Richard of St. Victor, which finds its fullest expression in Bonaventure.

Richard’s trinitarian thought is developed in his landmark opus *De Trinitate*. At the outset of this work, Richard asserts that he is providing necessary reasons for the Trinity, with human experience serving as the building blocks for his system. We would do well to clarify this approach, in the light of the criticisms it has drawn.

**Criticisms of His Method**

In his approach, Richard has been scored for offering necessary reasons for the Trinity, as well as for designating experience as his primary tool. Among other problems, critics charge that Richard falls into the trap of extreme rationalism. By claiming that his system provides necessary reasons for the Trinity, he dismisses the unavoidably mysterious character of the Trinity. Theologians have accused him of overstepping the bounds of reason and meddling unnecessarily in the realm of mystery. Critics of a more psychological bent, on the other hand, have criticized him for needlessly imposing dogma on experience. These critics claim that Richard’s analysis of experience stands well on its own terms, thus there is no need for the support of philosophical abstractions or religious dogma. Conversely, attempts to support religious dogma with experience also become useless.
Cousins offers a cogent rebuttal to these arguments. He points out first of all that the above objections presume that experience, reason, and faith cannot interact in an organic manner. Cousins emphasizes, however, that it is precisely the organic unity of these three elements which characterizes Richard’s theological method. For him, faith precedes both reason and experience. This means that faith transforms experience, uncovering new facets of experience and, in turn, new dimensions of knowledge. Thus, when Richard focuses on the experience of human love, he “views it as it has been transformed by faith and with the illumination that reason can give when guided by faith.”

Secondly, Cousins clarifies that these reasons do not form an airtight system of argumentation. Rather, what these necessary reasons convey are the eternal reasons for the divinity, “the ontological necessity of the divine mystery reflected in experience and drawn partially into consciousness by reason guided by faith.” Here, the organic faith-reason-experience framework clarifies what Richard means by “necessary reasons.” The human person is the image of God, reflecting God’s absolute truth and goodness. Thus, there is always an eternal dimension to a human person’s subjectivity. When a human person examines his or her experience using the faculty of reason, there comes a point where the divine light shines, providing a vision not just of the finite self but also of the reasons for the divinity reflected in his or her experience. It is at this juncture that reason guided by faith allows the human person to comprehend the necessary reasons, albeit only partially. Through the divine light the ontological necessity for the divinity mirrored in experience is brought into the consciousness of our finite minds, even as we are unable to grasp the divine in its entirety.

**The Mutual Relationship Between Father and Son as Perfect Charity**

With the foregoing clarifications, we now proceed to explain how Richard describes the intimate relationship between Father and Son. Richard could have very well been inspired by the biblical exhorta-
tion that “God is love.” However, it is his method as we have described above which forwards his analysis of the Trinity.

**Love, the Highest Good**

Richard begins with the premise that God is the highest goodness, the *Summum Bonum*, which has its most noble manifestation in love. The fact that love occupies the pinnacle of goodness is considered so self-evident to human experience that for Richard, there is no further need to prove its validity. Reflecting upon human experience, however, Richard points out that “love in its perfect state is personal and self-transcending,” what medieval thought has designated as charity. Again, it is experience imbued with faith which allows us to reason out that love can only be manifested in such a manner. Bringing these reflections to their logical end, if God is the embodiment of perfect love, then the Trinity must also possess in its fullness perfect charity.

**Love for the Son**

If reflection on human experience allows us to grasp the truth that God is indeed love, Richard further holds that such reflection will also shed light on the nature of the Trinity. Working from the insight that infinite love is infinitely self-transcending, manifesting itself in infinite charity, love of self can only be an imperfect form of the fullness in which love can be expressed. As Richard himself states:

In that supreme and absolutely perfect good there exists the fullness and perfection of all goodness. But where the fullness of all goodness exists, true and supreme charity cannot be absent. For nothing is better than charity; nothing is more perfect than charity. Yet no one is said, strictly speaking, to have charity in view of his own private love of himself. Love must be directed to another in order for it to be charity. Where there is only one person, charity cannot exist.

