

**IN THE GAZE OF GOD:  
ASPECTS OF THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE  
OF  
RUBLEV'S HOLY TRINITY ICON**

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## **ABSTRACT**

An icon is more than an image. It is a “sacramental form of presence” that makes present that which it signifies (Evdokimov 1976:167). To come before an icon is to come before the presence of God. To gaze at an icon is to pray.

Rublev’s Holy Trinity icon (see frontispiece) is a theology in colour. Inspired by the story in Genesis 18, the icon depicts the three *hypostases* of the Trinity sitting around an altar with a chalice placed on top. The Biblical story is an account of the genuine hospitality that Abraham and Sarah shared with three pilgrims. This theme of hospitality is expressed by the three *hypostases* in the icon who invite the cosmos to share in their love-life.

This research project investigates aspects of the spiritual significance that Rublev’s icon has on our Christian living. To this end, an interpretation of the icon is offered in chapter two. Chapter three focuses on the relationship among the three *hypostases* in the icon. This chapter reflects on the meaning that trinitarian *perichōrēsis* could have on our spiritual living in the way we develop our relationships and the type of church and socio-political structures we adopt and support.

The research project also explores the meaning that Rublev’s icon could have for Methodists. The resource that Wesleyan spirituality offers to those who seek a deepened spirituality is the doctrine of Christian perfection. Perfection, in the Wesleyan model, is sought through the means of grace, nurtured through Christian *koinonia* and evidenced in social transformation. Christian perfection is discussed with reference to Rublev’s icon in chapter four. Chapter five summarises aspects of the spirituality of the icon, postulates some implications that the icon has and unravels key issues arising out of this study.

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## POSITIONING

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The principal thing is to stand before God with the  
intellect in the heart, and to go on standing before  
him unceasingly day and night, until the end of life”

Theophan the Recluse (in Ware 1988:395)

This quote reflects an accurate understanding of prayer in the Orthodox tradition (Ware 1988:395). Theophan’s statement considers three points of significance. First, to pray is to “stand before God”. This implies that prayer is not necessarily asking for things or even speaking. Prayer implies entering into a relationship with God, coming face to face with God (Ware 1988:395). Standing before God, or coming face to face with God, is most profoundly expressed in silence (Ware 1988:395). Second, to pray is to stand before God with the intellect in the heart. The heart is the spiritual centre of a person, the place where created humanity is open to uncreated grace (Ware 1988:395). Theophan makes no clear distinction between mind and body for he says that to pray is to stand “with the intellect in the heart”. In other words, mind and body are united (Ware 1988:395). Third, praying is continual. Theophan teaches that we are to stand before God “unceasingly day and night.” Prayer is not one activity among many but *the* activity that characterises human existence (Ware 1988:395).

To gaze at an icon is to pray. To gaze at an icon is to stand before God with the intellect in the heart. On one level an icon is a picture, yet an icon is far more than a beautiful painting. An icon is a stylised image that is a “kind of window between earthly and celestial worlds” (Evdokimov 1976:166). The etymology of the word ‘icon’ is from the Greek word *eikon* which means image or likeness. The icon is not an idol, but a symbol through which we partake of a more profound reality (Baggley 1987:24-5). Icons are a sacramental form of presence and channels of grace (Evdokimov 1976: 167). The icon has no distinctive value on its own, “but draws the whole of its value from its participation in the wholly other” (Evdokimov 1976:167). In other words, the icon is a symbol that makes present what it signifies. Since an icon contains the presence of that which it signifies, to stand before an icon is “to stand before God”. The purpose of the icon is

prayerful communion, it is a guiding image that leads us into worship (Evdokimov 1976:167).

