

Ed. by Alejandra Vanney

**Violence in Civil Society: Monotheism Guilty?**

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## **Nonviolence and the Immanent Logic of Christian Trinitarian Monotheism**

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Contemporary debate over the relationship between religion and violence is far-reaching and complex, and the issues are informed by a full range of scholarly study and shared human experience. To effectively address a pressing concern of this magnitude and consequence, consideration must be given to the structure of this debate. One key aspect of the structure of this debate over the relationship between religion and violence concerns the immanent logic of certain forms of monotheisms. The debate tends to be structured in terms of only two alternatives: exclusivist forms of monotheisms that logically lead to intolerance and violence; or inclusivist forms of monotheisms that logically promote freedom and nonviolence. Yet both of these alternatives are constructed upon the same premise, that the immanent logic of the key assumptions of monotheisms will generate intolerance and violence when a pretense to exclusive truth is one of these assumptions. This essay will argue for another form of monotheism that logically necessitates both an assumption of exclusive truth and the promotion of freedom and nonviolence. This Christian monotheism, with its core confession of trinitarianism, is a third alternative that challenges this premise and more accurately broadens the structure of this important debate.

Two brief points are to be made at the outset. First, this essay is speaking theologically from within this religious tradition descriptively. The aim is to offer an orderly theological account of what this third form of monotheism might look like. Second, the abstraction of this description must be set against the background of a concrete historical example of the practical implications of this form of monotheism. Such an example is one of the most significant movements of freedom and nonviolent civil activism and social formation in recent American history: the American civil rights movement (1955–1968). The decisive influence of traditional Christianity in motivating, shaping, and sustaining the civil rights

movement has been well documented.<sup>1</sup> In his influential book *Why We Can't Wait*, Martin Luther King Jr. recounts the story of how the movement was launched on the segregated streets of Birmingham, Alabama—a movement that demonstrated to the world the power of nonviolent direct action in civil society. Of particular importance here is King's discussion of the deep connection between the call to join that nonviolent civil action and the religious tradition that informed it. For example, he states concerning the recruitment of volunteers for the movement:

The invitation periods at the mass meetings, when we asked for volunteers, were much like those invitational periods that occur every Sunday morning in the Negro churches, when the pastor projects the call to those present to join the church.... People came forward to join our army. But it was a special army, with no supplies but its sincerity, no uniform but its determination, no arsenal except its faith, no currency but its conscience. It was an army that would move but not maul. It was an army that would sing but not slay. It was an army that would flank but not falter. It was an army to storm bastions of hatred, to lay siege to the fortresses of segregation, to surround symbols of discrimination. It was an army whose allegiance was to God and whose strategy and intelligence were the eloquently simple dictates of conscience.<sup>2</sup>

The movement's religious orientation is further demonstrated by the *Commitment Card* that every volunteer was required to sign. This was in the form of a pledge to follow *ten commandments* that guided the movement. The first commandment is particularly instructive: '1. Meditate daily on the teachings and life of Jesus.'<sup>3</sup> The connection in the hearts and minds of these volunteers between the normative authority of the teachings and life of Jesus on the one hand, and this particularly significant example of religiously informed nonviolent action on the other is what will be explored here. For this normative authority is at least implicitly grounded in a monotheism

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 87–104. Here Chappell demonstrates that the movement could be considered less a political protest with religious dimensions than a religious revival with political and social dimensions.

<sup>2</sup>Martin Luther King Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Mentor, 1964), 62.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 63.

represented by the dynamic of key assumptions of the immanent logic of Christian trinitarianism, which is both theologically exclusivist and *by the same logic* is freeing, activist, and nonviolent.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Form of Christian Trinitarianism**

While there are many issues surrounding the trinitarian doctrinal formulation, serviceable here is a brief account of the traditional language of the Christian creedal heritage following from the great ecumenical councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381).<sup>5</sup> The subsequent Nicene Creed expresses the biblical meaning of Christian trinitarianism and with it the authority of the teachings and life of Jesus for generations of adherents.<sup>6</sup> The creed is central to the traditional liturgy of Christianity, from ancient to contemporary,

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<sup>4</sup>It should be noted, as Richard Wayne Wills Sr. makes clear, ‘that King was governed and guided by a personal sense of theological conviction,’ in *Martin Luther King Jr. and the Image of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 87. However, rather than with the christological definitions found in the orthodox statements of Nicaea and Chalcedon, King would have been more concerned with the personality of Jesus and his unique God-consciousness, and with his ‘revolutionary spirit’ that ‘embodied radical, agape love in action.’ Luther D. Ivory, *Toward a Theology of Radical Involvement: The Theological Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 79–84. Yet establishing whether King or his followers held explicitly to a traditional trinitarian doctrinal formula is not necessary to the argument being developed here. What is important to demonstrate here is how this trinitarianism is at least implied as the doctrinal warrant for the particularly Christian religious commitments of many participants in this movement. The most basic of these was a commitment to the authoritative teachings and life of Jesus Christ and a profoundly held ‘abiding faith’ in ‘an active, personal God.’ See Bayard Rustin’s description of King quoted in Chappell, 97.

