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Critical *Ressourcement* and Evaluative Correction in Trinitarian Theology: A Case Study on Richard of St Victor's *De Trinitate*

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Abstract: I begin this article by suggesting that the current phase of trinitarian theology is characterized by an impetus to evaluate and correct work done in earlier phases. One evaluative-corrective voice is that of Stephen Holmes, who critiques recent trinitarian *ressourcement* and advocates a return to more traditional conceptions. I suggest that Richard of St Victor can serve as an excellent model of traditional trinitarian theologizing. To do so, however, some recent mischaracterizations of Richard must first be corrected. Toward this end, I identify several points of disagreement with Holmes' reading of Richard. I explicate those points of disagreement and argue for what I take to be the correct understanding. I conclude by briefly reflecting on how Richard's project can serve the current phase of trinitarian theology.

Three (or so) phases in contemporary trinitarian theology

In his 2014 report on recent developments in trinitarian theology, Christoph Schwöbel identifies three phases in the contemporary academic scene. The first phase was programmatic in that theologians worked 'to establish trinitarian theology as a field of theological reflection'.[1] The first phase was hugely successful, hence the explosion in twentieth-century trinitarian theology – one so widely recognized that it borders on cliché to even mention. Having

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1 Christoph Schwöbel, 'Where Do We Stand in Trinitarian Theology? Resources, Revisions, and Reappraisals', in Christophe Chalamet and Marc Vial, eds., *Recent Developments in Trinitarian Theology: An International Symposium* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), p. 36.

accomplished the programmatic goal, the second phase was explorative. Here thinkers followed trajectories which engaged the 'new theological possibilities' that were precipitated by the programmatic phase.

The third phase was that of critical *ressourcement*. The phase was critical insofar as 'many of the initial intuitions of the programmatic phase were put to the test of historical scholarship' – one major example is the overturning of de Régnon's dichotomy between so-called Eastern and Western trinitarianisms. The third phase was a *ressourcement* both by retrieving historical sources, and also by 'developing new conceptual resources' for explicating trinitarian doctrine. This latter aspect, the pursuit of new developments, is particularly exemplified by philosophical theologians, many working in the analytic tradition.

Immediately after his brief survey of the three phases, Schwöbel asks 'Where do we stand now?' He observes that current trinitarian theology follows no single trajectory, but rather is highly 'differentiated'. Beyond this brief observation, though, Schwöbel does not answer his question further.[2] His reticence seems prudent, since it may be too early to fully describe the current phase of trinitarian theology. Though we cannot attempt a complete description, we can identify at least one major characteristic. Plausibly, one key characteristic of current trinitarian theology is an impetus toward evaluating and correcting movements from the previous phases: what I call 'evaluative correction'. Such evaluative correction adopts (or simply continues) the critical movement of the third phase, but expands and advances it by assessing both earlier developments (from the first and second phases), and even work from the third phase itself.

One example of evaluative correction is Schwöbel's essay, which deems the differentiation in contemporary trinitarian theology largely worth keeping, though in need of a course-alteration. Stephen Holmes advocates another evaluative-corrective option, namely, the abandonment of many of the trajectories pursued in the third phase's *ressourcement*. Holmes particularly targets developments made by analytic theologians, and even more particularly by social trinitarians (the two frequently overlap).

The aims of this article

My aim in this article is not adjudicate between Schwöbel and Holmes' visions for evaluative correction,[3] but to suggest some corrections of my own. In this

2 Schwöbel, 'Where Do We Stand in Trinitarian Theology?', p. 37. Schwöbel's goal in the essay is not primarily to describe current trends of trinitarian work, but to develop a line of (re)orientation for that work.

3 The two views are not completely exclusive of one another but do offer widely differing stances on the third phase and, critically, on what now is to be done in response.

instance, the correction is of contemporary readings of Richard of St Victor's trinitarian theology. To approach Richard's trinitarian thought, I will take some of Holmes' recent work as my entry point. Happily, Holmes gives Richard some considered attention. In some places, though, this attention follows a wider trend that gives Richard's detailed arguments too simple a reading.[4] Holmes argues that too many twentieth-century trinitarian thinkers moved away from traditional (patristic-medieval) commitments, and that the best move is back toward that tradition.

If Holmes is correct, then a deep understanding of the traditional thinkers can serve us well: by informing how third-phase *ressourcement* went askew and in directing us to where we ought to return. Alternatively, it may be the case that Holmes' rejection of many contemporary trinitarian developments goes too far. If so, it is important that we accurately view the tradition from which we may move away in pursuit of new, differentiated developments. Stated another way, if one is inclined to move away from the tradition, a better grasp of that tradition helps one make the departure. In sum, whether we mostly accept the third phase developments (as do, for example, some analytic theologians and social trinitarians), mostly reject those developments (for example, Holmes), or pursue some middle course (for example, Schwöbel), it is critical that we get the historical sources right. This is the core intuition of evaluative correction and motivates the rest of the current article.

Though Richard's work is not common fare in many current trinitarian discussions, it is well represented among social trinitarians. Using Holmes' analysis as a springboard for further investigation of Richard serves non-traditionalists (such as social trinitarians) by giving them a fuller picture of this nuanced historical thinker. My investigation serves traditionalists (such as Holmes) by identifying some ways that Richard models traditional medieval theology, and is not a social trinitarian. Therefore, Richard serves as a good centrepiece in the current discussion. In short, a greater understanding of Richard will not only serve as a corrective of the third phase, but can also strengthen Holmes' thesis that trinitarian theology is best served by returning to the tradition. To iterate, this article focuses on Holmes' treatment of Richard precisely because he gives Richard such detailed consideration. Holmes, then, affords us solid footing from which to reorient some recent trajectories for understanding Richard, thus strengthening (in some small way) the current phase of trinitarian theology.

4 Even detailed studies of Richard's work can rush past the arguments themselves in the effort to analyse, synthesize and apply the results. One recent example is Nico Den Bok, who examines Richard's notion of personhood in detail. Den Bok judges that *De Trinitate's* argument fails, though his examination of the argument is at times less nuanced than the argument requires. See Nico Den Bok, *Communicating the Most High: A Systematic Study of Person and Trinity in the Theology of Richard of St. Victor* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), pp. 431–76.

In his *The Holy Trinity*, Holmes dedicates a section to Richard of St Victor's trinitarian argument in *De Trinitate*.[5] I advance five points of disagreement with Holmes' reading of Richard. One point is over his characterization of Richard's argument for three divine persons; the remaining disagreements are over his understanding of Richard's argument against four divine persons. In this article I explicate those five points of disagreement and argue for what I take to be the correct understanding. I conclude with some reflections on how I think Richard's argument is best interpreted and how Richard can serve trinitarian theologians going forward. Before any of this, though, it will prove useful to briefly familiarize ourselves with *The Holy Trinity*'s thesis, goals and method.