Rublev's Holy Trinity icon (see frontispiece) is the icon of icons. Those who saw Rublev's masterpiece exclaimed; "truly the heavens are open and the glories of God are revealed" (Evdokimov 1976:167). As we gaze at Rublev's icon, we sense that we are mysteriously drawn to the icon. We intuit that we are an essential part of the polyphony of colours and form. The icon is not just a picture of the triune God but the very presence of God. The Trinity is the unshakeable foundation that unites the individual person and the community

## 1.2 DYNAMICS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

That icons have spiritual significance is understood when they are appreciated not as idols, but as symbols that mediate God's presence to us. In the light of this, the questions that this research project investigates are: (1) What significance, if any, could Rublev's Holy Trinity icon have on our spiritual living? (2) What spiritual significance, if any, could Rublev's icon have for Methodists? In the light of these questions we might consider how a relic from a far away country could have anything to contribute to the spirituality of 21st century South Africans, particularly Methodists. In the first place, the different expressions of Christianity such as Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Presbyterianism, Anglicanism and Methodism are not in themselves problematic. The problem arises when any one particular group claims to represent the only 'truth'. It is my contention that Christian spirituality, which is shaped by denominational affiliation, can be richly influenced through constructive dialogue with other traditions. This research project is such an attempt: it investigates how the spirituality of the Eastern Orthodox church can influence the spirituality of Methodists. The *perichōrēsis* of Rublev's Holy Trinity icon testifies as to how diversity need not imply division and isolation, but rather harmony and unity (see section 3.2.2). Secondly, icons can influence our spirituality. Our togetherness as Christians is characterised by activity and noise; we seem to have neglected the silent and contemplative aspect of our spirituality. In this situation, icons are a call to silence to a spiritually thirsty people. Thirdly, the West has been saturated with rationality; Western Christianity has become rationalistic, intellectual and cerebral (Baggley 1987:2). The effects of the Enlightenment has meant that intuition and mysticism have been relegated to the realms of the unreal. The Eastern Orthodox tradition, with its intuitive and mystical elements, offers a way of balancing the arid intellectualism

of the Western Christian traditions. Fourthly, our world has become prone to dualisms that separate spirit from matter<sup>1</sup>. The search for spirituality often encompasses an unhealthy split between the sacred and the profane, between mind and matter. Eastern Orthodox spirituality emphasises the doctrines of creation and the Incarnation. Eastern Orthodox theologians use these doctrines as a vehicle to perpetuate the interrelatedness of matter and spirit (Baggley 1987:3). Praying through icons affirms that the material world participates in the spiritual world.

The purpose of this chapter is to 'position' the questions of this research project. Section 1.2 offers a definition of an icon and a short description of the process of painting an icon. Section 1.3 situates Rublev's icon within a brief history of icons while section 1.4. equally briefly describes the historical developments from which Rublev's Holy Trinity icon emerged. Section 1.5 'positions' the questions of this research project in our contemporary, secular, political, ecclesial and theological situations.

Chapter two, "penetration", aims to 'penetrate' the meaning of Rublev's Holy Trinity icon and offer an interpretation of the icon. Chapter three, "participation," investigates the perichoretic relationship of the three *hypostases*<sup>2</sup> and offers suggestions as to the significance that participating in this ecstasy of God could have on our spiritual living. Chapter four, "perfection," regards the spiritual significance that Rublev's icon could have for Methodists in the light of the doctrine of Christian perfection. The final chapter, "postulation", summarises aspects of the spirituality of the icon, 'postulates' some implications that the icon has and unravels key issues arising out of this study.

### 1.3 A DEFINITION OF AN ICON

In the introductory comments, it was noted that on one level an icon (*eikon*) is an image or picture. On another level an icon is a sacramental sign, a symbol that allows the beholder to participate in the reality that an icon makes present. An icon is distinguishable from a portrait or a picture by its content (Ouspensky 1978:192). This content "creates specific forms of expression" which characterises an icon and distinguishes it from other art forms (Ouspensky 1978:192).

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<sup>1</sup>One expression of this dualism is Cartesian rationalism that distinguished between *res cogitans* - that which thinks and *res extensa* - that which occupies space. Descartes was unable to explain adequately the relationship between these two parts (Gonzalez 1985:186-188).