<sup>5</sup>Recognizing the tripersonality of God as an indisputable implication of the monotheistic witness of Holy Scripture, the ancient Christian church bequeathed creedal terminology for aiding the articulation of trinitarianism with precision and cogency. For a representative selection of extracts from the writings of the early Christian fathers dealing with the issues of trinitarianism, see Documents in Early Christian Thought, eds. Maurice Wiles and Mark Santer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 22–94. Also helpful is the collection of significant literature and documents in *The Trinitarian Controversy*, ed. and trans. William G. Rusch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

<sup>6</sup>The Nicene Creed in Greek, Latin, and English translations is found in ‘The Greek and Latin Creeds,’ *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, vol. II, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Harper and Row, 1931; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 57–61.

and would have been representative of a broad spectrum of Christian faith traditions that participated in the American civil rights movement. Simply stated, Christian trinitarianism is the assertion that God is revealed to be one God in both unity and distinction. In the most basic Christian experience, the one God is encountered as Father in the revelation of the Son by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Trinitarian Christians pray to one God as Father in the mediating name of the Son and with the help of the Holy Spirit; and they worship and serve one God as Almighty Father in the truth of the Son and in the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. This is firmly established in Jesus' own command for his Church to be baptized in the singular divine name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). The ancient church used the term *homoousios*<sup>7</sup> (of the same essence) to establish monotheism in the confession of the oneness and unity of God, even as the distinction between the Father and the Son is also affirmed by the Nicene Creed:

We believe in one God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all time, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not created, of the same essence as the Father.

The term acknowledges the common essential identity of the Father and the Son. God the Son as *homoousian* to God the Father means that each possesses the unity of a single divine essence, and that each possesses the fullness of one and the same divine essence.<sup>8</sup> In the third article of the creed the same concept is extended to include

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<sup>7</sup>The term is rendered *consubstantialis* in Latin.

<sup>8</sup>The phrase 'of the same essence as the Father' was further clarified in the Arian/Semi-Arian debates immediately following the Council of Nicaea as referring to the same divine essence possessed together by the Father and the Son, and also to the same content of that one essence possessed together by the Father and the Son, so that 'all that is the Father's is the Son's.' See especially the seminal arguments of the fourth-century Alexandrian theologian and bishop St. Athanasius in his discourses against the Arians (*Orationes contra Arianos*), in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ser. 2, vol. 4, ed. Archibald Robertson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 303–447.

the Holy Spirit, ‘who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified.’

It is ultimately the (pseudo) Athanasian Creed, or *Quicumque Vult*, in use by Christian churches since the sixth century that provides a more comprehensive statement of this trinitarianism. It states in part:

We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal.... So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet there are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son Lord; and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords, but one Lord.... And in this Trinity none is afore, or after another; none is greater, or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal together and coequal.... The Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshiped.<sup>9</sup>

Here is articulated the fullness of the biblical teaching that God is one divine being who eternally exists as a dynamic community of three distinct and coequal Persons. The term ‘Person’, or *hypostasis*, is used in this trinitarian context to acknowledge that the Person of the Father, the Person of the Son, and the Person of the Holy Spirit are eternally distinct in terms of ‘hypostatic characteristics’ that are uniquely and appropriately attributed to each. It intends to convey an understanding of ‘Persons’ as somewhere between totally individualized components (contra tritheism), and merely alternating instances of something more basic (contra modalism). Thus the unity of the Godhead is not established through a mere aggregate of three individual personal subjects or activities, nor is the divine being something that exists in distinction from these three persons as mere modes of its historical manifestations. These three co-equal Persons eternally exist in a mutually indwelling (*perichoretic*) unity of divine essence marked by the *homoousios* that confirms Christian

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<sup>9</sup>The Athanasian Creed in Latin and English is found in ‘The Greek and Latin Creeds,’ *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, vol. II, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Harper and Row, 1931; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 66–72.