The Holy Trinity's thesis, goals and method

Holmes' thesis is that twentieth-century trinitarian theology diverges in major respects from the classical tradition (c. AD 400–1800). One goal is to show just how far contemporary (particularly social) trinitarians have strayed from those whose thought they seek to appropriate. Another goal, via his exposition of the major traditional trinitarian thinkers, is to reverse the modern trend of seeing 'the doctrine taught by the Fathers as part of the problem, not a potential solution'.[6] To accomplish these and other goals, Holmes works on a 'big-picture scale', mostly by giving 'impressionistic sketches of complex positions'.[7] This is the only way to accomplish his goals in a single, readable volume, and so Holmes is openly unapologetic about doing 'violence to scholarly ideals'.[8] For the purposes of this article we will grant Holmes' aims and methods while seeking to give a finer-grain analysis of Richard than Holmes was originally able to provide. My project, then, is corrective, but also complementary to Holmes' emphasis of traditional thinkers.

5 Stephen Holmes, *The Holy Trinity: Understanding God's Life* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2012) (published in North America under the title *The Quest for the Trinity*). For Richard's *De Trinitate*, I will use Evans' English translation: Richard of St. Victor, *On The Trinity*, trans. C.P. Evans, in B. Coolman and D. Coulter, eds., *Trinity and Creation: Victorine Texts in Translation* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2011), pp. 195–382. To help the reader locate quoted passages in *De Trinitate* (hereafter *DT*), regardless of which translation is used, I will cite both the book and chapter number(s), followed by the page number(s) from Evans' English translation in parentheses.

6 Holmes, *The Holy Trinity*, p. 199.

7 Holmes, *The Holy Trinity*, p. xv. Though Holmes' discussion is necessarily coarse-grained, he fully intends for it to be a serious evaluation and course correction for trinitarian scholars, demonstrated by a later volume in response to the monograph. See T.A. Noble and J.S. Sexton, eds., *The Holy Trinity Revisited: Essays in Response to Stephen R. Holmes* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2015).

8 Holmes, *The Holy Trinity*, p. xv.

Richard's argument for three divine persons

Holmes begins by assaying some of Richard's theological method. He correctly recognizes that Richard looks to the created order – particularly self-knowledge and common experience – to reach dogmatically tempered conclusions about the divinity. One specific area which can use more detailed investigation is Holmes' reading of Richard's argument in *De Trinitate* book three, which Holmes summarizes this way:

> Love is necessarily directed towards another, which, for Richard, is already proof that God is not a monad (God's love cannot find fulfilment in being directed towards the creation, for that would make God's perfection necessarily dependent on the creation, which is impossible).[9]

I detect two inaccuracies in this summary. First, Richard does not teach that 'love is necessarily directed towards another'.[10] If this were so, then Richard must deny the existence – indeed the very possibility – of self-love.[11] But he affirms the existence of self-love in both human and divine persons;[12] it is an

9 Holmes, *The Holy Trinity*, pp. 132–3.

10 The issue of self-love is not trivial for Richard and his contemporaries, as there had been ongoing debate regarding the issue at least since Augustine's time. Though his analysis has received some much-needed revision, Rousselot is still the best place to start: Pierre Rousselot, *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages*, trans. Alan Vincelette (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001). Osborne provides a helpful overview of self-love in Augustine and its role in eleventh- and twelfth-century theology: Thomas Osborne Jr, *Love of Self and Love of God in Thirteenth-Century Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), ch.1, 'The Augustinian Tradition and the Early Scholastic Background'. For a dedicated study of the question's conception, see Oliver O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006).

11 Guimet argues that 'the exclusion of *amor privatus* in God' is 'the true ontological extinction' of God's charity altogether'. Fernand Guimet, 'Notes en marge d'un texte de Richard de Saint-Victor', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littraire du moyen age* 14 (1945), p. 388.

12 Again, Guimet, 'Notes en marge d'un texte de Richard de Saint-Victor', p. 388:

> > It is extremely clear then that love of others does not exclude self-love, but on the contrary supposes it, since it is self-love which gives other-love its measure, and the supreme degree of charity is attained when it is the same quantity of love that is accorded to others as one accords to oneself.
>
> And shortly after, 'in Richard of St. Victor, even in God it is necessary to say that ordered charity begins with oneself'. Cf. with Rousselot's conclusions regarding Richard's teacher, Hugh: 'The love of self is the necessary condition and as it were the form of the love of another. There is no question then of giving up the first in favor of the second'. Rousselot, *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages*, p. 139.

important part of his biblical hermeneutic and theological system.[13] Richard does not argue that the only form of love is other-love; nor does he does he argue that the only expression of divine love is other-love. Instead, he argues that supreme love (*summa caritas*) necessarily includes other-love (as well as self-love).[14] The upshot is that, contrary to Holmes' summary, Richard does not hold that love is necessarily other-directed. Instead, multiple divine persons necessarily exist because God necessarily has supreme love. This brings us to a second inaccuracy.

Richard denies that a divine person can share supreme love with creation, but not for the reason Holmes suggests. Holmes glosses Richard's position this way: 'God's love cannot find fulfilment in being directed towards creation for that would make God's perfection necessarily dependent on the creation'.[15] While Holmes' sentiment is true in the abstract, and Richard would no doubt endorse it, nowhere does Richard make such a claim. He argues instead that a divine person cannot share supreme love with creation because divine love must be perfectly ordered. The notion of ordered love (*caritas ordinata*) has a long history in the Christian tradition. Stated briefly, the core of the idea is this: each object of divine love is loved perfectly; part of what it means to love perfectly is to love an object according to its worth (*meritum*). To love a thing beyond (or below) its value is to have disordered love.[16] With the notion of ordered charity, Richard argues:

1. Divine persons love perfectly. (Part of the meaning of divine)
2. If a person loves perfectly, then her love is perfectly ordered. (From the definition of perfect love)
3. Therefore, a divine person's love is perfectly ordered.
4. Only a divine person is supremely valuable. (Again, part of the meaning of divine)
5. Only a supremely valuable thing is worthy of supreme love. (From the idea of *meritum*)
6. Therefore, only a divine person is worthy of supreme love.

13 Scripturally: self-love is necessary for making sense of Jesus' love commands. Historically: Richard inherits the notion of self-love from Augustine, and especially St. Gregory. Ethically: self-love is the principle or criterion by which we can judge our love for others. Philosophically: self-love is a starting place for any further thinking about love; for instance, both Plato and Aristotle presuppose the universality of self-love, and argue that we know we are loving others well when our other-love matches the degree of our self-love. See Plato, *Dialogues*, V.4; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1160b.

14 I draw Richard's Latin from Ribaillier's critical text: Jean Ribaillier, *Richard de Saint-Victor: De Trinitate* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1958).

15 Holmes, *The Holy Trinity*, p. 153.

16 See Fernand Guimet, '*Caritas ordinata* et *amor discretus* dans la théologie trinitaire de Richard de Saint-Victor', *Revue du Moyen Age Latin* 4 (1948), pp. 225–36.

