

ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND THE TRINITY: A THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF CAPITALISM AND THE CALL TO COMMUNION

By

Julius IJEKEYE

Department of Theology,
All Saints Major Seminary,
Uhiele, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria.
Email: dr.frjulius@yahoo.com

Abstract

With the use of Trinitarian theology, this study examines economic inequality, proposing the doctrine of the Holy Trinity as a critical framework for evaluating contemporary capitalist structures. It argues that the relational communion of the Trinity – marked by mutual self-giving, equality, and unity – offers a theological vision that challenges systems of exploitation and exclusion. Findings reveal that Trinitarian theology provides a normative model for economic justice rooted in solidarity, shared dignity, and participation. A significant gap exists in theological discourse where Trinitarian doctrine is insufficiently applied to economic ethics and critiques of capitalism. To fix this, the study reinterprets Trinitarian principles to articulate a communitarian ethic capable of addressing inequality and fostering a more just and inclusive socio-economic order. Theological analysis is the method used in this study.

Introduction

Economic inequality remains a defining challenge of the contemporary world, marked by widening disparities in wealth, access to resources, and opportunities for human flourishing. In many contexts, especially within developing societies, prevailing capitalist systems have intensified exclusion and prioritized profit over human dignity and the common good. This raises urgent ethical and theological questions about justice, solidarity, and the purpose of economic life. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity offers a profound yet underutilized framework for addressing these concerns. As a communion of persons characterized by equality, mutual self-giving, and relational unity, the Trinity presents a normative vision that contrasts sharply with individualistic and competitive economic models. This study argues that Trinitarian theology provides a critical means for evaluating capitalism and reimagining economic life as participation in communion. Addressing a gap in theological discourse, the study employs theological analysis to articulate an ethic of economic justice grounded in shared dignity, solidarity, and the call to communal flourishing.

Economic Inequality and the Theological Question

Economic inequality is not only a sociological fact but a theological challenge that touches the doctrine of God, the nature of the Church, and the destiny of creation. Recent Catholic and ecumenical work insists that unequal wealth distribution must be read as a question posed to faith itself, not merely as an arena for charitable response.

Catholic social teaching understands humanity as one family and the Church as sacrament of unity, grounding an ethic of solidarity, participation, and “relative equality” as conditions of a just society.¹

Economic inequality “bleeds” into other realms, undermining equal opportunity and democracy, and thus contradicts this theological vision.²

Theological critiques of capitalism argue that when self-betterment is equated with wealth accumulation, markets structurally generate excess inequality; justice requires contesting these anthropological premises, not just mitigating outcomes.³ Inequality therefore manifests disordered loves and a failure of communal responsibility before God (p. 23).⁴

Recent Trinitarian theology reads the perichoretic life of Father, Son, and Spirit as a paradigm of non-hoarding, mutual self-gift. In God “no one holds being, no one hoards glory; everything is shared,” which demands resistance to systems concentrating wealth in the hands of a few.⁵ Trinitarian *koinōnia* (Greek word meaning fellowship, joint participation, or partnership) thus critiques economies marked by a “large gap between rich and poor” and calls Christian communities to socio-economic practices mirroring divine communion.⁶

Alternative economic models (Economy of Communion, Economy of Francesco, social entrepreneurship) are interpreted within Catholic social teaching as signs of the times: concrete responses where profit is subordinated to human dignity, justice, and solidarity.⁷

Ecumenical and Catholic voices insist that economic justice is a matter of faith, not an optional add-on: the economy must become explicit subject of theological judgment and action.⁸ Practical and liberation-oriented theologies deploy biblical revelation and Trinitarian models of family and communion to call for renewed leadership, stewardship, and structures that embody

equity and the common good, especially in contexts of colonial and neoliberal exploitation.⁹

Economic inequality presses a theological question: Which god is being served – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in self-giving communion, or Mammon? Contemporary Catholic and Trinitarian reflection reads inequality as a sign of disordered worship and fractured communion, and so calls the Church to embody alternative forms of economic life where participation, solidarity, and shared goods mirror the eternal perichoresis of the Trinity.

Foundations of Divine Communion in the Doctrine of the Trinity

Divine communion in the Trinity is not an optional metaphor but the very form of God's being: a unity that is from and as communion. Recent Catholic and ecumenical trinitarian theology retrieves patristic insights – especially perichoresis and *koinōnia* – to ground a theological vision capable of judging possessive individualism and inspiring economic solidarity.

Perichoresis names the mutual indwelling and coinherence of the three hypostases, in which “everything is shared” and no one “hoards glory” within the divine life (557-558).¹⁰ The Cappadocians are re-read as grounding the unity of God precisely “on the basis of the communion of three independent hypostases” and their mutual indwelling (7-8).¹¹ In this line, contemporary theology argues that God's being is communion, so that “the oneness of God and the equality of three divine persons should be stated on the basis of their communion” (15-16).¹²

Debates on immanent–economic relations (Barth, Rahner) show that divine mystery and revelation coinhere: God is known as Trinity in the economy, yet exceeds every

economic image.¹³ This safeguards both the substantial unity confessed in Catholic dogma¹⁴ and the irreducibly relational form of the divine life.¹⁵

Catholic systematic work on Trinitarian *koinōnia* explicitly adopts the classical loci of Scripture–Tradition–context to show that faith in the Triune God has socio-economic implications.¹⁶ Scripture witnesses to a communing God whose covenant and indwelling establish a *communio sanctorum* marked by openness, reciprocity, participation, mutual recognition, and cooperation (4-5),¹⁷ a pattern taken up by Vatican II and later magisterial teaching on ecclesial communion.