trinitarianism as a monotheistic religion.<sup>10</sup> The power of this conceptual dynamic of unity and distinction in trinitarian monotheism was beautifully articulated by the fourth-century Cappadocian theologian St. Gregory of Nazianzus:

This I give you to share, and to defend all your life, the One Godhead and Power, found in the Three in Unity, and comprising the Three separately, not unequal, in substances or natures, neither increased nor diminished by superiorities or inferiorities; in every respect equal, in every respect the same; just as the beauty and the greatness of the heavens is one; the infinite conjunction of Three Infinite Ones, Each God when considered in Himself; as the Father so the Son, as the Son so the Holy Ghost; the Three One God when contemplated together.... No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the Splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the Three I think of Him as the Whole, and my eyes are filled.... When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the Undivided Light.<sup>11</sup>

Although much more can be said about this trinitarian doctrinal formulation, this brief account forms a sufficient context from which to demonstrate what is particularly relevant here—how this concept of *homoousios* establishes divine revelation as divine *self*-revelation. In the immanent logic of trinitarianism, revelation is the action of God actually and truly revealing God; it is a self-interpreting, self-accommodating, and self-communicating divine revelation for humanity. Thus when Christian meditation and action are formed by this trinitarian conception of divine revelation, they are perceived as being profoundly formed by God's own personal activity. Such meditation and action properly and authoritatively guided by the teachings and life of Jesus may now be developed further with this concept of *homoousios* as it establishes the identity of Jesus in the

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<sup>10</sup>As confessed with the Athanasian Creed, 'For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; So are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say; There are three Gods or three Lords,' Schaff, p. 67.

<sup>11</sup>St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *On Holy Baptism* (Oration 40), in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ser. 2, vol. 7, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), p. 375.

immanent logic of Christian trinitarianism. For the concept is intelligible only when comprehended in the context of the Christian confession of Jesus Christ as the incarnate self-revelation of God. This confession is grounded in the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ with phrases such as: ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’ (Matthew 16:16); ‘The Word was with God, and the Word was God’ (John 1:1); ‘My Lord and my God!’ (John 20:28); ‘Declared with power to be the Son of God’ (Romans 1:4); ‘The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’ (2 Corinthians 4:6); ‘Who being in very nature God’ (Philippians 2:6); ‘The image of the invisible God’ (Colossians 1:15); ‘God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him’ (Colossians 1:19); and ‘He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature’ (Hebrews 1:3).

This Christian testimony to God’s self-revelation entails the important twofold identity of essence or *homoousia* between the Son, who is the content and medium of the revelation, and the Father, who is the author and source of the revelation. First, this means that God in the unity and fullness of divine being is as much the content of revelation as God is its author, that God in revelation does actually disclose God. Indeed, if this were not the case, if divine revelation did not actually have God as its content in this way, then the Christian would not know who God is and would still have to look elsewhere for the author of this revelation. But the Christian tradition confesses that in Jesus Christ God is encountered in God the Son incarnate, that this is indeed the unified activity of God actually revealing God. For this reason the apostle John is able to declare concerning Jesus: ‘No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known’ (John 1:18).

Second, divine self-revelation in the strictest sense also means that God in the unity and fullness of divine being is as much the medium of revelation as God is its source, that in the Son divine revelation is not encountered through a medium that is alien to this source. This would diminish a true self-revelation, making it instead a mere pointer to something else. But in the Christian confession of Jesus Christ as God the Son incarnate, the medium of revelation is also God; God is truly revealed by God’s self-interpretation and self-

accommodation for humanity in the incarnation. For this reason alone does the Christian tradition understand that Jesus Christ points to God by pointing to himself: ‘Whoever has seen me has seen the Father’ (John 14:9b). Therefore, in the immanent logic of Christian trinitarianism, divine revelation in Jesus Christ is an actual, true, and ultimate self-revelation of God, because as both the content and medium of this revelation, he is *homoousian* to the Father as its author and source in the unity and fullness of the divine being as God the Son incarnate.