7. Therefore, a divine person will love divine persons, and only divine persons, with supreme love.[17]

However cogent one finds this argument, the important point for the present discussion is this: Richard nowhere avers that God's perfection would be dependent upon creation if God loved it with supreme love. Casting Richard's argument this way imports an outside argument and calls it Richard's own. Besides an historical error, this importation misses the real force of Richard's case, namely, the centrality of other-love and the notion of *caritas ordinata*.

Above I registered two disagreements with Holmes' summary of Richard's positive argument for multiple divine persons. The bulk of Holmes' attention, though, is directed at Richard's reasoning for the impossibility of more than three persons. Holmes argues thus: Richard's reasoning against four or more divine persons is made of three (or four) strands, and each strand fails. Let us now consider Holmes' examination and critique of these strands.

Richard's argument against four divine persons – the three (or four) strands

In *De Trinitate* book three, Richard argues that there must be at least three divine persons, but gives no reason to stop at three. Holmes asks: 'Why, then, a Trinity' and not 'an infinite series?' He continues:

> Richard's argument seems to have three strands. The first, unstated but decisive, is the fact of revelation: the church believes in a divine Trinity, and so the series must reach three and then stop. The second strand concerns a sense of completeness: with three persons, each one may love the beloved and rejoice in the love of a third for the beloved; there is thus no need to extend the series further. The third strand is a return to an Anselmian argument concerning divine relations of origin: in the Trinity, there is one who only gives existence, one who both gives and receives, and one who only receives. The simplicity axiom demands that there can be no more, because there is no other relationship of origin logically possible.[18]

In a parenthetical statement immediately following this passage, Holmes quietly adds a fourth strand to the three just listed:

> (Richard later makes a similar argument that the Father exists from himself, the Son immediately from the Father, and the Spirit mediately from the

17 *DT* 3.2 (248).
18 Holmes, *The Holy Trinity*, p. 153.

> Father; again, no other mode of existence is possible, and so the fullness of deity must be three persons and three only.)[19]

On Holmes' analysis, Richard offers four reasons for believing that there are three, and only three, divine persons: (1) authoritative church teaching; (2) the satisfaction of the conceptual or metaphysical requirements of love by three persons; (3) the exhaustion of logical space concerning relationships of origin; and (4) a similar argument from the relations of (im)mediacy. Holmes believes that each strand fails and, thus, so does Richard's project as a whole. I find each of these strands problematic and will address each (though in slightly different order).

Strand 1 – authoritative church teaching

Holmes identifies revelation and church authority as Richard's primary reason – 'decisive', in Holmes' words – for denying the possibility of a fourth divine person. This strand is problematic because Richard never presents scriptural or dogmatic data as reasons to reject the possibility of a fourth divine person. If we look back to Holmes' statement of Strand 1, we see a tension. He claims that revelation is both an 'unstated' piece of evidence, and yet it is also 'decisive' in Richard's argument. Richard is nothing if not methodical, which gives me reason to pause before assenting to the idea that his main line of reasoning is both decisive and unstated.

I think Holmes' analysis goes askew in misidentifying the place of revelation in Richard's project. Richard does believe in the veracity of conciliar, Catholic trinitarianism; it is this very brand of trinitarian theology for which he argues. But Richard clearly states his goals and method at the outset: 'in this work we intend to discuss not just any kind of truth but those eternal truths that we are ordered to believe by the rule of the Catholic faith'.[20] That set of eternal truths includes many propositions for which Richard argues in *De Trinitate*. Most relevant for us is the proposition that God is 'one in substance but three in person', and

> that in the unity of substance there is a plurality of persons, each of whom is distinguished from each of the others by a distinct property; that in the unity of substance there is a person who is from himself but not from any other . . . a person who is from only one person but not from himself, and . . . a person who is from two persons but not from one person alone.[21]

19 Holmes, *The Holy Trinity*, p. 153.
20 *DT* 1.3 (214).
21 *DT* 3.5 (251).

Regarding these requirements of faith, Richard tells us: 'I frequently hear or read all these assertions, but I do not recall having read how all these assertions are proven. Authorities abound in all these issues, but argumentations are not equally abundant; proofs (*experimenta*) are lacking in all these assertions and argumentations are rare'.[22] Richard's goal, the driving method and motivation of *De Trinitate*, then, is 'to introduce, insofar as the Lord allows, not only probable but also necessary reasons (*necessarias rationes*) for what we believe and to season the teaching of our faith with an exposition and explanation of truth'.[23] Richard's explicit statements reveal a lack of correspondence to Holmes' analysis on which revelation is decisive to Richard's argument.

Catholic doctrine is central for Richard, but not in the way Holmes claims. For Richard, dogmatic theses about revelation are the ends of his speculation, but never the means. Put another way, Richard has a set of conclusions he believes are true. Some of these conclusions – for example, the unity of the divine substance; the triad of divine persons; their causal relations – are necessary truths. But necessary truths have necessary explanations, and sometimes, in faith and through God's grace, these explanations are accessible to humans through philosophical reasoning. Richard believes that he has found some of those reasons regarding God's triunity. However, Richard does not locate these reasons in Scripture, the church hierarchy, councils, the Fathers or any other authority. Instead, Richard looks for these reasons only in common, publicly accessible, human experiences of phenomena such as goodness and love,[24] joy[25] and honour.[26]

Holmes paints a different picture than the one I just sketched. On Holmes' analysis, Richard uses the truth of the *filioque* to argue for the truth of the *filioque*. In Holmes' words:

> It is already obvious that Richard more nearly assumes the *filioque* as argues for it. That said, his logical constructions of Trinity do assume it, and would not work without it. To this extent, then, they propose an argument for the *filioque* of the form 'it is not possible to understand the divine Trinity unless we confess the *filioque*; but revelation demands that it is possible to understand the divine Trinity; therefore we must confess the *filioque*'.[27]

If Holmes is correct, then Richard's argument has the general form:

8. If the *filioque* is true, then there are exactly three divine persons.

22 *DT* 3.5 (251).
23 *DT* 1.4 (215).
24 *DT* 3.2 (248–9), 3.11 (256–7).
25 *DT* 3.3 (249–50), 3.12 (257–8).
26 *DT* 3.4 (250–1), 3.13 (258–9).
27 Holmes, *The Holy Trinity*, p. 153.

9. The *filioque* is true.
10. Therefore, there are exactly three divine persons.

Since the existence of three divine persons is included in the *filioque*, this argument can be restate:

11. There are three divine persons.
12. Therefore, there are three divine persons.

This sort of argument, in which the conclusion includes one of its premises, is a clear a case of question begging and would render Richard's argument unsound. Richard is aware of the *petitio principii*, and would have avoided the fallacy.[28] Even so, according to Holmes, it is 'obvious' that Richard assumes the *filioque*. In other words, Richard blatantly incorporates the truth of *filioque* into his argument for *filioque*. One wonders why Aquinas and Scotus – among other critics of Richard's project – never noticed or cared to comment on this elementary, and most destructive, logical blunder? The reason, of course, is because Richard commits no such blunder. At no point does Richard appeal to authority in arguing against a fourth divine person. Instead, as I have argued, he only appeals to human experience in support of trinitarian conclusions.