Zizioulas’ trinitarian ecclesiology radicalizes this: “the Trinity consists of Persons in communion, and the nature of God himself is relational,” so that the Church’s very essence is communion mirroring Trinitarian unity (35-36; 40).¹⁸ God, Church, and world are “inextricably linked to the triune God,” and the unity of the divine Persons becomes “the highest model and principle” of ecclesial unity (32).¹⁹

If the divine *oikonomia* (stewardship) itself is communal, then human *oikonomia* is called to image it: the Trinitarian *oikonomia* can be “icon of the ideal human economics.”²⁰ Perichoretic life – where no divine person possesses being over against the others but receives and gives it in love – thus becomes a theological criterion against systems that concentrate wealth and power in the hands of a few, a vision reinforced by relational ontologies drawn from the Fathers and modern personalism, which hold that if humanity is created in the image of the Triune God, its fundamental being is likewise relational and even perichoretic. In this light, Jonathan Edwards’s portrayal of the Trinity as a dynamic communion of love – where the

Father generates the Son as perfect self-expression and the Spirit proceeds as the bond of love – provides a compelling parallel to perichoresis, emphasizing mutual indwelling, self-gift, and joyful reciprocity; such a vision not only deepens the ontological grounding of relational existence but also challenges individualistic and domination-based socio-political structures, calling instead for a redistribution of power and a model of leadership rooted in self-giving love and the flourishing of all (3.1 & 3.2).²¹

Zizioulas's account of "being as communion" presents personhood as a movement beyond individualism into ecclesial life, realized in Baptism and the Eucharist (Acts 2:42–44; 1 Cor. 10:16–17). This reflects the Church's teaching that believers form one body in Christ²² and is grounded in the Trinitarian life where "God is love" (1 Jn. 4:8), a vision anticipated by Augustine of Hippo. Such relational ontology undergirds a moral vision in which communities – including firms – are ordered to the common good rather than profit.²³ African and global South theologians extend this through perichoresis: as divine life is shared and non-possessive (cf. 2 Cor. 8:13–15), so societies must resist exclusionary economies, echoing Basil of Caesarea's critique of hoarding.

Yet Catholic and wider scholastic tradition caution against reducing the Trinity to a social model: the mystery remains without full human analogy, as emphasized by Hilary of Poitiers, and so cautions against naïve projection;²⁴ even as the Trinitarian unity and communion are held together in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.²⁵ Within this analogical framework, Trinitarian theology critiques "logics of accumulation" and proposes "goods of communion" – friendship, solidarity, and shared goods (Acts 4:32–35), a vision deepened in *Caritas in Veritate*.²⁶ Recent studies²⁷ thus present perichoresis as a dynamic

framework for public ethics: the Church, as *communio*, becomes a sacrament of Trinitarian life, calling persons and institutions to embody justice, participation, and the common good against structures of hoarding and exclusion.

Equality, Mutuality, and Self-Giving Love in Trinitarian Relationality

At the heart of Christian faith stands a God whose very being is eternal communion: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in equal dignity, mutual indwelling, and absolute self-gift. To speak theologically of equality and mutuality is therefore not to import secular ideals into God, but to receive from the Trinity the first and normative form of just relation.

1. Equality: Consubstantiality and Non-Domination

Classical Catholic and patristic tradition affirms that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are consubstantial – one in essence, equal in glory, majesty, and power – as defined in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (cf. Jn. 10:30; Phil. 2:6). This unity does not erase distinction but grounds perfect relational self-gift: as Thomas Aquinas explains, the Father communicates the whole divine nature to the Son without division, making equality the very condition for total self-giving love.²⁸ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* likewise teaches that the divine persons are “really distinct” yet “one God”,²⁹ a mystery already articulated by Gregory of Nazianzus, who insists on equality without subordination.³⁰

Modern Trinitarian theology (Hemmerle, Balthasar, Schindler) interprets this consubstantial equality as revealing that divine being is identical with relational love and self-gift, not domination. As Scripture affirms, divine

authority is expressed in self-emptying love (Phil. 2:6–8), not in hierarchical superiority. Consequently, Trinitarian ontology challenges political and economic systems that absolutize asymmetrical power, since in God there is no “superior subject” over others but a communion of equals in love. This provides a theological critique of domination and a foundation for human dignity, equality, and just social relations.

2. Mutuality: Perichoresis as Relational Reciprocity

The patristic doctrine of perichoresis – mutual indwelling without confusion – expresses perfect reciprocity within the Trinity: each divine person exists in and for the others as relation-in-love (cf. Jn. 17:21–23). This insight, rooted in the Cappadocian Fathers, is reflected in Gregory of Nazianzus’s insistence on the co-inherence and equality of the divine persons.³¹ Augustine of Hippo deepens this vision by identifying the Holy Spirit as the *ineffabilis communio* – the mutual love of Father and Son³² – thus presenting divine life as intrinsically reciprocal, where each person gives and receives in perfect unity. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms this dynamic communion, teaching that the divine persons “dwell in one another”.³³

Modern theology retrieves this patristic insight, describing the Trinity as an “eternal, joyful reciprocity,” a communion in which each person wholly shares the divine life without rivalry (cf. Phil. 2:6–8; 2 Cor. 13:14). Contemporary relational accounts develop this into an I–Thou–We framework, where the Spirit personalizes the unity of love between Father and Son, forming a perfect “We.” Such perichoretic mutuality provides a theological horizon for human community, challenging both individualism and oppressive collectivism, and grounding

a vision of communion marked by participation, reciprocity, and shared life.