### Three Key Implications of Christian Trinitarianism

This Christian trinitarian concept of *homoousios* establishes the identity of Jesus Christ as the self-revelation of God, and with it grounds the assumption of exclusive truth in the Christian tradition concerning Jesus’ teachings and life. The nature of this exclusivism and its formative connection to social behavior and civic action that promotes freedom and nonviolence—or the recovery of *shalom* as the presence of justice, peace, reconciliation, and human flourishing—can now be examined in terms of the immanent logic of three key implications.<sup>12</sup>

First, because this Christian trinitarianism teaches that in the incarnation of the Son there is an actual, true, and ultimate self-revelation of God, it is indeed logical to take this revelation as definitive. This establishes Jesus Christ as the authoritative norm by which Christians seek to determine the truthfulness of all other claims to divine revelation. This is in marked contrast to various forms of reductionist philosophical exclusivisms, such as religious pluralism, that imperialistically seek to impose foreign metaphysical structures or alien metanarratives upon monotheisms in particular.<sup>13</sup> In the case of

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<sup>12</sup>On the meaning of *shalom* and its relevance to the issues discussed here, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice & Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), esp. 69–72.

<sup>13</sup>The classic philosophical statement of religious pluralism is found in John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). For an important critique of this position, see Keith E. Yandell, ‘Religious Pluralism: Reductionistic, Exclusivist, and Intolerant?’ *Philosophia Christi* 11, no. 2 (2009), 275–92.

Christianity, this would marginalize Jesus Christ as merely representing one of a number of different and even contradictory disclosures of a *Real* that remains ineffably and unknowably *beyond* them all. Philosophical exclusivisms of this sort would logically force the conclusion that God has not been revealed actually, truly, and ultimately in Jesus Christ, but at most only indirectly, inconsistently, and partially. This would clearly contradict the concept of *homoousios* as the identity of essence that Christian trinitarianism assumes. Therefore, because Jesus Christ the Son incarnate is God, Christian trinitarian monotheism is logically exclusivist. Yet this exclusivism is not intolerantly social, political, or even necessarily religious, but rather it is strictly theological and, more specifically, christological. In the immanent logic of trinitarianism, even Christian formulations of religious inclusivism must be grounded in this same assumption of exclusive truth concerning the teachings and life of Jesus. The inclusivity of these positions is typically worked out in ecclesiology or soteriology, and not in Christology, which is established along these same trinitarian lines. For this reason, Christian religious inclusivism is not the denial of an assumption of exclusive truth concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ, but the affirmation of it.<sup>14</sup> Whether worked out theologically as religious exclusivism or religious inclusivism, the important point here is that this key christological assumption of exclusive truth is far from a license for intolerance and violence. In the immanent logic of trinitarianism it is this christological assumption of exclusive truth that leads Christians from the darkness of groping confusion into the light of humble witness. As Jesus declared, ‘Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free’ (John 8:32).

Yet how does this theologically exclusivist monotheism become an effective means of forming social and political identities that seek social justice, peace, reconciliation, and human flourishing through

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<sup>14</sup>For an important statement of religious inclusivism along these lines of thought, see *The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church*, Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 21 November 1964, esp. chs. 1 and 2. It should be noted that within the structure of the issue as it has been presented above the alternative positions are ultimately reduced to only two: philosophical exclusivism or theological exclusivism.

nonviolence above all, as exemplified in the American civil rights movement? A second key implication addresses this question with the concept of *homoousios* that establishes the moral influence of Jesus' teachings and life. This moral formation comes through the preaching, mission, and God-consciousness of Jesus, the Christian movement he founded, and the inspiring effect of his martyrdom and resurrection. New Testament scholars generally agree that the basic thrust of New Testament teaching is in the direction of nonviolence.<sup>15</sup> That Jesus taught nonviolence is clearly evident, for example, in his Sermon on the Mount with its beatitudes blessing the poor, the meek, and the peacemakers; and with its exhortations to love one's enemy and to not resist evil with force (Matthew 5; Luke 6:17–38).<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Jesus demonstrated the practicality of nonviolence in the way he lived out the Suffering Servant Christology of Holy Scripture. This real way of life is nonviolent, not in passivist withdrawal, but in activist mission. Through the teachings and life of Jesus, God provides profound wisdom and clear guidance for a nonviolent Christian lifestyle even in the face of all the complications of human history and the human condition.

These teachings and this life of Jesus have divine authority in the immanent logic of trinitarianism, which ensures that everything Jesus said and did was ultimately God speaking and acting; these were not mere human words or random historical events. Yet it also establishes in the person of Jesus a revelation of proper human action

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<sup>15</sup>For a summary of the key positions and issues in the debate concerning nonviolence in the teaching of the New Testament, see Robert J. Daly, 'The New Testament: Pacifism and Non-Violence,' *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, vol. 168, no. 8 (October 1974), 544–62.