Applying this insight into the inner life of the Trinity, the Godhead as embodying perfect love and charity would presuppose at least two persons. Flowing once more from reflection on human experience,
we are brought to the conclusion that “it is love that elicits the plurality of the divine persons, and there must be a person who corresponds to the loving person and is worthy of his love.”16 The generation of the Son has therefore come about because of perfect love. This generation is necessary because divine love cannot be fully expressed as perfect charity without expressing it for another. And since what is expressed is divine love, the expression can only be perfect if it is directed towards another divine person, if the love is mutual; thus, the Son.

**Love for the Spirit**

On the basis of the above reasoning, the infinite love which finds expression in perfect charity for one another further moves into the realm of ultimate perfection by blocking out any self-serving or egotistic motive. And yet this is precisely the danger in a dual, mutual relationship. Each party may be so content with the love that it gives and the love that it receives that the relationship becomes exclusive and self-serving. There is the need, therefore, to share this love with a third party, to move from mutuality to transcendence. As Richard suggests:

> Strictly speaking, there is shared love when two persons love a third in a harmony of affection and a community of love, and when the loves of the two converge in the single flame of love they have for the third. From this, then, it is evident that shared love would not have a place in the divinity, if there were only two persons, and not a third.17

It is on this basis that the third person of the Trinity is explained. And with the emergence of the Holy Spirit, the perfect, ultimate love is attained and fully consummated. The “triple expression” of charity closes, as it were, the circle, and all that is left is for God’s love to be freely channeled to other creatures. Later theology will further refine the role of the Spirit as the very love which exists between the Father and the Son, an important note we will return to later.18
LIMITATIONS OF RICHARD’S TRINITARIAN THOUGHT

Even in the cursory manner in which it has been presented, it is possible to see the compact and ordered explanation for the inner life of the Trinity which Richard’s system offers. However, it is here that some caution may be, even briefly, in order.

Necessary Reasons?

Without belaboring the point, it would be good to emphasize here that even as the ordered processes that are presented above certainly appeal as “necessary reasons” for the Trinity, these do not, in any way, remove the aspect of mystery which should remain in the Trinity. We must again stress that the “necessity” of the reasons offered are in the context of Richard’s synthetic faith-reason-experience method which we have already carefully qualified. Furthermore, any analogy or imagery which attempts to encompass a mystery of the faith as fundamental as the Trinity will fall short of its mark.¹⁹

Subordinationist Undertones

This is not to say, however, that the image presented will have no inherent value. However, great care must be taken in distinguishing the potential contributions of the system from the possible misinterpretations. Hill warns, for instance, that in the way the system is presented, God the Father seems to be portrayed as loving himself first, and then expressing this love for the Son, and finally the two uniting in a shared love with the Spirit. These subordinationist undertones, with the existence of the Son and the Spirit seemingly contingent on that of the Father, have to be guarded against.²⁰

Autonomy vs. Unity

We must also see how Richard’s system, as Pannenberg points out, “...emphasizes the autonomy to the point of putting into jeopardy the divine unity.”²¹ If we were to simply take Richard’s system wholesale, the individual contributions of each of the divine persons may be so emphasized that the fundamental unity of the Godhead is compromised. Similar to our warning above, the Father may be seen as the person expressing love, the Son and the Spirit as
passively receiving, without recognizing that the Trinity is a dynamic whole.

**INFINITE LOVE AND PERFECT CHARITY: APPROACHING THE FATHER**

Having given the warnings above, we are now in a better position to assess the contributions of Richard's system. Despite the limitations cited above, Richard's perspective can help us assess our relationship with the Father from a fresh perspective. If our life of grace truly involves intersubjectivity with the Trinity, then this participation should be animated by Jesus' relationship with his Father. An important aspect of this relationship is brought to the fore with Richard's system: it is a bond which strives toward perfect charity.

**Challenges for Perfect Charity**

Here we must make an important clarification. In Richard's trinitarian theology, perfect charity, in the medieval norm, is viewed as a love that is self-transcendent and personal. What are the ramifications of this notion of charity in our day and age?