3. Self-Giving Love: Kenosis without Loss and the Economy of Gift

Patristic and scholastic theology presents the Trinitarian processions as eternal acts of self-gift: the Father begets the Son and breathes forth the Spirit without any loss, revealing that divine life is pure generosity (cf. Jn. 3:16; Jn. 5:26). This insight, already present in Athanasius of Alexandria and Augustine of Hippo, is developed by Thomas Aquinas, who teaches that the Father communicates the whole divine essence to the Son, making total self-giving possible only because of consubstantial unity.³⁴ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms that the divine missions reveal this inner life of self-giving love,³⁵ showing that “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8) not as an attribute but as the very mode of being.

Modern Trinitarian theology retrieves this as an ontology of gift: divine life is an eternal circulation of giving and receiving, a kenosis without loss (cf. Phil. 2:6–8). Such a vision challenges systems built on hoarding and scarcity. As Scripture testifies, true divine economy is marked by generosity and sharing (2 Cor. 8:9; Acts 4:32–35). Catholic social teaching draws on this Trinitarian *koinōnia* to propose an economy of communion, where goods are ordered toward the common good and especially toward “the least” (cf. Mt. 25:40), a principle articulated in *Caritas in Veritate*.³⁶ Thus, the Trinity – far from a closed circle – reveals God as *pro nobis*, an open communion of self-giving love that both grounds and critiques human economic life, calling it toward solidarity, participation, and the just sharing of goods.

4. From Trinitarian Relationality to Communion and Justice

Patristic and Augustinian theology, received within contemporary communion ecclesiology, understands participation in God as participation in divine equality, mutuality, and self-giving love. The Holy Spirit – who is the mutual love of the Father and the Son – is poured out as gift to create unity and charity within the Church (Rom. 5:5; Acts 2:1–4), a truth articulated by Augustine of Hippo, who describes the Spirit as the *communio* of Father and Son.³⁷ This is affirmed by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which teaches that the Church is a communion brought about by the Trinitarian missions,³⁸ and by *Lumen Gentium*, which presents the Church as a people united in the Trinity.³⁹

Thus, Trinitarian *koinōnia* becomes both the source and measure of ecclesial and social life: believers are called to embody a communion where dignity is never subordinated, reciprocity replaces exploitation, and goods are shared in justice and love (Acts 4:32–35). This vision resonates with patristic teaching, such as John Chrysostom’s insistence that wealth is given for the sake of others,⁴⁰ and is further developed in modern Catholic social teaching, especially *Caritas in Veritate*, which links love, justice, and economic life.⁴¹

In this framework, equality arises from shared participation in the one divine life (cf. Gal. 3:28), mutuality reflects the perichoretic reciprocity of the Trinity (Jn. 17:21), and self-giving love mirrors the eternal kenosis of Father, Son, and Spirit (Phil. 2:6–8). Together, these form a Trinitarian critique of economic systems that deny communion and a call to a renewed *oikonomia* – a social order patterned on the communion of the Triune

God, where solidarity, participation, and the common good prevail.

Theological Critique of Capitalism and Inequality

A Trinitarian vision, especially as articulated in Catholic tradition and the Fathers, exposes contemporary capitalism not merely as a flawed technique of allocation, but as a rival *theology* of the human person, community, and destiny. Economic inequality becomes a visible distortion of the divine image and a contradiction of communion.

3. 1. Catholic Trinitarian Anthropology against *Homo Economicus*

Catholic social teaching grounds its economic vision in the *imago Dei*, affirming that the human person, created in the image of the Triune God, possesses a relational dignity ordered to communion (Gen. 1:26–27; Jn. 17:21). From this flow the principles of human dignity, the common good, solidarity, and subsidiarity,⁴² as articulated in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.⁴³ This Trinitarian anthropology stands in sharp contrast to economic models that reduce persons to utility-maximizers or mere instruments of labour,⁴⁴ since the human person is essentially relational and called to self-gift. The Church Fathers further insist that created goods are destined for the common good, reflecting God’s providence and generosity (Ps. 24:1; Acts 4:32–35). Basil of Caesarea teaches that withholding goods from the poor constitutes injustice,⁴⁵ while John Chrysostom condemns hoarding as a violation of charity and justice.⁴⁶ In this patristic vision, the accumulation of wealth at the expense of others is not merely economic imbalance but a moral failure to reflect divine *philanthropia*, even a “crime of inhumanity” (cf. Basil; Chrysostom). Thus, Trinitarian anthropology offers

a decisive critique of *homo economicus* by proposing instead a vision of the human person as relational, participatory, and oriented toward shared goods. Rooted in the communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, this vision calls for an economy of solidarity and justice, where material goods serve the flourishing of all rather than the interests of a few (cf. Acts 4:32).

4. 2. Inequality as Failure of the Common Good and Communion

Contemporary Catholic social teaching shows that economic inequality “bleeds” into all areas of public life, undermining equal opportunity, participation, and even democracy, and thus contradicting the Church’s vision of humanity as one family in communion (cf. Gal. 3:28). The Church, as a sacrament of unity,⁴⁷ is called to witness against such divisions. When global structures privilege the affluent North at the expense of the poor South, they violate the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity,⁴⁸ revealing the need for structural conversion rather than mere acts of charity.⁴⁹ Patristic theology reinforces this critique through the image of the body, where diverse members exist for mutual benefit (1 Cor. 12:12–26). John Chrysostom insists that the goods of the earth are given for all, and that injustice arises when some live in excess while others lack necessities.⁵⁰ Likewise, Basil of Caesarea teaches that hoarding wealth is a deprivation of the poor.⁵¹ Contemporary theology retrieves this vision,⁵² arguing that when systems of mutuality are replaced by extraction and domination, inequality becomes not only social but theological: it fractures the *koinōnia* that should reflect the harmonious communion of the Triune God (cf. Jn. 17:21).