<sup>16</sup>Theologian and social ethicist René Coste forcefully summarizes the results of Gospel criticism when he states: 'It is an incontestable fact that Christ *did* preach nonviolence, both as a condition and a consequence of the universal love that he taught us. To pretend, as is sometimes done, that his directives are only meant to be applied to individual or ecclesiastical relationships is a supposition that is nowhere justified in the writings of the New Testament. Evangelical morality embraces the whole of human activity: only methods of application may differ according to the various levels at which it operates. The Christian, more than anyone else, is bound to use only peaceful means, both in his collective relationships and his individual ones. Otherwise, he is not faithful to the demands made by his master.' In 'Pacifism and Legitimate Defense,' *Concilium* 5 (1965), 87. Cited by Daly, 551.

in response to God. To daily meditate on the teachings and life of Jesus is not only to meditate on the definitive self-interpreted and self-accommodated revelation of God, but also to meditate on the equally definitive revelation of a human moral exemplar in response to that divine revelation. This exemplar is profoundly nonviolent—as Jesus punctuates the activism and mission of his own teachings and life with the statement from the cross: ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do’ (Luke 23:34). Thus the immanent logic of Christian trinitarianism takes as normative Jesus’ teachings and life for human moral formation and social action. The very same trinitarian logic of divine self-revelation in the person of Jesus that necessitates theological exclusivism also necessitates missional nonviolence, since the teachings and life of this same Jesus must likewise be taken as the definitive example of our proper human response.

A third implication of this concept of *homoousios* in the immanent logic of Christian trinitarianism draws on the work of Jesus understood as his defeat of the powers of evil—all that holds humanity in bondage—and in its place the restoration of *shalom* as the advancing manifestation of an in-breaking, future kingdom of God. This is taken in terms of a cosmic and supernatural work, but also as a concrete historical work where the present reality and future hope of *shalom* becomes a new possibility for humanity.<sup>17</sup> Jesus establishes this new human freedom for obedience to God’s kingdom rule now in his own teachings, self-giving death, and resurrected life.<sup>18</sup> With this

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<sup>17</sup>This work of Jesus Christ is biblically and traditionally articulated in terms of atonement. Historically it is the *Christus Victor* view that sees Christ’s work of atonement as a movement of God toward humanity in a divine act of cosmic deliverance from sin and evil. Although his categories tend to be overly formal, Gustaf Aulén has set the general structure of the debate concerning the meaning of Christ’s work of atonement by contrasting this ‘classic’ type to the ‘Latin’ type, which sees Christ’s work of atonement as a movement of God toward humanity in a sacrifice fulfilling the requirements of divine judgment on sin, and the ‘subjective’ type, which sees Christ’s work of atonement as a movement of humanity toward God in response to a supreme example of divine love. Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (London: S.P.C.K., 1950).

<sup>18</sup>The death of Christ in his work of atonement has come under close scrutiny in recent years by theologians and scholars representing a range of academic disciplines. The violence of crucifixion and the biblical and traditional concepts,

aspect of Jesus' work, the normative moral exemplar is also the contemporary actualization that frees and empowers human response to God in an ever increasing desire and capacity for righteousness, justice, and love manifested in nonviolence. This has central significance in Jesus' kingdom work in the immanent logic of Christian trinitarianism: Jesus is God the Son incarnate who is God with and for humanity, he is the moral exemplar of humanity with and for God, and he is also the crucial middle term. Jesus is the one whose vicarious representative actions create, shape, and sustain a new possibility of moral formation in faithfulness to God. This is articulated in Christian trinitarianism as God the Father self-communicated in the *homoousios* of the Spirit of Christ, who is God the Holy Spirit, identified in the third article of the Nicene Creed as 'the Lord and Giver of life.'<sup>19</sup> Here continual provision is made for

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metaphors, and images used to explain its saving significance are being reformulated in ways that better communicate how the gracious power of a singular nonviolent action of the triune God is able to cause this profound act of human violence to actually become the end of violence and the redemption, reconciliation, and transformation of the whole human race. For an important discussion of the issues concerning the language of atonement, see Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989). Constructive studies that survey and analyze atonement theories through a critical lens focused on the issues of violence and abuse, retributive justice, redemptive suffering, sacrifice, and divine intentionality include: J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); Stephen Finlan, *Options on Atonement in Christian Thought* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007); *Atonement and Violence: A Theological Conversation*, ed. John Sanders (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006); Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace: The Message of the Cross and the Mission of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); Christopher D. Marshall, *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); and from a Girardian perspective, S. Mark Heim, *Saved From Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); and Robert J. Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled: The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice* (London: T&T Clark, 2009).