In the second half of Holmes' critique which I quoted above, he states that Richard gives an argument in the following form, 'it is not possible to understand the divine Trinity unless we confess the *filioque*; but revelation demands that it is possible to understand the divine Trinity; therefore we must confess the *filioque*'. This formulation of Richard's project is incongruous with Richard's understanding of his project. True, Richard does affirm that belief in the *filioque* is necessary for a proper understanding of Catholic doctrine (and of God himself). And true, this affirmation drives Richard to look for philosophical (that is, non-authoritative) reasons to believe these claims.[29] But crucial here is the fact that these affirmations and motivations are not part of Richard's argument. The point cannot be stressed enough: Richard develops arguments from experience and reason for the conclusion that there are exactly three divine persons, arguments that do not make scriptural or ecclesial appeals for support. In sum, Richard does not assume the truth of the *filioque*, the Trinity or

28 *De Trinitate* is probably a revised formulation of class lecture notes. Richard's students would be well versed in formal and informal logic, and any obvious fallacies would have been easily spotted, smugly pointed out to Richard (as grad students are wont), and corrected. See Todd D. Vasquez, 'The Art of Trinitarian Articulation: A Case Study on Richard of St. Victor's *de Trinitate*', PhD dissertation (Chicago: Loyola University, 2009), pp. 58–9.

29 See *DT* Prologue (209–12), 1.5 (215–16).

Scripture, and so Strand 1 is a mischaracterization of Richard's method and argument.

Strand 2 – conceptual requirements of love satisfied by three divine persons

Holmes' claim in Strand 2 is that Richard argues this way: there are not four divine persons because three persons satisfy all requirements of love such that there is 'no need to extend the series further'.[30] This analysis, part of the wider trend of misreading I mentioned at the beginning of this article, echoes a move similar to that made by Richard Swinburne in his own trinitarian argumentation: 'I believe that there is overriding reason for a first divine individual to bring about a second divine individual and with him to bring about a third divine individual, *but no reason to go further*'.[31] Swinburne's statement highlights what is implicit in Holmes': the notion of divine (or perfect) love does not require us to posit a fourth divine person; but neither does it prohibit such a possibility. If Holmes' analysis is correct, then we could give Richard's argument something like the following general description:

A probable argument for three divine persons

1. Probably, if divine love exists, then there are only three divine persons.
2. Divine love exists.
3. Therefore, probably, there are only three divine persons.

On this description, the conceptual-moral demands of love – as far as we are aware (hence the 'probably') – are exhausted by three divine persons, and so there is no further reason to speculate. However, it may be the case that love actually does require a fourth person, we just do not realize it yet. A psychologist, for instance, could one day discover some heretofore unrecognized aspect of love which demands four persons for perfect charity. The problem with Holmes' analysis is that it describes a probable reason (*ratione probalis*) for exactly three persons. This sort of argument is occasionally attributed to Richard,[32] but it is not one he actually gives. Richard is explicit in his effort to give necessary arguments.[33] A necessary argument concludes that there must be only three persons and, as a logical

30 Holmes, *The Holy Trinity*, p. 153.
31 Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 177 (emphasis mine).
32 For example Jin Hyok Kim, 'A Trinitarian Logic of Divine Love: Richard of St. Victor's Rational Argument for the Trinity and Modern Appropriations of His Trinitarianism', 신학논단 제 [*Theological Forum*] 82 (2015), pp. 7–37.
33 Cf. *DT* 1.4 (250–1).

corollary, there cannot be four. A careful reading shows that his trinitarian argumentation takes the following general form:

A necessary argument for three divine persons

4. Supreme love requires at least three divine persons.
5. God has supreme love.
6. Therefore, God is / has at least three divine persons.
7. It is impossible for three divine persons to love a fourth divine person.
8. Therefore, there are exactly three divine persons.

A key difference between the probable and necessary arguments is the difference between premises 1 and 4. Premise 1 captures an approach like the one Swinburne takes, namely, arguing that the idea of love pushes us to posit three divine persons, but not four. Alternatively, premise 4 merely states that perfect love requires at least three, leaving open the possibility of more. In other words, Richard correctly perceives that the principles he introduces regarding perfection and love do seem to require more than three divine persons. For instance, if the desire for a co-beloved (*condilectum*) is a perfection (*perfectione*) of true charity, then the obvious and pressing question is 'Why is the desire for co-co-beloved not also a perfection?' Stated baldly: If love among three is so good, why is love among four not even better? Richard realizes that the logic of love which he develops pushes us to posit a fourth divine person.[34] And if a fourth, then a fifth, sixth and onward *ad infinitum*. For this reason, Richard devotes the *entirety* of *De Trinitate* book five to arguing against such implications.

In sum, Holmes' Strand 2 incorrectly claims that Richard gives a probable argument for three divine persons. This misclassification is so important because it ignores the strength of Richard's case. On Strand 2's portrayal of Richard, the notion of love motivates speculation until we reach three divine persons, but then runs out of steam. This portrayal neuters Richard's argument of its real force. On Richard's view, our experience of love gives powerful warrant for positing three divine persons. So powerful, in fact, that it exhorts us to consider the necessity of even more persons in the divinity. To show why the fecundity of love must stop at just three divine persons, Richard develops two necessary arguments against the possibility of a fourth, which I will examine below.

34 Despite categorizing Richard's argument as exhausting itself at three persons, Holmes, *The Holy Trinity*, p. 153, later recognizes that Richard's logic does seem to demand further speculation: 'This might suggest an infinite series, with love endlessly increased the more who are involved'.

Strand 4 – failure of the (im)mediacy argument

The next strand we must investigate is Strand 4 (Strand 3 is the longest and most complex, so I will leave it for last). According to Holmes, in Strand 4 Richard argues 'that the Father exists from himself, the Son immediately from the Father, and the Spirit mediately from the Father; again, no other mode of existence is possible, and so the fullness of deity must be three persons and three only'.[35] We can outline the putative argument as follows:

1. Person 1 exists from himself, Person 2 exists immediately from Person 1, Person 3 exists mediately from Person 1.[36]
2. No other mode of existence is possible.
3. Therefore, Person 4 is impossible.

In point of fact, Richard makes no such argument. Holmes mistakes Richard's discussion of the (im)mediacy relation for a separate argument against four persons. Let us look at Richard's discussion in greater detail to capture his argument more thoroughly.

Amid his procession argument in *De Trinitate* book five, Richard spends several chapters exploring aspects of the procession relation.[37] A person proceeds when she receives her being from another person. (At this point we are talking about persons generally, both human and divine.) There are two ways that procession occurs. Person 2 proceeds immediately when she receives existence directly from Person 1. As an example of immediate procession we may take Eve, who receives being from Adam (via his rib); Seth receives being from 'the loins' of Eve so he, too, proceeds immediately.[38] Person 2 proceeds mediately when his existence comes from Person 1 through a third party, Person 3. For instance, Seth proceeds mediately from Adam because he comes immediately from Eve, and Eve came immediately from Adam; Seth also proceeds immediately from Adam (via Adam's loins). In sum, there are three logically possible modes of procession regarding (im)mediacy: (i) immediately alone, (ii) immediately and mediately, (iii) mediately alone.