5. 3. Capitalism, Idolatry, and the Anti-Trinitarian Economy

Catholic social teaching interprets Pope Francis's warning that "such an economy kills"⁵³ as a critique of economic systems in which profit is elevated as the ultimate end, thereby displacing human dignity and the common good (cf. Mt. 6:24; Lk. 12:15). In this light, unrestrained capitalism fosters what recent scholarship calls "toxic individualism," fragmenting the global common good and forming persons into a rival "liturgy" of Mammon.⁵⁴ Such a system stands in tension with the Trinitarian vision of communion, where life is ordered toward self-giving love rather than accumulation (cf. Acts 4:32–35). The Magisterium consistently teaches that markets are legitimate only when embedded within a strong moral and juridical framework ordered to the common good, solidarity, and the universal destination of goods.⁵⁵ When economic systems are absolutized as self-regulating and self-justifying, they risk usurping the place of God as the ultimate source of value and destiny – thus becoming a form of practical idolatry (cf. Ex. 20:3; Col. 3:5). The Fathers likewise warn against such distortions: John Chrysostom denounces the idolatry of wealth as incompatible with Christian life,⁵⁶ while Augustine of Hippo locates true order in rightly ordered love.⁵⁷ Therefore, an "anti-Trinitarian economy" emerges wherever accumulation replaces communion and domination replaces gift. In contrast, a genuinely Christian economic vision – rooted in the life of the Triune God – calls for structures that promote participation, justice, and shared goods, reflecting the divine *koinōnia* rather than the false absolutism of the market.

6. 4. Signs of an Alternative: Economy under the Trinity

Grounded in Trinitarian communion, Catholic social teaching discerns in emerging economic models – such as the Economy of Communion, the Economy of Francesco, and various social enterprises – authentic “signs of the times” that place justice, solidarity, and shared flourishing above profit (cf. Mt. 6:33).⁵⁸ These initiatives reflect the Church’s vision of economic life as participation in God’s providence, where leadership is exercised as service in love (cf. Jn. 13:14–15). As the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* teaches, economic activity must be directed toward the common good and the dignity of the human person,⁵⁹ a principle further emphasized in *Caritas in Veritate*, which calls for an economy marked by gratuitousness and fraternity.⁶⁰ In this perspective, business leadership becomes a vocation of love and responsibility, cooperating with God’s creative and redemptive work at every level of society (cf. Gen. 2:15).⁶¹ The Trinity is not merely an abstract model but the living norm of such an economy: a God whose very being is self-giving communion (1 Jn. 4:8) cannot be reconciled with systems that generate exclusion and radical inequality (cf. Lk. 4:18–19). The Fathers strongly affirm this orientation, with Basil of Caesarea teaching that wealth exists for the benefit of all,⁶² and John Chrysostom insisting that economic life must serve the flourishing of the entire community.⁶³ Thus, these alternative economic practices embody a Trinitarian vision of *koinōnia*, where goods are shared, relationships are prioritized, and structures are ordered toward the common good. They stand as concrete anticipations of an economy transformed by communion, reflecting – however imperfectly – the self-giving love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Therefore, a Trinitarian critique shows that capitalism’s deepest problem is not

inefficiency but a refusal of communion, forming life against the God who is shared love (cf. Jn. 17:21; 1 Jn. 4:8). Economic inequality thus becomes a sign of broken communion, calling the Church to challenge idolatrous markets⁶⁴ and to witness – following Basil of Caesarea and John Chrysostom – to an economy of shared goods that reflects Trinitarian life.

Trinitarian Insights for Economic Justice

Christian reflection on economic justice arises intrinsically from Trinitarian faith: the God who is communion and self-giving love (1 Jn. 4:8) provides both the criterion and the horizon for evaluating economic systems. Thus, faith in the Trinity becomes a lens for judging economic orders and imagining a more just *oikonomia* (cf. Eph. 1:10).

1. Trinitarian *Koinōnia* as Measure of Human Economy

The communion (*koinōnia*) of Father, Son, and Spirit – revealed in Scripture and Tradition (2 Cor. 13:14) – serves as a theological norm for human society. As affirmed by *Lumen Gentium*,⁶⁵ the Church itself is a people gathered into Trinitarian unity. This divine life of mutual indwelling and non-possessive love contrasts sharply with economic systems marked by inequality and exclusion.⁶⁶ In this light, persistent gaps between rich and poor (cf. Jas. 5:1–6) reveal a failure to mirror divine communion and call for transformation grounded in Trinitarian faith.

2. Perichoresis and a Radical Economic Ethic

The patristic doctrine of perichoresis – mutual indwelling without domination – offers a powerful ethical analogy. Gregory of Nazianzus emphasizes the unity and reciprocity of the divine persons, a vision echoed in modern theology.⁶⁷ Where divine life is shared without hoarding, human societies are called to resist systems that

concentrate wealth and power (cf. Acts 4:32–35). Catholic social teaching reinforces this through the principle of the universal destination of goods,⁶⁸ urging solidarity, redistribution, and justice, especially in contexts of global inequality.

3. *Imago Trinitatis* and the Economy of the Firm

Because the human person is created in the image of the Triune God (Gen. 1:26–27), economic actors are not reducible to profit-seeking individuals but are called to relational communion. *Centesimus Annus* affirms that business must serve the human person and the common good.⁶⁹ Contemporary theology develops this into a vision of the firm as a “moral community,” where relationships of trust, cooperation, and shared responsibility replace purely competitive logic.⁷⁰ Here profit is subordinated to dignity, participation, and the flourishing of all.