<sup>19</sup>See Dietrich Bonhoeffer's discussion of this vicarious representative action (*Stellvertretung*) of Jesus Christ and its implications for the Holy Spirit's work in the temporal actualization of a new possibility for human community. In *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, vol. I, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), esp. 157–92. Also helpful is the lecture by Thomas F. Torrance, 'The Word of God and the Response of Man,' in *God and Rationality* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 137–64. These deep

free and faithful human response to God as the essential aspect of a ‘beloved community’ formed through nonviolent acts of reconciliation and *agape* love in this new life in the Spirit.

Martin Luther King Jr. often wrote of this beloved or integrated community as an ultimate sociopolitical ideal and moral-ethical goal.<sup>20</sup> Yet he also understood that the individual and societal transformation that brings about a community of this sort necessarily entails spiritual transformation. King made this connection clear, for example, when he identified radical *agape* love and active cooperating faith as the foundational components of this new community. He describes them as the community creating ‘love of God operating in the human heart,’ in such a way that ‘man filled with God and God operating through man bring unbelievable changes in our individual and social lives.’<sup>21</sup> The unity of divine action that brings about the transformative freedom of this new community is powerfully stated by the apostle Paul: ‘Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit’ (2 Cor. 3:17–18). Those who pledged person and body to the nonviolent work of the civil rights movement meditated daily on the teachings and life of Jesus in a new freedom for obedience to the

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connections between Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the actualization of community draw on the seminal work of Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Volume IV: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1953–1967).

<sup>20</sup>From the beginning of the civil rights movement, King defined the ultimate goals of nonviolent boycotts, such as the 1955–1956 Montgomery bus boycott, as ‘reconciliation,’ ‘redemption,’ and ‘the creation of the beloved community.’ In ‘Facing the Challenge of a New Age,’ Address Delivered at the First Annual Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change (3 December 1956), *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume III: Birth of a New Age, December 1955–December 1956*, eds. Stewart Burns, Susan Carson, Peter Holloran, and Dana L. H. Powell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 458. Helpful analysis of this important concept of beloved community in King’s thought is provided by Ivory, 133–46, and Wills, 139–64.

<sup>21</sup>Martin Luther King Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 103–106; and *Strength to Love* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), 121–26.

whole of the Commitment Card, including most remarkably: to ‘remember always that the nonviolent movement in Birmingham seeks justice and reconciliation—not victory’; to ‘walk and talk in the manner of love, for God is love’; to ‘sacrifice personal wishes in order that all men might be free’; and to ‘refrain from the violence of fist, tongue, or heart.’<sup>22</sup> Thus the first commandment of the civil rights pledge to daily meditate on the teachings and life of Jesus not only provides inspiration and encouragement in an authoritative moral exemplar, it is also the proper means for actualizing social formation and civic activism in the freedom and nonviolence graciously made possible through the continuing work of the Father, in Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit.

### Conclusion

This essay addressed the contemporary debate over the relationship between religion and violence with its structural premise that the immanent logic of the key assumptions of monotheisms will generate intolerance and violence when a pretense to exclusive truth is one of these assumptions. Drawing from the concrete historical example of the American civil rights movement, with its deep connection between nonviolent civil action and the religious tradition that so decisively influenced it, Christian trinitarian monotheism with the concept of *homoousios* was identified as an important challenge to this premise. Three key implications of this concept in the immanent logic of Christian trinitarianism demonstrated how the same authoritative divine self-revelation in the person of Jesus Christ that logically necessitates theological exclusivism also promotes freedom and nonviolence, since Jesus as God the Son incarnate is an actual, true, and ultimate divine self-revelation, as well as the definitive human exemplar and, in the continuing unified action of the Godhead, the contemporary actualization of a proper human response. In the dynamic of these key assumptions in its immanent logic, Christian trinitarianism is theologically exclusivist and, *by the same logic*, is

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<sup>22</sup>King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 62–63. King offers a fuller account of the meaning of these commandments in the context of his own pilgrimage to nonviolence in *Stride Toward Freedom*, 90–107.

also freeing and activist in the new possibility and empowerment for nonviolence created, shaped, and sustained by the triune God. Thus, as a form of monotheism that necessarily includes an assumption of exclusive truth, Christian trinitarianism is an important alternative within the structure of this debate as an effective means, in both religious and civil society, of forming and empowering social and political identities that embrace the task of promoting *shalom* as social peace.