<sup>2</sup>The Greek term *hypostases* is used instead of the usual term 'persons' See section 3.2.2.

Firstly, the content of an icon indicates holiness (Ouspensky 1978:192). The effect of divine grace on the human body and on the senses is shown by an icon (Ouspensky 1978:207-8). There is an ontological link between the spiritual experience of Eastern Orthodoxy and the Orthodox icon (Ouspensky 1978:208). In other words, an icon expresses the doctrine of deification (see section 4.2.1.1). Secondly, the content of an icon is a spiritual guide for Christian life and especially for prayer (Ouspensky 1978:210). An icon indicates the attitude we should have towards God and towards the world when we pray (Ouspensky 1978:210). The "icon calls us to the life which the Gospel reveals" (Ouspensky 1978:225).

An icon may be referred to as theology made visible. The tenth century theologians refer to icon-painting as the spiritualisation of matter that reflects the incarnation, the appearance of God on earth (Kala 1993:21). Paul's expression "Christ is the image of the invisible God" offers a christological foundation for the icon (Evdokimov 1990:183). What is meant is that the visible humanity of Christ is an icon of the invisible divinity (Evdokimov 1990:183). In praying through icons we witness the incarnation (Quenot 1992:148). The incarnation of Christ illuminates every aspect of living; even the simple actions of life such as eating and sleeping are capable of transfiguration (1 Corinthians 10:31). The transfiguration that awaits humanity is made possible through the incarnation of the Logos and was prefigured in Christ's transfiguration on Mount Tabor.

The materials used in the painting of an icon participate in the transfiguration of the cosmos. The task of the iconographer is to spiritualise our tangible reality (Quenot 1992:83). To paint an icon is to bring about a transformation of matter (Kala 1993:22). In technical terms, the background of an icon is often called its light (Evdokimov 1990:183). Either red or yellow ochres are used in the gilding process (Quenot 1992:84). Often a white varnish is also used on the background (Quenot 1992:84). In some icons, the entire background is covered with a gold leaf. The artistic method of painting an icon is called "progressive enlightenment" (Evdokimov 1990:183). Wax encaustic, which was the first method employed in icon painting, was replaced by the egg-tempera method where egg yolk was mixed with a little water and painted onto a gesso surface. This technique was used by Rublev in the painting of the Holy Trinity icon. The colours in Rublev's Holy Trinity icon seem to glow with life. Today, the use of oils have almost entirely replaced the egg tempera method, yet oils fail to convey the luminosity and life that the colours of the egg tempera method conveyed (Kala 1993:23).

## 1.4 HISTORICAL POSITIONING OF ICONS

The Christian icon is essentially a synthesis of Roman, Greek and Christian cultures (Quenot 1992:15). The preliminaries to the evolution of the icon take into consideration the Judaic faith because it is the precursor to Christianity and the Greek and Roman cultures (Quenot 1992:16). The evolution of the icon really began in the catacombs of early Christianity and its development was greatly accelerated when Christianity became a state religion.

### 1.4.1 *Judaism*

The Mosaic law (Exodus 25:4) rejects any kind of divine representation. Quenot (1992:16) argues that despite the fear of idolatry, a broad tolerance for images existed in Judaism. For example a third-century (CE) town on the western banks of the Euphrates, Dura-Euphrates, has frescoes decorating the walls of the synagogue. These frescoes never depict the face of God; the presence of God is indicated by either a temple or an ark (Quenot 1992:16). Despite this atypical tolerance iconography has no direct roots in the Judaic faith.

### 1.4.2 *The Greeks and Romans*

Although Greeks venerated the portrait of sovereigns, the philosophers criticised the cult of adoration of the statues (Quenot 1992:16). For the Romans, an emperor's portrait assumed judicial importance in that the portrait amounted to his very presence. Thus every act that was signed before this portrait had the same validity as one signed before the emperor in person (Quenot 1992:16).