4. Communion Ecclesiology and Economic Justice

Drawing on Augustine of Hippo and the Greek Fathers, communion ecclesiology presents the Church as a participation in divine life that overcomes both individualism and collectivism.⁷¹ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that the Church is a communion rooted in the Trinity.⁷² Within this framework, economic injustice appears as a rupture of participation in divine communion, calling for concrete practices of sharing, structural reform, and preferential love for the poor (cf. Lk. 4:18–19). Trinitarian theology offers decisive insights for economic justice: the *koinōnia* and perichoresis of the divine persons establish a norm of shared life against hoarding; the *imago Trinitatis* reveals persons and institutions as ordered to the common good; and communion ecclesiology calls the Church to embody an alternative economy of solidarity. Consequently, systems

marked by structural inequality are not only socially unjust but theologically incompatible with the God who is eternal communion and self-giving love.

Neglect of Trinitarian Economic Reflection as a Gap in Theological Ethics

A significant lacuna in contemporary theological ethics is the insufficient integration of Trinitarian theology into economic reflection. While Catholic social teaching has robustly addressed inequality, development, and the common good, much of this discourse remains implicitly rather than explicitly Trinitarian. Yet, the Church's own doctrinal sources insist that all Christian anthropology and social ethics flow from the life of the Triune God, whose being is communion (cf. 1 Jn. 4:8).⁷³ The relative neglect of this ontological foundation risks reducing economic ethics to moral exhortation or policy critique, rather than grounding it in the deepest mystery of divine life. Recent Catholic scholarship has begun to identify this gap. Studies in *ressourcement* and communion ecclesiology argue that without a retrieval of Trinitarian ontology, concepts such as solidarity, participation, and the common good lack their fullest theological depth.⁷⁴ Similarly, economic critiques of capitalism often proceed in functional or sociological terms, failing to expose what is, at root, a theological disorder: an economy structured against communion. As *Evangelii Gaudium*⁷⁵ notes, systems that exclude and marginalize are not merely inefficient but dehumanizing, reflecting a deeper rupture in relationality. However, without explicit Trinitarian grounding, such critiques risk remaining at the level of ethical denunciation rather than doctrinal diagnosis. Patristic theology offers a corrective. The Church Fathers consistently understood divine life as shared, non-possessive communion, a vision with direct ethical implications. Basil of Caesarea's

insistence that hoarded wealth belongs to the poor and Augustine of Hippo's account of ordered love (*ordo amoris*) reveal that economic injustice is fundamentally a distortion of participation in divine life. Contemporary theologians have begun to recover this insight, arguing that inequality is not only a social problem but a failure of *koinōnia* – a rupture in the human vocation to image the Trinity.⁷⁶

Moreover, the absence of explicit Trinitarian reflection has allowed the dominance of reductive anthropologies such as *homo economicus*, which construe the human person as an isolated, utility-maximizing agent. This stands in stark contrast to the *imago Trinitatis*, where personhood is constituted by relation and self-gift (Gen. 1:26–27).⁷⁷ Without a Trinitarian corrective, theological ethics risks accommodating rather than transforming prevailing economic paradigms. As recent Catholic analyses note, a failure to root economic life in divine communion contributes to structures of exclusion, ecological degradation, and global inequality.⁷⁸ Addressing this gap requires a renewed synthesis: economic ethics must be explicitly grounded in the perichoretic life of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Only then can the Church articulate a truly theological critique of capitalism – not merely as unjust, but as ontologically disordered in light of divine communion – and propose an alternative *oikonomia* shaped by participation, reciprocity, and shared flourishing. In this sense, the recovery of Trinitarian economic reflection is not optional but essential for a coherent and transformative theological ethic in the face of global inequality.

Theological and Ethical Implications of Economic Inequality and Trinitarian Economy of Communion

A Trinitarian economy of communion reveals economic inequality not as a neutral market outcome but as a theological contradiction of the God whose life is shared love (*koinōnia*) (1 Jn. 4:8; 2 Cor. 13:14). Recent Catholic scholarship underscores that Trinitarian communion is a “real locus of faith” with concrete socio-economic implications, especially in contexts marked by widening gaps between rich and poor.⁷⁹ In this light, the divine *oikonomia* – God’s self-giving life in history (Eph. 1:10) – becomes the norm for human economies: systems that hoard wealth and exclude the poor distort the *imago Trinitatis* and must be judged as sinful ruptures of communion.⁸⁰ Catholic social teaching intensifies this judgment. *Fratelli Tutti* critiques economic systems that privilege profit over persons and foster a “throwaway culture”,⁸¹ while *Laudato Si’* links inequality with ecological degradation and structural sin.⁸² Empirical and theological analyses converge: inequality erodes participation, undermines democracy, and wounds the Church’s identity as sacrament of unity.⁸³ The patristic tradition sharpens this critique: Basil of Caesarea and John Chrysostom insist that goods are given for common use, and that hoarding is an injustice against both neighbour and God. Contemporary retrievals show that such teachings are not peripheral but flow from Trinitarian confession itself.⁸⁴

The doctrine of perichoresis further grounds a radical economic ethic. The mutual indwelling of Father, Son, and Spirit – without domination or exclusion – provides an analogical norm for social life. Modern theological works argue that where divine life is

characterized by non-possessive sharing, human economies must resist concentration of wealth and power.⁸⁵ In African and Global South contexts marked by neo-colonial exploitation, this Trinitarian vision calls for solidarity, redistribution, and communal flourishing as reflections of divine relationality. Economic inequality thus appears as a refusal of participation in perichoretic life, a fracture of *koinōnia* that demands both structural and spiritual conversion.