Obviously, in our modern world, the call to charity remains, but it cannot simply be subsumed within the simple act of turning towards the other, i.e., the other being concrete individuals. It is evident that "more recent concern with the social and political dimensions of faith and of hope have alerted believers and theologians to the political and social dimensions of loving: 'social love,' 'civilization of love' (John Paul II)." However, despite the increasing complexity of living out the demands of perfect charity in the modern world, the wellspring for such a life of love remains fairly simple. Love simply has to imbue our whole existence, holding a place of primacy in our lives. Thus in an age where laws, institutions, and social situations or structures hold sway, the primacy of charity should be even more emphasized. Rene Carpentier's ideas on the import of charity in the context of the moral life are helpful in this regard. For Carpentier, charity "...informs the virtues not only on the plane of conduct itself but also on the plane of the moral object...."
Here Carpentier is referring to the doctrine formulated by St. Thomas Aquinas on the existential structure of the moral object, this object being any concept relevant to morality. According to St. Thomas, the moral object consists of two important elements. First is the “complex of ‘determinations’ which arises from my experience of the outside world in relation to this ‘object.’” 24 Second is “the judgment which gathers together these experiential data and affirms this object as a good in relation to my last end.” 25 Through the action of my “basic tendency” and will, I adopt an attitude which leads to the formation of the moral object in my consciousness and the affirmation of God as the final end. Taking on this attitude is none other than an existential act of love for God as my ultimate goal.

At its most basic level, therefore, the political and social dimensions of charity involve making sure that such charity suffuses all of our actions and intentions, so that it truly becomes the basic attitude in one’s life. In this manner, love undergirds the totality of our existence, such that in our lives we have “the primacy of love mediating between historical structures and kingdom values, and underlying kingdom values themselves.” 26 Love (along with the other theological virtues) should remain the basic component in one’s actuations, becoming in fact the “form” of all the virtues. In so doing, our lives of charity remain personal and self-transcendent, and more so the more perfect the charity involved.

Within Richard’s model, the movement toward perfect charity—toward the primacy of charity above everything—is initiated by the Father. In drawing closer to the Father, we therefore become more familiar with the ways of perfect love.

**Drawing Closer to the Father**

It is in this challenge of establishing the primacy of charity in our lives through our relationship with God the Father that the schema offered by Richard becomes truly helpful. Two aspects of the response to this challenge are especially highlighted with Richard’s schema.
**A Model Attuned to Human Experience**

First, Richard’s Trinitarian theology provides for those striving toward perfect love a model which recognizes the natural development of human love. This correspondence between human and divine love can help make the ideal of perfect love embodied in the latter more realizable. John O’Donnell states that “Richard’s analysis stresses the inexhaustible creativity of love which offers the believer the best insight available in human experience to grasp the nature of the divine trinitarian life.”

This close affinity with human experience makes Richard’s insights most helpful in further articulating our human appropriation of the love of the Father, and of the rest of the Trinity. Here the human experience of love plays a unique role. Human love provides the analogue for understanding the mystery of trinitarian love. At the same time, the understanding obtained provides a model and ideal for human love to emulate.

O’Donnell describes Richard’s argument as a two step process. The first step reasons out that in order for God to love perfectly, there must be a mutuality to the love expressed in the Godhead. This implies a reciprocity of love between two equals, and thus the relationship between Father and Son. In the second step, Richard shows how a more perfect love will move from mutuality toward love for a third person. In distinguishing between this lower (reciprocity) and higher form of love (sharing of love with a third person), Richard appeals to the same distinction in human love. Thus when humans strive for the ideal of self-transcendent love, Richard’s schema provides an example that is easily appropriated by human experience, precisely because it is based on such experience.