### 1.4.3 *The catacombs and the early Christians*

The catacombs mark the beginning of Christian art whose primary purpose was didactic, although this art was also a way of expressing the stirrings of the heart (Quenot 1992:18). Since Christianity was a forbidden religion, the creative use of symbols was a means of communicating what could not openly be portrayed; it was a way of nurturing the faith of neophytes (Quenot 1992:20). One example of this is the Greek word for fish - *ichthys*. *I ch Th y s* was an abbreviation for the dictum

*Iesous Christos Theou Yios Soter* which means Jesus Christ Son of God Saviour (Quenot 1992:20).

#### **1.4.4 Christianity becomes the state religion**

Constantine's victory over Maxentius in 312 CE was attributed to the God of Christians. The Edict of Milan that was passed soon afterwards promoted Christianity to the rank of a state religion. This period represents a flourishing of Christian art and icons as Constantine and emperors after him commanded the construction of many beautifully decorated churches (Quenot 1992:20). During the reign of Justinian I (527-565), the Golden Age, Byzantium developed its definitive form quite distinct from that of the Roman empire (Quenot 1992:22). The Hagia Sophia basilica is an example of church architecture that testifies to the intense spirituality of this time (Quenot 1992:22).

#### **1.4.5 The *Acheiropietos* icon and the *Hodigitria***

There are two traditions as to the origin of the first icon. One tradition holds that the first icon is the Saviour *Acheiropietos* (see plate 1), the icon of Christ that is "made without hands." Christ, who was unable to journey to Edessa to heal King Adgar who suffered from leprosy, sent him a cloth with a miraculous imprint of his face (Baggley 1987:7). The king was healed by the image of Christ on the cloth (Baggley 1987:7). It is possible that many Western-minded Christians would not regard this story as anything more than a legendary narrative but the story has an important implication: in contemplating the icon we are transfigured by the presence of God; in coming before icons we are in Christ's healing gaze.

The second tradition refers to the *Hodigitria* (see plate 2). The arrival of the *Hodigitria* in Constantinople in the later part of the fourth century CE suggests that Christian icons were well established from the first half of the fifth century CE (Quenot 1992:15). This portrait of the Mother and Child is attributed to the so-called first iconographer, the evangelist Luke, who refers to Mary more than any other Gospel writer does (Quenot 1992:15).

These two legends about the *Acheiropietos* and *Hodigitria* reveal important truths about the place

of icons in Orthodox Christianity. Firstly, icons are considered as much a medium of revelation as the written or spoken word (Baggley 1987:9). This is clearly seen in the association of the *Hodigitria* and Luke. Secondly, icons are part of the process whereby the Holy Spirit leads us towards healing and restoration in the image of God, as can be seen when King Adgar is healed by the icon of Christ (Baggley 1987:9).

#### 1.4.6 *The crisis of iconoclasm*

The term 'iconoclasm' describes the breaking of images. The existence of icons was seriously threatened by the rise of iconoclasm which, as a result of the influence of Judaism and Islam, had always had a sporadic influence on the development of Christian icons. The Council of 787 CE settled the iconoclastic controversy which had reached full swing during the reign of Leo III, who rejected any representation of Christ and his saints. The violence of this period meant that many icons were destroyed with the result that few ancient models remain. The final victory of the veneration of icons was in 843, the triumph of Orthodoxy. This is celebrated annually on the first day of Lent as the Feast of Orthodoxy.

In the struggle against iconoclasm, the church had to defend her teaching on salvation (Ouspensky 1983:31 and 1978:180). On the occasion of the triumph of the icon, the kontakion, which is recited at the Feast of Orthodoxy, concisely expresses the economy of our salvation and thereby the teaching on the image and its content (Ouspensky 1983:31 and 1978:180):

No one could describe the Word of the Father;  
But when He took flesh from you, O theotokos,  
He consented to be described,  
and restored the fallen image to its former state  
by uniting it to divine beauty.  
We confess and proclaim our salvation in word and images.