At the ecclesial and practical level, the economy of communion and related initiatives embody a concrete response. These models subordinate profit to the common good and integrate solidarity, reciprocity, and participation into economic practice.⁸⁶ Grounded in a Trinitarian anthropology, they view the human person not as *homo economicus* but as *imago Trinitatis*, called to communion (Gen. 1:26–27).⁸⁷ As Augustine of Hippo teaches, rightly ordered love (*ordo amoris*) must shape social and economic relations, ensuring that material goods serve communion rather than domination.

Ultimately, the theological implication is decisive: economic inequality is not merely unjust but theologically dissonant with the Triune God. Ethically, this demands a reconfiguration of economic life toward participation, shared goods, and solidarity. A Trinitarian economy of communion thus offers both a critique of capitalism's exclusions and a constructive vision – an *oikonomia* that anticipates, however imperfectly, the perichoretic communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Reclaiming Trinitarian Ethics for Social Transformation

Reclaiming Trinitarian ethics entails recognizing the life of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as the formative principle of

social, economic, and political transformation, rather than a doctrine confined to interior piety. The Triune God, whose very being is communion (*koinōnia*) (2 Cor. 13:14), reveals that authentic human existence is relational and self-giving (1 Jn. 4:8). Contemporary Catholic theology emphasizes that this communion is not abstract but normative: economic inequality, which excludes and fragments, stands in contradiction to participation in divine life.⁸⁸ Thus, the Trinitarian *oikonomia* (Eph. 1:10) becomes the criterion for judging and transforming economic systems.

Catholic social teaching articulates this vision as an ethic of communion. *Fratelli Tutti* calls for social friendship that resists exclusion,⁸⁹ while *Laudato Si'* links inequality with ecological and social breakdown.⁹⁰ These insights echo the Fathers: Basil of Caesarea and John Chrysostom insist that created goods are for all, and that hoarding wealth is a violation of justice. Recent scholarship confirms that inequality undermines participation, weakens democracy, and damages the common good.⁹¹ The doctrine of perichoresis further grounds a radical ethic of reciprocity. Modern theological works⁹² argue that just as the divine persons share life without domination, human societies must resist systems that concentrate wealth and power. In contexts marked by neo-colonial exploitation, this Trinitarian vision calls for solidarity, redistribution, and communal flourishing. Economic inequality thus becomes a theological rupture – a failure of participation in divine communion.

Practically, this vision is embodied in initiatives such as the Economy of Communion and the Economy of Francesco, which subordinate profit to the common good and foster solidarity.⁹³ Grounded in the *imago Trinitatis* (Gen. 1:26–27),⁹⁴ such models affirm that persons are

called to communion, not isolated self-interest. As Augustine of Hippo teaches, rightly ordered love (*ordo amoris*) must guide social and economic life. Leadership, therefore, becomes participation in divine providence, structuring institutions toward dignity, cooperation, and justice.

In sum, reclaiming Trinitarian ethics requires ontological, ecclesial, and practical conversion. Economic life must be reoriented toward participation, shared goods, and solidarity, reflecting the communion of the Triune God. Social transformation, therefore, is not an external application of doctrine but the historical unfolding of divine communion within human history.

Evaluation

A Trinitarian evaluation of economic inequality discloses a profound theological dissonance between contemporary capitalist structures and the divine life of communion. Scripture presents God not as solitary power but as relational love (1 Jn. 4:8), calling humanity into a shared life that reflects divine unity (cf. Jn. 17:21; Acts 4:32–35). From this vantage, systems that normalize exclusion, hoarding, and structural inequality contradict the very form of God’s being and the vocation of the human person created in the *imago Trinitatis* (Gen. 1:26–27). The Magisterium consistently affirms that economic life must be ordered to the common good, solidarity, and the universal destination of goods. *Gaudium et Spes* teaches that “God intended the earth and all it contains for the use of every human being”,⁹⁵ while *Caritas in Veritate* insists that economic activity must be shaped by “gratuitousness” and fraternity.⁹⁶ Likewise, *Fratelli Tutti* critiques systems that exclude and marginalize, calling instead for a social order rooted in fraternity and shared dignity.⁹⁷ These

teachings reveal that inequality is not merely a socio-economic imbalance but a moral and theological failure to embody communion.

Patristic theology intensifies this judgment by grounding economic ethics in participation in divine life. Basil of Caesarea teaches that withholding goods from the poor is theft, since creation is given for all,⁹⁸ while John Chrysostom condemns wealth accumulation that neglects the needy as a violation of justice.⁹⁹ Augustine of Hippo further frames social disorder as disordered love (*ordo amoris*), where economic practices become unjust when they prioritize private gain over the common good.¹⁰⁰ In this patristic vision, inequality is not accidental but symptomatic of a deeper rupture in communion with God and neighbour.

Critically, however, a Trinitarian approach must avoid simplistic analogies between divine life and human systems. The unity and equality of the divine persons do not translate directly into any single economic model. Rather, they provide a normative horizon: economic structures must be judged according to whether they foster participation, reciprocity, and shared flourishing or, conversely, exclusion and domination. Thus, the critique of capitalism must remain both theological and prudential – rejecting its absolutized forms while discerning possibilities for reform in light of the Gospel.