Richard argues that (iii), mediate procession alone, is possible for humans but not for divine persons: necessarily, divine persons are both willing and able to be united as closely as possible, and so are always at least related immediately.[39]

35 Holmes, *The Holy Trinity*, p. 153.
36 I use the more generic 'Person' (for 'divine person') because at this point in the argument, Richard has not yet given reasons for believing that Person 1 is Father, and so on. Until he does this in book six, Richard only refers to the divine persons numerically. Prematurely filling in Richard's numerical terminology with the biblical terms does away with some of the epistemological and logical rigour of *De Trinitate*.
37 *DT* 5.6–9 (297–303).
38 *DT* 5.6 (298).
39 *DT* 5.9 (302–3).

Richard uses these distinctions in his argument for the existence of at least one divine person who only receives being from other divine persons (but who does not give being to any other divine persons).[40] Richard does not, however, employ these distinctions as an independent argument against four divine persons. He does not use (im)mediacy as the basis for such an argument because he correctly perceives that the relation is not incommunicable, that is, it is not a personal property or a property that can distinguish divine persons.[41] The upshot is that Strand 4 is inaccurate. To assess Richard on the strength of such a weak argument, and one that Richard does not in fact give, is to do Richard a disservice. In such a case we would attack a straw-man, all the while ignoring the real arguments.

In conclusion: the notion of (im)mediacy cannot provide reasons to deny a fourth person. For this reason, Richard gives no such argument, but instead develops two other arguments. The first is a procession argument, which Holmes outlines in Strand 3. The second is an argument grounded in the nature of love, which Holmes ignores altogether (I will have more to say on this in my last section). Let us now examine Holmes' description and analysis of Richard's procession argument.

Strand 3 – failure of relations of origin argument

Holmes views the third strand of Richard's argument to be a return the 'Anselmian argument concerning divine relations of origin'. Holmes summarizes Richard this way: 'in the Trinity, there is one who only gives existence, one who both gives and receives, and one who only receives. The simplicity axiom demands that there can be no more, because there is no other relationship of origin logically possible'.[42] This is an argument against four divine persons from the notion of processions. Though it captures only the most general moves, I largely agree with Holmes' summary.[43] Further, he accurately identifies it as inspired by Anselm. Strand 3's big claim is this:

40 *DT* 5.8 (300–301).

41 Unlike the procession relations, the (im)mediacy relation is symmetric. If Person 1 gives being to Person 2 immediately, then Person 1 is related immediately to Person 2 (via the 'giving being' or 'generates' relation), and Person 2 is related immediately to Person 1 (via the 'receiving being' or 'generated' relation). Viewed from this angle, we see that (im)mediacy is a secondary relation, an attribute of certain divine attributes. In short, (im)mediacy does not distinguish divine persons from one another because it is not the sort of relation that can do such metaphysical work.

42 Holmes, *The Holy Trinity*, p. 153.

43 Correct in all places save the clause, 'in the Trinity'. Richard does not begin his argument saying, 'In the trinity, such and such relations of origin obtain'. Doing so assumes that there is a Trinity, which is the very claim at issue. Instead, he supposes the existence of at least three divine persons; a supposition for which he earlier argued in *De Trinitate* book three.

since Richard's argument corresponds so closely to Anselm's, it suffers from the same defects as Anselm's. In this section I will briefly detail Strand 3's objections to Anselm's procession argument and explain why Richard's version does not suffer from them.[44]

Anselm's argument and Holmes' objections

To grasp Strand 3's objections to Anselm (and hence Richard), we must first glance at Holmes' understanding of Anselm's argument. He describes it this way:

> [Anselm's] argument . . . operates at a fairly high level of abstraction working with the concept of 'existing from', which is a generic term to describe the relationships of origin. The Father does not exist from any other, but is himself the monarchy; the Son exists from the Father; the Spirit exists from the Father. This what is confessed in the [Niceno-Constantinopolitan] Creed. Having stated these points, however, Anselm makes a surprising claim: either the Son exists from the Holy Spirit or the Holy Spirit exists from the Son. Why so? Anselm's argument is complex, the core of it would seem to be something like this: the divine *hypostases* are identical in every way save only their relations of origin. Therefore, it is necessary that the relations of origin be different. But, at the level of abstraction Anselm is working at, the creed appears to say that the Son and the Sprit have the same relation of origin – viz. existing from the Father. If there is genuinely no other differentiation, the Son and the Spirit must be identical, and so the same *hypostasis* (on the basis of divine simplicity, and hypostatic distinction being maintained only by the relations of origin). Of course, the Son and the Spirit are not identical; God is triune; and so there must, necessarily, be a distinction in relations of origin between them. The only possible contenders are that the Son exists from the Spirit or that the Spirit exists from the Son.[45]

We may outline Holmes' description of Anselm's argument:

1. The Father, Son, and Spirit are numerically distinct – there are three divine hypostases. (From the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed)
2. The Father does not exist from any other. (Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed)
3. The Son exists from the Father. (Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed)
4. The Spirit exists from the Father. (Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed)

44 Note that I do not argue that Richard's case is successful. I only make the more modest claim that it does not suffer from Holmes' objections. Further, I make no attempt to defend Anselm's argument (though I believe the Anselmian could make a similar defense as the one I give for Richard).

45 Holmes, *The Holy Trinity*, p. 150.

5. The Father, Son, and Spirit are identical in every way save only their relations of origin. (From divine simplicity)
6. Therefore, the Son's relation of origin to the Father is different than the Spirit's relation of origin to the Father.
7. If a person is related by origin to another person, then she 'exists from' the other person. (Anselm's interpretation of 'relations of origin')
8. Therefore, either the Son exists from the Spirit, or the Spirit exists from the Son.

After describing Anselm's procession argument, Holmes provides the following analysis:

> The problem with this argument is the level of confidence assumed in reasoning about divine reality. Anselm has reduced the biblical / creedal language of 'begotten' and 'proceeding' to the abstract concept 'existing from', and asserted their logical identity. If the Spirit exists from the Father in a different way from the way in which the Son exists from the Father, the logic fails, and it seems impossible for us to know whether this is the case. The simple answer to Anselm's construction here is Gregory of Nazianzus' famous dismissal of those who ask what 'procession' means, and how it differs from 'generation'.[46]

In this passage we can tease out three elements of Holmes' critique of Anselm's procession argument (and by extension, Richard's). (1) Anselm's over-confidence in his speculation; (2) the reduction/identification of biblico-credal language to abstract causal language; (3) our inability to make a determination on the causal nature of the intra-trinitarian relations. Let us examine each in turn.