Thus individuals striving to live out trinitarian love do not have to make a “quantum leap” in meeting this ideal. Instead of grappling with the ideal of “community of love” immediately, Richard provides a framework derived from their own experience which follows the natural human process of moving from mutuality to transcendence in relationships. This process makes the trinitarian ideal more comprehensible, more attuned to the human situation, and hopefully, more attractive as a tool for evangelization.
CORRECTING AN EXCESSIVELY GRATUITOUS NOTION OF FATHERLY LOVE

A second aspect of the primacy of love underlined by Richard’s system is the realization that the life of charity to which we are led should be active rather than passive, transcendent rather than self-centered, in keeping with the example of the Holy Trinity. Our life of grace allows us to share, through Christ, in the Father’s love for the Son and the Son’s love for the Father. While our sharing in this relationship is gratuitous, there may be a danger of emphasizing this gratuitous aspect too much (e.g., the focus on the image of the Father in “The Prodigal Son” in the Year of the Father celebration), i.e., with us always on the receiving end. Richard’s focus on perfect charity allows us to realize more clearly the attitude incumbent upon us as sons of the Father: charity (obviously not perfect because of our finitude) modeled after and sharing in the infinite love relationship between God the Father and God the Son, and directed towards the other.

An important note here is the fact that later theology will see the Spirit not just as the object of the mutual love between the Father and Son, but as that very love itself. While this idea is not explicitly evident in Richard’s system, it is not totally incongruent with it. The Spirit as both the object of and the very love between Father and Son simply highlights the importance of love in the trinitarian community. It also amplifies the corrective we are explaining here. Sharing in this love means sharing in the Spirit, in the relationship between Father and Son—which is what grace is—and in the mutuality and transcendence this involves. Such sharing certainly goes beyond a merely “gratuitous” notion of love.

There are many ways in which this “gratuity” in living out the love of the Father may be carried to undesirable extremes. In the lives of the faithful, for instance, this can be manifested in a kind of piety that is overly centered on acts of worship and devotion, without corresponding effects in praxis. The movement toward perfect love initiated by the Father stands as a corrective to this misconceived notion of faith. This corrective, as we can see, shall serve not just the individual but the concerns of Church and society as well.
Making Sonship Operational in Philippine Church and Society

In this part of our reflections, we will attempt to provide directions on how the fresh perspective offered by Richard on our relationship with the Father can help us take on the exhortations of Tertio Millennio Adveniente. Specifically we will look at the challenges incumbent upon us as a Church and as a nation, and how our insights into God the Father help illumine the Philippine church’s response in one specific and important area, namely the economic situation.

VATICAN II: GAUDIUM ET SPES

Vatican II’s Gaudium et Spes (GS) certainly echoes many of the ideas that we have found in our treatment of Richard of St. Victor. In the Council’s description, for instance, of the contemporary call for the Church, divine filiation again plays an important role: “God, who has fatherly concern for everyone, has willed that all mankind should be one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood” (GS, no. 24). And, in a line that seems directly drawn from the reflections of Richard, the Council alludes to “…a certain likeness between the union of the divine persons and in the union of God’s sons in truth and charity.” In this vein, the document urges the faithful toward greater love of God and neighbor. Our call to sonship, in Vatican II’s formulation, is thus a call for the whole community, for as the Council affirms: “He has lavished life upon us, so that, as sons in the Son, we can cry out in the Spirit: Abba, Father!” (GS, no. 22)

Aside from reminding us of the importance of living as “communities of charity,” the relationship of perfect charity between Father and Son can also inspire the spirituality which can animate these communities. The interpersonal stress of Richard’s Trinitarian system helps provide a guide for a “spirituality based on the experience of human community,” the need for which has emerged quite distinctly in the post-Vatican II era. Ultimately, this spirituality should lead to a reinvigoration of society as a whole. As Leonardo Boff
states, "The sort of society that would emerge from inspiration by the trinitarian model would be one of fellowship, equality, or opportunity, generosity in the space available for personal and group expression."\textsuperscript{32}

**How Has the Philippines Responded to the Call to Sonship?**

Given the call to sonship which is extended to the universal Church, we can ask ourselves how we have done in our response to the call of sonship in the Philippine church and society? In the assessment undertaken by the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II), there is certainly a situation of "lights and shadows."\textsuperscript{33} The situation admits to a certain ambiguity especially in the areas of society and culture, the economic and political situation, and the religious context. Certainly progress has been made. But there are also numerous needs that still have to be addressed.