Ultimately, the evaluation leads to a twofold conclusion. Negatively, economic inequality rooted in systems of accumulation and exclusion stands as a contradiction of Trinitarian communion and a form of structural sin (cf. Jas. 5:1–6). Positively, the Trinity offers not a blueprint but a vision: an *oikonomia* shaped by gift, participation, and solidarity. The Church, as sacrament of

unity,¹⁰¹ is called to embody this vision in its life and witness, anticipating – however imperfectly – an economy transformed by the shared life of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

The mystery of the Trinity reveals that reality is grounded not in competition but in communion: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist in self-giving love that both grounds and judges human relationships (cf. Jn. 17:21; 1 Jn. 4:8). From this perspective, economic inequality is not a neutral outcome but a distortion of the human vocation to participate in divine life. Systems that sustain exclusion and disparity contradict the *imago Trinitatis* (Gen. 1:26–27), which calls persons to relationality and shared flourishing. Catholic tradition affirms that the goods of creation are meant for all, and the Fathers of the Church emphasize that neglecting the poor violates divine generosity. Yet the Trinitarian vision is also constructive, proposing an alternative *oikonomia* rooted in solidarity, gift, and participation. Ultimately, addressing inequality requires conversion – transforming persons and structures toward communion, where justice and love converge in God.

Endnotes

- ¹ Himes, K.R. (2019), Catholic Social Teaching, Economic Inequality, and American Society. *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 47: 283-310.
- ² Himes, (2019). *Catholic Social Teaching, Economic Inequality, and American Society*.
- ³ Hirschfeld, M.L. (2019). Rethinking Economic Inequality. *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 47: 259-282.
- ⁴ Koskey, W., Obrempong, J. N., & Muriithi, S. M. (2025). An Examination of Theology's Influence on Societal, Political, and Economic Realities. *Journal of Sociology, Psychology and Religious*, 5(3), 19–33.
- ⁵ Twumasi-Ankrah, N., & Boaheng, I. (2025). Perichoresis in African Context: Edwards' and Barth's Critique for Reconciliation. *African Journal of Biblical Studies, Translation, Linguistics and Intercultural Theology (AJOBIT)*, 1(1). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/391794053_Perichoresis_in_African_Context_Edwards%27_and_Barth%27s_Critique_for_Reconciliation
- ⁶ Gobbo, W. (2025). The Trinitarian Koinōnia and Its Socio-Economic Implications. *Religions*, 16: 166. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16020166>
- ⁷ Petrušić, B. (2024). Alternative economic models as (theological) signs of the times. *Crkva u Svijetu*, 59(4): 940-961.
- ⁸ Petrušić, B. (2024). *Alternative economic models as (theological) signs of the times*.
- ⁹ Koskey et al, (2025). *An Examination of Theology's Influence on Societal, Political, and Economic Realities*.
- ¹⁰ Jere, Q. (2018). Perichoretic interaction within the Trinity as a paradigm for fostering unity in the Public Affairs Committee (PAC) in Malawi. *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, 4(2), 553–578.
- ¹¹ Suh, B. (2025). The Unity of God and the Relationship between the Three Hypostases. [PhD-Thesis - Research and graduation internal, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam]. <https://doi.org/10.5463/thesis.1468>
- ¹² Suh, B. (2025). *The Unity of God and the Relationship between the Three Hypostases*.
- ¹³ Baik, C. (2018). A Matrix of Ontology, Epistemology, and Mystery in Karl Barth and Karl Rahner on the Immanent–Economic Trinity Relation. *Theology Today*, 75, 297 - 317.
- ¹⁴ Iheanacho, V. (2022). Historical development of Trinitarian Doctrine in Roman Catholicism. *Verbum et Ecclesia*. <https://verbumetecclisia.org.za/index.php/ve/article/view/2667/6131>
- ¹⁵ Higgins, M. (2023). Being as Communion in Aquinas's Trinitarian Theology. *New Blackfriars*, 104(1112), 428-447.
- ¹⁶ Gobbo, (2025). *The Trinitarian Koinōnia and Its Socio-Economic Implications*.

- ¹⁷ Gobbo, (2025). *The Trinitarian Koinōnia and Its Socio-Economic Implications*.
- ¹⁸ Siwecki, L. (2024). John Zizioulas' Trinitarian Ecclesiology. *Collectanea Theologica*, 94(2), 29–59.
- ¹⁹ Siwecki, (2024). *John Zizioulas' Trinitarian Ecclesiology*.
- ²⁰ Gobbo, (2025). *The Trinitarian Koinōnia and Its Socio-Economic Implications*.
- ²¹ Twumasi-Ankrah, & Boaheng, (2025). *Perichoresis in African Context: Edwards' and Barth's Critique for Reconciliation*.
- ²² *Lumen Gentium* 7.
- ²³ Pembroke, N. (2025). Personalist Philosophy, the Relational Trinity, and the Business Firm as a Moral Community. *Religions*, 16: 475.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16040475>
- ²⁴ Van de Beek, A. (2022). Trinity– Simply: These three are one. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 43(1), a2679. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v43i1.2679>
- ²⁵ CCC 253–255.
- ²⁶ *Caritas in Veritate*, 34.
- ²⁷ Siwecki, (2024). *John Zizioulas' Trinitarian Ecclesiology*; Twumasi-Ankrah, & Boaheng, (2025). *Perichoresis in African Context: Edwards' and Barth's Critique for Reconciliation*; Iheanacho, (2022). *Historical development of Trinitarian Doctrine in Roman Catholicism*.
- ²⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q.42.
- ²⁹ CCC 253–255.
- ³⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 31*.
- ³¹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 31*.
- ³² St. Augustine, *De Trinitate* XV, 17, 27.
- ³³ CCC 255.
- ³⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q.27; q.42
- ³⁵ CCC 257.
- ³⁶ *Caritas in Veritate*, 34.
- ³⁷ *De Trinitate* XV.
- ³⁸ CCC 731–732.
- ³⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, 4.
- ⁴⁰ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Acts*.
- ⁴¹ *Caritas in Veritate*, 36.
- ⁴² Himes, (2019). *Catholic Social Teaching, Economic Inequality, and American Society*.
- ⁴³ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004), no. 34:
https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html
- ⁴⁴ cf. CCC 1878–1880.
- ⁴⁵ Basil of Caesarea, *Homily on Luke*.
- ⁴⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Lazarus*.
- ⁴⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, 1.
- ⁴⁸ cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 192–196.