The first part of the kontakion describes the "abasement of the second person of the Holy Trinity" and therefore the christological basis for the icon (Ouspensky 1978:181). The last part of the kontakion is humankind's answer to God; it is a confession of the saving truth of the incarnation and of humankind's participation in the saving work of God (Ouspensky 1983:31 and 1978:181).

## 1.5 HISTORICAL POSITIONING OF RUBLEV'S HOLY TRINITY ICON

In 1551 the Muscovite Council of a Hundred Chapters declared that Rublev's icon of the Holy Trinity was a perfect example of iconic art (Quenot 1992:68). The first definite reference to Andrei Rublev was when he was asked to work with Theophanes the Greek and Prokhor of Gorodets on the Cathedral of the Annunciation at Moscow (Evanov 1988:53). Rublev had studied under Nikon of Radonezh at the monastery of the Trinity and St Sergius which is situated close to Moscow (Kala 1993:75 and Evanov 1988:57). Nikon of Radonezh, who was a disciple and the successor of St Sergius, requested that Rublev paint the Holy Trinity icon to commemorate St Sergius, who was a leader in the monastic revival (Boguslawski 1998:1). At its completion (c.1425), the icon was placed beside the remains of St Sergius who was remembered for his special devotion to the Trinity. Today the icon is in the Tretyakov gallery in Moscow (Kala 1993:75).

The Monastery of the Holy Trinity and St Sergius was a place where ideas of calm, peace, love and spiritual growth were expressed and nurtured (Boguslawski 1998:3). The popularity of the doctrine of the Trinity was not only because of the richness of the doctrine but also because of the political and social turmoil of Russia (Boguslawski 1998:3). The feudal wars were threatening to undermine the weak economy and to make Russia easy prey for her enemies (Boguslawski 1998:3). The Trinity offered a criticism of the feudal divisions and Mongol rule under the Tatar yoke. The undivided Trinity was a way of preaching togetherness and denouncing strife.

The icon is therefore an affirmation of life amid all the forces of death that were threatening Russian life in the time of the Mongol yoke:

Among the restless circumstances of the time, among the discords, the local wars, the general savagery and the Tartar inventions, among the lack of peace that had depraved Russia, there opened to the eye of the soul this infinite, indestructible peace (Voloshinov 1999:103).

In his icon, Rublev expresses the need for one individual to have trust in another and for there to be unity in diversity. Rublev's icon elucidates Christ's high priestly prayer: "I am not asking you to remove them from the world but to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the

world any more than I belong to the world” (John 17:15-16). Nouwen expresses Rublev’s purpose in creating the Holy Trinity icon:

Andrei Rublev painted this icon not only to share the fruits of his own meditation on the mystery of the Holy Trinity but also to offer his fellow monks a way to keep their hearts centred in God while living in the midst of political unrest (Nouwen 1987:20).

## 1.6 CONTEXTUAL POSITIONING OF THE QUESTION

### 1.6.1 *Secular context*

The social situation of human persons in the ‘new’ millennium is one where they experience a continuous bombardment of the senses, in particular the sense of sight. In the modern era, the consciousness of humankind is flavoured by the written word. The invention of the printing press in the fourteen hundreds made this possible, as did various religious movements which furthered education. One such example is the Methodist movement. Part of Wesley’s concern and the practical piety that he taught was the necessity for, and furthering of, literacy; the reading of Scripture was of paramount importance in the sort of spirituality that he was teaching. In today’s society it is the image that dominates: “Images flood our lives” (Quenot 1992:145). Due to the nature of the media and the omnipresent materialism of our age, pictures are replacing the written text. The result of this is that our thought processes surrender more to feeling than to cognitive operations (Quenot 1992:145). The purpose of these images is to make profit; there is therefore little regard for human values. The suggestive use of images can be used against us without us realising it (Quenot 1992:145). Images can prejudice our thoughts, influence our behaviour and in short, deprive us of our personal freedom (Quenot 1992:145). Humanity is influenced by what it contemplates; the icon is a source of purification that helps us develop our interior vision. The spirituality of icons is such that it provides a means of sanctification of the senses and in this way a deepened spirituality. More than that, icons offer a sense of silence, attentiveness and intuition to Protestant churches that is often lacking owing to the emphasis on the proclamation of the Word.