*CBCP and the Philippine Economy*

One such need that has been deemed worthy of a major statement from the Philippine hierarchy has been the whole area of economics. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines' "Pastoral Exhortation on the Philippine Economy" was drafted in the context of the Church's millennium preparations and the economic crises that beset numerous Asian countries in 1997 and succeeding years. In this statement, the CBCP takes note of how "the current crisis offers an opportunity for rethinking, abandoning our self-assurance, and returning to fundamentals—especially fundamentals of the moral order."\textsuperscript{34}

The statement first of all describes the major characteristics of the economic crisis besetting the nation, and some of the important factors which have led to this problem. Some of these factors include external debt, weak financial growth, liberalization and deregulation, globalization, and the use of inappropriate development models. Secondly, the statement cites pertinent principles in Catholic social teaching which will help in the formulation of a proper response to the crisis. Among these principles are human solidarity, the option
for the poor, the universal destination of goods, and the dignity of work and labor. The concrete implications of these principles in interpreting and addressing the economic crisis are then drawn. The document ends with recommendations for civil leaders and economic planners on how the government can alleviate the crisis based on the moral convictions enunciated.

**Invoking Trinitarian Community**

In what ways can the CBCP statement’s on the economy dovetail with *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*’s focus on the Father in the penultimate year of the Church’s millennium celebrations? The most obvious association would be the fact that working for the betterment of the economy should be done in the spirit of charity. This point itself is not brought up in the CBCP statement, but it bears consideration in the light of our reflections on the Father. Invoking the message of perfect charity inherent in Richard’s system would help us further the message of the CBCP exhortation.

**Acts of Human Love**

One of the strengths of Richard’s system is the way it takes human experience to illumine the divine mystery of trinitarian love. In the same vein, the concrete recommendations of the CBCP exhortation can be taken as initial steps toward the perfection of charity. Just as the Father in Richard’s system sought the perfection of charity in sharing with the other, the concrete recommendations for the alleviation of the nation’s economic woes may be seen as examples of sharing which will lead to the perfection of society according to the example set by the Trinity. As Miroslav Volf has observed, “...the question is not whether the Trinity should serve as a model for human community; the question is rather in which respects and to what extent it should do so.”

On this score, the suggestions of the economic exhortation, for evangelization purposes, may be made more realizable if steps in implementing the recommendations are given to individuals or small communities. These steps can be inspired and modeled after the process from mutuality to transcendence which the trinitarian com-
munity, with the Father “taking the lead,” follows. If acts of alleviating economic hardship are considered acts of human love, then they can be inspired by—and lead to a more perfect emulation of—divine love.

**Exigencies of Sonship**

The attitude above, however, will only be possible if love for the Father is indeed seen not just as a sharing or taking in of that love (i.e., totally gratuitous) but also a moving out from mutuality to transcendence. If reaching out in transcendence is at the heart of the ideal of perfect charity, then there should be much greater clarity in seeing the alleviation of economic and other kinds of suffering as part of our obligation in love.

Seeing how the relationship between Father and Son is characterized by perfect charity can help us live out such charity with a certain sense of urgency. This allows us to see charity not just as a virtue juxtaposed to God’s Fatherhood, but as the very essence of the relationship with the Son. Thus, if we wish to share in this sonship, we should live out this charity by turning to the other, or in a more contemporary sense, by reestablishing the primacy of love in all our actions and intentions. For here, it becomes easier to appreciate the role of the Spirit as well as both the object of the Father and Son’s love and as that very love itself, a love we are called to share in intersubjectivity with the Trinity.

In Richard’s model, the Father is the starting point for the movement toward perfect charity. Reflecting on this aspect of the Father leads us to a fuller understanding of the love which pervades the trinitarian community and inspires our own efforts at establishing economic equality.

**Into the New Millennium**

Looking at the foregoing challenges from Vatican II and PCP II, we can say that the invitation to live out true sonship has always been extended to us as a church and as a nation. It is well worth asking, however, what new facets of the invitation emerge with the pope’s exhortations for the new millennium.
As we cited at the beginning of this study, the Holy Father has expressed the hope that the year of the Father will be a time of renewal marked by charity and conversion, as the church addresses a number of formidable problems, including the menace of secularism. What have our reflections on Richard of St. Victor’s trinitarian theology offered towards the fulfillment of this hope?