Objection 1 – level of confidence

Holmes begins with the observation that Anselm's argument is problematic because he is overly optimistic about his ability to reason about the divinity.[47] Confidence is a mental state, a feature of persons, not of arguments. Anselm, and Richard's, mental states are irrelevant to the veracity of their respective arguments. To fault an argument for its proponent's shortcomings is to commit the genetic fallacy. A charitable reading of Holmes' statement yields something like this: 'Anselm's overconfidence in his ability to reason about the divine reality leads him to make a faulty argument, or at least an argument that cannot be

46 Holmes, *The Holy Trinity*, p. 150.

47 Karen Kilby details a very similar concern about social trinitarians (many of whom draw from Richard for inspiration and source material). See Karen Kilby, 'Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity', *New Blackfriars* 81 (2000), pp. 432–45.

verified as either true or false'. If this reading is close to what Holmes has in mind, then we must examine Anselm's argument itself, leaving questions about level of confidence wholly to the side.

Objection 2 – reduction of terms

Holmes' second objection to the processions argument is that it 'reduce[s] the Biblical/creedal language of "begotten" and "procession" to the abstract concept of "existing from"', and 'assert[s] their logical identity'. As far as I can tell, Holmes' critique here is not that Anselm substitutes one set of terms for another, merely using 'existing from' in lieu of 'begotten'. Instead, Anselm makes an ontological reduction by asserting their 'logical identity'. In other words, 'begotten' and 'proceeds' are strictly equated with 'caused to exist'. To say that a divine person is begotten means nothing more than the divine person is caused, or given existence.

According to Holmes, such a reduction is theologically problematic because 'begotten' and 'procession' are not merely causal notions. Claiming so dismisses much that Scripture and creeds seek to express. Philosophically, the reduction is problematic because divine persons may be related to each other beyond their causal relationships (this is the grounds of Holmes' Objection 3, see below). We must now ask: does Richard make such a reduction? And if so, does his argument depend on it? The answer to both questions is straightforwardly 'no'.

Richard accurately perceives that the semantic range of 'generation' and 'procession' goes far beyond that of 'receives being'. He devotes much of *De Trinitate* book six to investigating the special relationships between Father, Son and Spirit, all of which involves more than mere causal interaction.[48] Richard makes no naïve reductions. Equally important, Richard also accurately perceives that 'generation' and 'procession' do denote causal relationships (among other things), so he is fully justified in focusing on their causal aspects. In sum: Richard does not make a conceptual or ontological reduction; he does not identify one set of terms with a more abstract set; he does believe that 'begotten' (and 'proceed') have much more meaning than 'existing from'. Richard focuses on the causal (that is, 'giving existence' and 'causing to be') aspects of the biblical and creedal language. The question now is whether Richard is warranted in attributing such causal content to the traditional terms. Our having knowledge of the meaning of 'begotten' and 'procession' (as including causal content) is the third objection of Strand 3.

48 *DT* 6.6–7 (323–5). On Richard's view the divine persons are identical to their interpersonal relations. The Father's love for the Son is identical to the Father's causing the Son, for example. However, this in no way reduces, or requires us to reduce, the full conceptual content of the relations to the merely causal aspect.

Objection 3 – no knowledge about begotteness and procession

The last element of Strand 3 an epistemic one. I will quote the relevant passage again to refresh our memory:

> If the Spirit exists from the Father in a different way from the way in which the Son exists from the Father, the logic fails, and it seems impossible for us to know whether this is the case. The simple answer to Anselm's construction here is Gregory of Nazianzus' famous dismissal of those who ask what 'procession' means, and how it differs from 'generation'.[49]

According to Holmes, the nature of the Son's generation and the Spirit's procession are not aspects of reality to which we have epistemic access. To see why this is so problematic for Richard, we may glance at a brief outline of his argument against the possibility of four divine persons:

1. Necessarily, there is one, and only one, divine person (Person 1) who only causes the being of (an)other divine person(s).
2. Necessarily, there is one, and only one, divine person (Person 3) whose being is only caused by (an)other divine person(s).
3. Necessarily, there is one, and only one, divine person (Person 2) who both causes the being of (an)other divine person(s), and whose being is only caused by (an)other divine person(s).
4. There are only three possible sets of causal relations among divine persons: (i) causing being, (ii) being caused, (iii) both causing and being caused.
5. Divine persons are identical to their causal relations with other divine persons.
6. Therefore, it is impossible for there to be a fourth divine person.

This is a terse summary, but it serves to show that, crucially, Richard's argument depends on our ability to know at least one thing about the inter-personal divine relations, namely, their causal nature. According to Holmes, however, 'it seems impossible for us to know' what 'generation' and 'procession' mean in the Godhead. If so, we have no good reason to believe that one divine person causes another, and therefore it is unreasonable to believe premises 1 to 3 (and possibly 4). What to say about this critique? Does Richard avoid the perils upon which, allegedly, Anselm falls?

I believe he does. If Holmes accepts that the relations of origin are at least causal relations, then Richard's argument goes through. However, Holmes may deny that we have any knowledge about the relations, and so deny knowledge about their causal nature. That Holmes holds such a strong view of trinitarian

49 Holmes, *The Holy Trinity*, p. 150.

mystery is suggested by his appeal to Gregory of Nazianzus. Holmes mentions Gregory's 'famous dismissal', no doubt a reference to the Nazianzen's 31st Oration, in which he asks: 'What, then, is "proceeding"? You explain the ingeneracy of the Father, and I will give you a biological account of the Son's begetting and the Spirit's proceeding – and let us go mad the pair of us for prying into God's secrets'.[50]

Others have interpreted these statements as representing a strong apophatic stance on the intra-trinitarian relations.[51] But interpreting Gregory this way is incorrect.[52] Speaking about the passage just quoted – and its apophatic interpretations – Oliver Langworthy clarifies Gregory's position on the issue of apophaticism: 'the end of *Or*. 31.9 engaged in cataphasis and openly confirmed that causal distinction establishes identity in the Trinity. While the mode of generation may be inexpressible, for Gregory the diversity within the Trinity certainly was not'.[53] If Langworthy is correct, then, Gregory's apophaticism is more restrained than Holmes indicates. True, Nazianzus argues that the deep nature of 'begetting' and 'proceeding' are far beyond their physical-biological analogues, and thus are beyond our ken. Even so, there is at least one thing we know about them, namely, that they are causal relations. A cursory reading of Oration 31.9 or 29.2 confirms the point, and Langworthy stresses it further: 'Simply put, for Gregory, there existed three distinct identities in the Trinity, distinguished in number and by causal relation but equal in essence and glory'.[54]

This discussion is important not just because Gregory is a poor bannerman for very strong apophaticism, but also because Gregory sets an epistemic trajectory about the divine personal relations which Richard largely follows. Correctly interpreted, Nazianzus reveals that, whatever else 'generation' and 'procession' mean, and whatever of that meaning we may grasp, these relations are at least causal in some way. True, we do not know all of what that 'some way' involves, but we do not need to: the causal, 'existence-giving' aspect of the relations is all Richard needs for his argument to work.