### 1.6.2 Political context

Our political milieu, in many ways, is similar to that of Rublev's. Rublev's society was threatened by divisive feudalism. Our South African society is threatened by race division. The icon preaches unity in diversity and offers a home to live in, amidst the forces of evil and destruction.

In South Africa today, the media is a powerful influence in the propagation of the racism in our country; the media shapes society in the same way that society shapes the media. Sean Jacobs (2000:5) comments that "racism is inextricably part of the media make-up in South Africa in how it perpetuates separate audiences, constructs markets of advertisers, portrays complex processes of political transition and organises its newsrooms". The Oxford dictionary describes racism as a belief in the superiority of a particular race. Margaret Legum, a panellist on the Human Rights Commission in South Africa, defines racism as "the result of a theory or idea that white people are superior to black people (in Steenveld 2000:11). Racism means that people's relationships with each other are defined or influenced by colour. According to the African National Congress white people believe that the stereotypes they have about black people reflect the truth about black people (ANC 2000:21). This is the message that J M Coetzee reflects in his book *Disgrace*.

J M Coetzee's book *Disgrace* tells the story of Professor Lurie, a lecturer at Cape Town University who loses his job as a result of sexual indiscretion with one of his students. In order to escape the subsequent furore, he spends some time with his lesbian daughter, Lucy, on her farm in Salem in the Eastern Cape. During the course of Professor Lurie's stay on his daughter's farm, they are attacked and his daughter is brutally raped by three men. One of the three men turns out to be related to Petrus, the farmworker who assists Lucy on her farm. The insinuation is made that Petrus was somehow responsible for the attack. Lucy falls pregnant as a result of the rape and agrees to marry Petrus and become his second wife.

According to an article by the African National Congress entitled *Stereotypes steer the news* (2000:21), Coetzee's book is a post-apartheid commentary on white people's perception of the black man. The ANC state that white South African society continues to believe that the black African male is:

- immoral
- savage
- violent
- disrespectful of private property
- incapable of refinement through education
- driven by hereditary, dark satanic impulses (ANC 2000:21).

The character Petrus is consistent with what this stereotype dictates and is the embodiment of the fear that white people have, namely that a black African government will mean an increase in crime, corruption and rape, with white women being most threatened (ANC 2000:21).

Eve Bertelsen (2000:20) comments that racism is real, “but that it will always be found to articulate with other powerful forces shaping our social and political life”. For this reason Phumla Mthala (2000:7) expresses that the divisiveness in South Africa is not limited to race, racism and racial stereotypes. She expresses the need for South Africans to address class and gender discrimination by understanding how these “practices of race, gender and class are created, expressed, challenged, reinforced and circulated in our society” (Mthala 2000:7).

Rublev’s Holy Trinity icon denounces divisiveness in whatever form, whether it be racism, sexism or classism. It offers an alternative to divisiveness by calling for individuals to be united in an equal, mutual and inclusive society.

### ***1.6.3 Ecclesial context***

As a Methodist theological student, it is important for me to situate my research project within the context of the spiritual and theological experience of the Methodist Church in Southern Africa. In 1991, a project called *Journey to the New Land* set the course that the Methodist church of South Africa would take in the new era, in the ‘new’ South Africa. The first call on the lives of Methodist Christians, as identified by the people at grass roots level, is the call for deepened spirituality. It is in the context of this call that this research project is situated.

The Wesleyan heritage offers resources for Methodist who search for a deeper spirituality. The framework of spirituality outlined by John Wesley is the doctrine of Christian perfection. Rublev’s icon elucidates the meaning and practical application of Wesley’s doctrine of Christian perfection.