The focus on the Father which we have undertaken has allowed us to prioritize the primacy of charity in today’s world. Reestablishing this primacy is particularly urgent given the manifold problems faced by the modern world. It helps us see the urgency and determination with which our Pontiff, John Paul II, has invoked the need to establish a “culture of love” in a world racked by secularism, inequality, and other deep-seated problems.

Finally, while it has not been the focus of Richard’s model, his conception of the Trinity has allowed us to see the role of the Spirit in a better light. We get a clearer idea of how the Trinity is truly rooted in love, the Spirit being both the object of the mutual love of the Father and Son (in Richard’s view) and “The Spirit [which] exists as a common Spirit of the Father and the Son, the Spirit of Love.”

Conclusions

In this brief work we have delved into the Fatherhood of God by looking at the specific contributions of Richard of St. Victor to trinitarian theology. After briefly reviewing the scriptural warrants for divine filiation, we looked closely at the Trinity as a community of infinite love. We cited in particular the perfect charity that is the essence of the relationship between the Father and the Son.

Areas for Future Research

What we have done here is a very cursory survey of Richard’s trinitarian thought, as well as a tentative application to the challenges facing the Philippine church. In terms of future research, a more detailed analysis of De Trinitate could be made, linking it to other
possible areas of Church life and witness. Another possible area of research is to see how Richard’s trinitarian thought influenced later theologizing on the Trinity. The similarities of Richard’s thought to mystics such as Julian of Norwich may also be explored.

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Bringing these reflections to bear on the Philippine church and society’s preparations for the third millennium, we have seen how Richard’s system fills a lacuna, as it were, in the Tertio Millennio Adveniente exhortations. Seeing how the Son relates with perfect charity to the Father, the call to strive for the same charity in relating to the Father—through the Son, and in the Spirit—is made more immediate for us. In this manner, meeting the challenges of secularization, globalization, economic and social ferment, and other contemporary problems through the establishment of a “culture of love” become more real for us. It is now up to us to make these challenges ours.

References


Notes


3All biblical references from the Revised Standard Version.

4Galot, 65.


7Etienne Gilson, Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages (New York: Random House, 1955) 634.


9Hill, 226.


11Ibid., 62.

12Ibid., 64.

13In the context of medieval thought, the metaphysical and epistemological approaches employed here are “Exemplarism” and “Illumination” respectively. Ibid.

14Hill, 226.

15Cousins, 60.

16Galot, 109.

17Cousins, 79.

18“The Father loves the Son in the bond of the Holy Spirit, who is their

19Here we appeal to the positive notion of Christian mystery as the most perfect knowledge, achieved definitively in heaven when we "see" God as mystery. The dogmatic constitution Dei Filius of Vatican I in its chapter on reason and faith clarifies the relationship between the two: "Nevertheless, if reason illumined by faith inquires in an earnest, pious and sober manner, it attains by God's grace a certain understanding of the mysteries, which is most fruitful, both from the analogy with the objects of its natural knowledge and from the connection of these mysteries with one another and with our ultimate end. But it never becomes capable of understanding them in the way it does the truths which constitute its proper object." Josef Neuner, S.J. and Jacques Dupuis, S.J., The Christian Faith, 6th ed. (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1996) no. 132, 48.

20Hill, 230.

21Ibid., 231.


24Ibid.

25Ibid.

26McDonagh, 614.


28Ibid., 8-9.


30Ibid.

31Cousins, 58.


34 Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, “Pastoral Exhortation on the Philippine Economy.” *Unpublished manuscript*.


36 For instance, the recommendation for the encouragement of the informal economy (i.e., small independent producers and sellers) based on the principle of subsidiarity can be further grounded on the community level. As a means of disseminating the economic exhortation, steps on how informal economic activities can be promoted in specific communities should be provided.

37 Theological Historical Commission, 30.