Even if my interpretation of Gregory is incorrect, a strong apophaticism is untenable. If Holmes' claim is that we have no knowledge about the

50 Gregory of Nazianzus, 'Oration 31.8', in *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, trans. Lionel Wickham, Popular Patristic Series 23 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), p. 122.

51 So Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminar Press, 1974); see esp. ch. 4, 'The Procession of the Holy Spirit in Orthodox Trinitarian Doctrine'.

52 The rest of the passage reveals that Gregory's statement is specifically a rejection of the heterousian claims about the nature of generation and procession – claims which deny that the Son is fully divine, or that the Spirit is divine at all.

53 Oliver Langworthy, *Gregory of Nazianzus' Soteriological Pneumatology* (Tübingham: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), p. 18.

54 Langworthy, *Gregory of Nazianzus' Soteriological Pneumatology*, pp. 18–19.

intra-trinitarian relations whatsoever, and if he is right about this, then Anselm's argument (and Richard's) fails. But surely Holmes does not want to say that we have *no knowledge whatsoever* about the Father's begetting the Son, or of the Spirit's procession.[55] As I mentioned above, Anselm's argument draws from Scripture and creed, which do teach us something about those relations (however little). Further, if we truly know nothing about the nature of 'begetting' and 'proceeding', then these terms are literally meaningless to us.[56] But in fact they are not meaningless. They have some conceptual content and, therefore, theological value. Certainly Holmes thinks we can know something about the Father's begetting the Son, and the Spirit's procession from Father (and Son). Stated as a dilemma: Holmes must either accept no knowledge of the relations whatsoever (certainly not what he wants), or he must accept a minimal knowledge of those relations. Such minimal knowledge, though, has traditionally been described as causal, which is the very grounds of Richard's argument.

Conclusion

In this section I have teased out three elements of Strand 3's critique of Anselm's procession argument for the impossibility of four divine persons. Rather than attempt to defend Anselm against those critiques, I have sought only to show how they fail to undermine Richard's own procession argument. To recap: Strand 3 mentions Anselm's confidence in (his ability to) reason; but confidence is irrelevant to the argument. Next, Strand 3 argues that a reduction of terms (or more accurately, concepts) takes place, a reduction on which the procession argument depends; but Richard only focuses on the causal aspects of divine personal relations, making no reductions. Finally, Strand 3 argues that, for Anselm's procession argument to work, the 'existing from' relation must be identical for the Son and the Spirt; but, this objection adds, the 'existing from' relation may be different for the Son and Spirit, and further, we cannot even know if it is. If Strand 3 is right about this, then Anselm's argument may be in trouble (I leave it to Anselm scholars to determine whether Holmes is correct on this score). The important point is that Richard avoids these concerns: Richard argues only that divine Person 2 and 3 are caused by Person 1; Richard makes no further relevant claims

55 Not even Lossky goes this far. He maintains a strong mysterianism about the relations, and considers our language to be very distantly analogous, but he still repeatedly stresses that the relations are causal. Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, pp. 80–83.

56 In fact, if we know nothing about the relations, then we do not even know that they are relations, since 'being a relation' is something we know about 'begotten' and 'proceed'.

about the nature of those relations. Holmes must either hold an overly strong apophaticism, or concede that the divine persons have causal relations – which is all Richard's argument needs to get off the ground.

Beyond the four strands: Richard's argument against four divine persons

Viewed broadly, Holmes judges that Richard's trinitarian argument fails in its final step. That is, Richard does not provide a good reason to reject the possibility of four or more divine persons. Failing to prevent a vicious infinite series, Richard's project falters and falls. So far I have exposited Holmes' critique and have offered a few replies. As a general assessment, I believe Holmes' analysis suffers from too cursory a reading. *De Trinitate's* arguments are nuanced, and to receive a proper evaluation they require an equally nuanced reading. As a step towards that direction, and to advance the discussion beyond evaluative-correction, in this section I will sketch my own stance on one of Richard's arguments.

As the final step in his case for the necessary existence of three, and only three, divine persons, Richard develops two arguments against the possibility of a fourth person. In the previous section I touched briefly on the argument from processions, where I outlined it and argued that it does not suffer from the difficulties which Holmes identifies in Anselm's arguments. Here I want to attend to Richard's other argument, the argument from love, which he considers to be the 'clearer' (*evidentiori*) and 'more thorough' (*altiori*) reason.

Richard begins this way: 'If we bring into consideration the fullness of true love, and if we pay careful attention to the distinction of properties pertaining to the same consideration, then perhaps we will sooner discover what we are seeking'.[57] What he seeks, of course, is a reason for believing that the existence of four divine persons is impossible. Over the course of ten chapters Richard develops an argument for this conclusion from the nature of love. Space permits only a sketch of its essential steps. Even so, to foster a more accurate reading of *De Trinitate*, it will be useful to describe Richard's project at the point where Holmes believes it fails, namely, in giving a good argument against four divine persons. We may summarize Richard's argument this way:

The argument for the impossibility of four divine persons from love

1. There are only three modes of other-love: (i) gratuitous, (ii) owed, (iii) both gratuitous and owed.
2. Person 1 alone has only gratuitous love.
3. Person 3 alone has only owed love.

57 *DT* 5.16 (302–10).

4. Person 2 alone has both gratuitous and owed love.
5. A divine person is identical with his mode of love.
6. Therefore, there are only three possible divine persons.
7. Therefore, it is impossible for there to be a fourth divine person.

We must bear in mind that this is not a free-standing proof, but *De Trinitate's* culminating argument, resting on a host of previously established suppositions. Most pertinent to the present discussion are three suppositions which Richard has already developed, namely, (i) the necessary existence of one (and only one) supremely good divine substance; (ii) the divine substance's supreme charity; and (iii) the existence of at least three persons in the divine substance. Supreme charity is a complex notion,[58] but for the moment we will direct our attention to its central condition, namely, other-love. In premise 4, Richard identifies the two ways that a person may love another: with 'gratuitous' or with 'owed' love. He describes both:

> Love is gratuitous when someone gladly bestows love to a person from whom he did not receive any favours. Love is owed when someone requites nothing but love to the person from who he freely received it. And love is a combination of both when by loving in both ways a person freely receives love and freely bestows it.[59]

Through an acute phenomenology of love, Richard has identified that in every instance of other-love, there is one who introduces love, and one who receives and (if all goes well) returns that love. Gratuitous love (*amor gratuitus*) is given to the beloved not in response to anything the beloved had previously given. Owed (*debitus*) love is the love requited in response to gratuitous love. Human lovers give and return their love in time, so that gratuitous love is always temporally prior to owed love. The love between divine persons is not limited by time, and so gratuitous love is 'before' owed love only logically, not temporally.[60]

58 The classic study is Gervais Dumeige, *Richard De Saint-Victor et l'Idée Chrétienne de l'Amour* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952). For a more rigorous semantic analysis, see the recent Pierluigi Cacciapuoti, *Deus Existentia Amoris: Teologia della Carità e Teologia dell Trinità negli Scritti di Riccardo di San Vittore* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998); see esp. ch. 3.