#### 1.6.4 Theological context

“Many people view the theological doctrine of the Holy Trinity as a speculation for theological specialists which has nothing to do with real life” (Moltmann 1981:1). Johnson (1997:302) humorously comments that according to the trinitarian theology, there are five notions, four relations, three persons, two processions, one nature and no sense! One of the major theologians of the twentieth century, Karl Rahner (1970:10), has rightly suggested that most Christians are “mere monotheists.” In practice there is little connection between Trinitarian mystery and Christian faith and spirituality (Rahner 1970 and Moltmann 1981). This development is due, in part, to the fact that the immanent Trinity is divorced from the economic Trinity (Rahner 1970:21). A study of Rublev’s icon of the Trinity illustrates that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity and the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity. The link between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity has significance for spirituality and social transformation.

Cunningham (1998:19) describes a theological renaissance of the doctrine of the Trinity that attempts to address the situation outlined by Moltmann, Johnson and Rahner. He notes that contemporary theology aims to make the doctrine less abstract, more intelligent and more relevant to Christian living. Cunningham (1998:20) comments that positive contemporary contributions to the doctrine of the Trinity have emphasised relationality, explored the practical ramifications of the doctrine and have emphasised the roots of the doctrine in Scripture and not in Plotinus and Plato. Cunningham (1998:50) also highlights the negative aspects of contemporary developments in the field of the doctrine of the Trinity. He notes that contemporary developments in the doctrine of the Trinity have failed to address the problem of gender and have failed to question the relationship between the doctrine of God and the rise of the nation state; particular doctrines of God underwrite particular political structures (see section 3.6.3).

Cunningham (1998) makes the point that contemporary theology brought the Trinity back into fashion. He refers to Lacugna’s article that appeared in the 1986 edition of *Modern Theology* that described a renaissance of the doctrine of the Trinity (1998:19). Cunningham (1998:20) comments that the prevalence of trinitarian studies today has meant that the “phenomenon begins to look not so much as a renaissance but a bandwagon”. Johnson points out that although work on the link

between the Trinity and the mystery of salvation is well under way in theological centres, it is far from finished in terms of the church's preaching, teaching and spirituality (1997:303-4). The gift of the icon in this context is that it offers a way in which laity can access the truths that theologians have been espousing since the renaissance of trinitarian reflection described by Cunningham (1998). The Holy Trinity icon articulates the relationship between the triune God and the lives of Christians and the implications this connection has for the way Christians conduct their lives and which social, political and ecclesial structures they adopt and support.

## **1.7 SUMMATION**

The topic of this research project is Rublev's Holy Trinity icon. The questions that the research project investigates are (1) What significance, if any, could Rublev's Holy Trinity icon have on our spiritual living? (2) What spiritual significance, if any, could Rublev's icon have for Methodists? This chapter offers a definition of an icon and describes the historical situation from which icons emerged generally and from which Rublev's Holy Trinity icon emerged specifically. This chapter also briefly sketches the social setting of the research project. To this end, the social, political, ecclesial and theological contexts of this research project are outlined.

## PENETRATION:

### AN INTERPRETATION OF RUBLEV'S ICON

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

From a distance the icon looks like a red and blue flame (Evdokimov 1990:256). The image is an appropriate one. The I AM who was revealed to Moses at the burning bush is revealed to us in the vision of this icon; we are in the gaze of God gazing on God. As we draw closer and closer to the icon, several features become clearer. In the background we notice a temple, a tree and a distorted rock. In the foreground we are aware of three divine beings in conversation. The image reminds us of the three pilgrims that Abraham and Sarah hosted beneath the sacred oaks of Mamre.