- ⁴⁹ Pena, A. (2025). Catholic Social Economics in ASE Journals: An 80-Year Review. *Forum for Social Economics*, 54, 141 - 157; cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, 22.
- ⁵⁰ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*.
- ⁵¹ Basil of Caesarea, *Homily on Luke*.
- ⁵² Hargaden, K. (2023). Book Review: *Commodified Communion: Eucharist, Consumer Culture, and the Practice of Everyday Life* by Antonio Eduardo Alonso. *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 36, 694 - 697.
- ⁵³ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 53.
- ⁵⁴ Poole, E. (2025). Practical Economics – What Capitalism's Toxic Assumptions and Buying god have to say about Money, Economics and Practical Theology. *Practical Theology*, 18, 267 - 277.
- ⁵⁵ cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 42; *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 171–184.
- ⁵⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*.
- ⁵⁷ *De Civitate Dei*.
- ⁵⁸ Himes, (2019). *Catholic Social Teaching, Economic Inequality, and American Society*.
- ⁵⁹ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 331–333.
- ⁶⁰ *Caritas in Veritate*, 36.
- ⁶¹ Himes, (2019). *Catholic Social Teaching, Economic Inequality, and American Society*.
- ⁶² Basil of Caesarea, *Homily on Luke*.
- ⁶³ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Acts*.
- ⁶⁴ cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 53.
- ⁶⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, 4.
- ⁶⁶ Petrušić, B. (2024). *Alternative economic models as (theological) signs of the times*.
- ⁶⁷ Rieger, J., & Silva, P. (2023). Liberation Theologies and Their Future: Rethinking Categories and Popular Participation in Liberation. *Religions*, 14: 925. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14070925>
- ⁶⁸ cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 171.
- ⁶⁹ *Centesimus Annus*, 35.
- ⁷⁰ Pembroke, (2025). *Personalist Philosophy, the Relational Trinity, and the Business Firm as a Moral Community*; Siwecki, (2024). *John Zizioulas' Trinitarian Ecclesiology*.
- ⁷¹ Hargaden, K. (2023). Book Review: *Commodified Communion: Eucharist, Consumer Culture, and the Practice of Everyday Life* by Antonio Eduardo Alonso. *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 36, 694 - 697.
- ⁷² CCC 731–732.
- ⁷³ CCC 255.
- ⁷⁴ Hargaden, 2023. Book Review: *Commodified Communion: Eucharist, Consumer Culture, and the Practice of Everyday Life* by Antonio Eduardo Alonso; Siwecki, (2024). *John Zizioulas' Trinitarian Ecclesiology*.
- ⁷⁵ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 53.

- ⁷⁶ Rieger, & Silva, (2023). *Liberation Theologies and Their Future: Rethinking Categories and Popular Participation in Liberation*; Petrušić, B. (2024). *Alternative economic models as (theological) signs of the times*.
- ⁷⁷ cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.
- ⁷⁸ Iheanacho, (2022). *Historical development of Trinitarian Doctrine in Roman Catholicism*; Twumasi-Ankrah, & Boaheng, (2025). *Perichoresis in African Context: Edwards' and Barth's Critique for Reconciliation*.
- ⁷⁹ Petrušić, (2024). *Alternative economic models as (theological) signs of the times*; Gobbo, (2025). *The Trinitarian Koinōnia and Its Socio-Economic Implications*.
- ⁸⁰ cf. CCC 1878–1880.
- ⁸¹ *Fratelli Tutti*, 18–22.
- ⁸² *Laudato Si'*, 109–110.
- ⁸³ Himes, (2019). *Catholic Social Teaching, Economic Inequality, and American Society*.
- ⁸⁴ Rieger, J., & Silva, P. (2023). *Liberation Theologies and Their Future: Rethinking Categories and Popular Participation in Liberation*.
- ⁸⁵ Twumasi-Ankrah, & Boaheng, (2025). *Perichoresis in African Context: Edwards' and Barth's Critique for Reconciliation*.
- ⁸⁶ Petrušić, B. (2024). *Alternative economic models as (theological) signs of the times*.
- ⁸⁷ cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.
- ⁸⁸ Petrušić, B. (2024). *Alternative economic models as (theological) signs of the times*; Gobbo, (2025). *The Trinitarian Koinōnia and Its Socio-Economic Implications*.
- ⁸⁹ *Fratelli Tutti*, 30–31.
- ⁹⁰ *Laudato Si'*, 109–110.
- ⁹¹ Himes, (2019). *Catholic Social Teaching, Economic Inequality, and American Society*.
- ⁹² Rieger, & Silva, (2023). *Liberation Theologies and Their Future: Rethinking Categories and Popular Participation in Liberation*; Twumasi-Ankrah, & Boaheng, (2025). *Perichoresis in African Context: Edwards' and Barth's Critique for Reconciliation*.
- ⁹³ Petrušić, B. (2024). *Alternative economic models as (theological) signs of the times*.
- ⁹⁴ cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.
- ⁹⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, 69.
- ⁹⁶ *Caritas in Veritate*, 36.
- ⁹⁷ *Fratelli Tutti*, 22.
- ⁹⁸ Basil of Caesarea, *Homily on Luke*.
- ⁹⁹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Acts*.
- ¹⁰⁰ *De Civitate Dei*.
- ¹⁰¹ cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 1.