59 *DT* 5.16 (310).

60 That is, the Father loves the Son and Spirit first – that is, with gratuitous love – because the Father does not receive his being from the Son or Spirit. It is worth noting that, later in his career, Aquinas thought carefully about this claim and explicitly agreed with Richard's analysis. Cf. Aquinas, *De Potentia* q. 10, a. 1, resp. 8.

In *De Trinitate* book three Richard argues for a minimum of three divine persons. Now, in *De Trinitate* book five, he examines the love relations that must obtain between them: 'the fullness of a gratuitous love belongs to one person alone (Person 1), the fullness of an owed love belongs to a second person alone (Person 3), and the fullness of both an owed and gratuitous love belongs to a third person alone (Person 2)'.[61] Each of the three persons has one of the logically possible modes of love: gratuitous alone, owed alone, or both gratuitous and owed. If there were a fourth divine person, then he would have to love with one of three modes. However, Richard shows this to be impossible by identifying the divine persons with their mode of loving: 'Surely each of the three divine persons and their love are not distinct things? Surely, for each of these persons, being is not distinct from loving, nor is loving distinct from being? . . . Therefore, for any of the three, their person will be identical to their love . . .'.[62]

Employing the notion of divine simplicity, Richard argues that each person is his mode of loving and a fourth divine person would be identical to one of the first three. In other words, there cannot be a fourth divine person.

Notice that the argument from love avoids all the criticisms Holmes levelled against Richard's procession argument. It avoids Holmes' Strand 1 because in no way does it assume the truth of the *filioque*; nor does it employ any data dictated by scriptural or ecclesial authority. It avoids Strand 2 because it gives a positive reason for denying the possibility of an infinite regress. It avoids Strand 4 because it does not argue from the notion of (im) mediacy. It avoids Strand 3 because it does not depend on the causal relations between the persons.

As a general principle, when we seek to evaluate an argument, we ought to consider its strongest line(s) of reasoning. If we want to give Richard's work a fair hearing, then, we must understand and evaluate the strongest argument(s) on offer. Richard develops two arguments against four divine persons. Holmes focuses on just one of those arguments against the possibility of four persons, and finds it wanting. I have sought to show that these critiques miss their target. Further, even if we concede that Richard's procession argument fails, we still have an argument from love which Richard considers the strongest of the two: an argument that steers well clear of the critiques.

A sketch of Richard's complex position

As a final move, and in the spirit of Holmes' project in *The Holy Trinity*, I want to give what I take to be a more faithful summary of Richard's trinitarian

61 *DT* 5.20 (312–13).
62 *DT* 5.20 (313).

argument (at least the parts most closely related to *filioque*,[63] which is Holmes' chief concern).

After arguing for a single, supreme, divine substance (*De Trinitate* books one and two), Richard moves to the central theme of the treatise, the divine persons (*De Trinitate* books three to six). The single divine substance has the perfection of wisdom (or knowledge), and so there is at least one divine person. Further, this person has supreme charity because Richard takes it as obvious that love for others is a most excellent expression of love, valued even more highly than self-love. Richard immediately addresses a concern: If God has supreme charity, why can he not share that charity with creation? As I noted upon above, Richard responds by appealing to the notion of ordered love. God cannot love created persons supremely because created persons are not worthy of supreme love. Richard next gives three distinct arguments for at least two divine persons: one each from supreme goodness, supreme happiness and supreme glory. In short, the greatest possible goodness has the greatest possible good, which is supreme other-love; further, love that is given and requited is the source of the greatest possible joy, which the supreme substance also has; finally, it is supremely glorious to share all that one can, which just is a person's act of love. Thus, we have three reasons to believe that there are two divine persons. Richard gives similar reasoning for three persons: the greatest perfection of other-love is the desire to turn love outward; the greatest joy cannot be shared merely among two persons, but can only, and so must, be shared with another; and the greatest glory is to join with another in sharing all that the two lovers have. Finally, Richard gives the two arguments against the possibility of four persons that we have already discussed.

This summary, of course, is quite terse and I do not expect it to appear overly cogent to the reader. In fact, for now we can put off questions of cogency because before we can analyse and evaluate their merits and faults, we must first accurately describe those arguments. I have already tried to defend Richard's arguments against Holmes' criticisms, so I will just add a few final points. These arguments are motivated by Richard's belief that the eternally triune God has eternally (and necessarily) true reasons for his triunity. Richard's arguments depend totally on our common experiences: with love, joy, causation and so on;

63 As a relatively minor point, I am hesitant about Holmes' framing of Richard's trinitarian work within discussion of the medieval *filioque* controversies, where Richard is examined primarily as a contributor to the *filioque* debate. True, Richard believes that 'in the unity of substance there is a person who is from two persons but not from one person alone'. But this is just one of many 'eternal truths' that 'we are ordered to believe by the rule of the Catholic faith', and for which Richard supports with 'necessary reasons'. In other words, the argument from *De Trinitate* that Holmes analyzes is more than just an argument for the *filioque* and gives a much more comprehensive treatment to trinitarian monotheism than merely *filioque* considerations. *DT* 1.5 (215–16).

they do not appeal to any authority. Nor do they argue for the *filioque* directly, but only indirectly, while pursuing their main goal: establishing the necessary existence of exactly three divine persons.

Richard's trinitarian argument is so exciting for theologians today – or should be, at least – because he presents a way forward for thinking about the real, psychologically rich relations between the persons, while not sacrificing traditional thinking about the singularity and simplicity of the divine substance, nor the (numerical) unity of power, action, will and desire of the persons. Richard is no social trinitarian, even in a loose sense of the term. But properly understood, he appeals to some of the social view's core sensibilities, and so Richard offers such trinitarians an attractive gateway into traditional dogmatic commitments. Read carefully, Richard proves to be a strong representative of traditional trinitarianism, and a valuable source for contemporary thinkers, which is precisely Holmes' main goal.

Conclusion

In this article I have sought to reply to Holmes' summary and critique or Richard's trinitarian argument from *De Trinitate*. I have not sought to convince the reader that Richard's argument is true, or even that it is a good argument. Instead, I have assigned myself the more modest task of arguing that Holmes' reading of Richard is incorrect in a couple of places, and that the resulting critiques miss their target. I also advanced my own understanding of Richard's stronger argument against four persons, pointing out that to properly judge Richard's project, we must understand and evaluate the love argument as well as the procession argument. Richard's trinitarian speculation is subtle. My overriding goal in this article is to cultivate deeper understanding of his arguments and show that they are highly resilient to too easy a dismissal. A close reading of Richard can serve as a course-correction for social trinitarians, and even help advance Holmes' desire for a return of classical trinitarianism.[64]

64 I am deeply grateful to Stephen Holmes for discussion about some of the subject matter of this article, as well as to Oliver Crisp for commenting on an earlier draft.