Rublev's Holy Trinity icon can have three levels of interpretation (Evdokimov 1990:246). Firstly, there is the Biblical narrative of the visit of the three angels to Abraham and Sarah at the oak of Mamre. The absence of Abraham and Sarah is an invitation to penetrate the meaning of the icon to a deeper level (Evdokimov 1990:246). The second level is the Holy Trinity in discussion on the redemption of the world. The third level is the cosmos invited to share in the divine love affair. The first part of this chapter highlights the first level of interpretation, namely the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah (section 2.2). The absence of Sarah and Abraham and the distortion of the background elements such as the tent, the oak of Mamre and the rock, are an invitation to penetrate the meaning of the icon further. The second part of this chapter illuminates the meaning of these background elements (section 2.3). The third part of this chapter shows how these background elements, as well as the elements in the foreground, are arranged within the geometry of the icon which structures the icon internally (section 2.4). The fourth part of this chapter reflects on the second level of interpretation, namely the three angels in conversation (section 2.5). The fifth part of this chapter is in reference to the third level of the interpretation; humanity and the cosmos who are invited to share in the ecstasy of the angels. The fifth section of the chapter discusses how Rublev's use of colour and form serve to unite us to the icon (section 2.6 and 2.7).

## 2.2 THE BACKGROUND TO THE ICON - GENESIS 18:1-15

The difficulty in iconography to render the Holy Trinity pictorially arises from the firm belief that God the Creator cannot be represented (Boguslawski 1998:1). God made Godself known to the prophets and patriarchs of the Old Testament, but God still remains a hidden God. Genesis 18:1-15 describes how Abraham was visited by three angels at the oak of Mamre. It is to this story that iconographers turn in depicting the Trinity. In the East this narrative of hospitality has always been regarded as a prefiguration of the Trinity. This notion is reinforced by the fact that the text uses the singular and plural interchangeably (Kala 1993:73). The liturgy of the Eastern Orthodox church affirms this interpretation of Genesis: "Blessed Abraham saw the Trinity and offered food for it, his food, as if to a friend" (Ivanov 1987:57).

In painting<sup>3</sup> this icon, Rublev was required by the tradition of iconography to refer to earlier models of the same icon (see plate 3). Rublev, however, without totally abolishing the historical aspect, developed the dogmatic theme by reducing the Biblical features to a minimum (Ouspensky 1983:201). For example, in his Holy Trinity icon, Rublev eliminates Abraham and Sarah, the servant killing the calf and the food on the table. Symbols such as the mountain are reduced and obscured. This is because Rublev did not want to portray the theme of hospitality as the other iconographers did. He wanted to emphasise the unity and indivisibility of the three *hypostases* of the Trinity (Boguslawski 1998:1). He therefore highlighted the dogmatic meaning of the icon more than the Biblical illustration (Ouspensky 1983:201).

### 2.2.1 *The hospitality of the icon, the Biblical illustration*

The Genesis story of Abraham and Sarah hosting the three pilgrims is a story of hospitality. An inviolable rule of hospitality, in antiquity, was to accept strangers unconditionally. The stranger was viewed as God-sent. The sacred nature of the stranger is based on the belief that we share with him or her the same situation (Kamperidis 1990:4). We are all guests on God's earth; we are partakers and guardians of creation, the household of God (Kamperidis 1990:4). Abraham and

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<sup>3</sup>The etymology of the word iconographer is from two Greek words; *eikon* meaning image and *graphō* meaning to write. An iconographer is therefore someone who 'writes' an image. Some authors refer to an iconographer writing and not painting an icon.

Sarah practised hospitality by accepting the strangers unconditionally, by sharing the gifts of the earth with them and by integrating the lives of the strangers into their own. Their hospitality constitutes the essentials of a eucharistic relationship with the Creator, for by sharing generously with the strangers they offered thanksgiving to God for God's generous provision in their lives. Thus the three strangers are the means through which Abraham and Sarah entered into eucharistic communion with the triune God (Kamperidis 1990:4). There is a complete identification between host and guest, for both guest and host recognise their obligation to behave as guests in the hospitable domain of God (Kamperidis 1990:4).

The hospitality of Abraham and Sarah is clearly depicted in plate three, an earlier model of the Holy Trinity icon. Plate three, from late 14th century Athens, is more often called the "Hospitality of Abraham" (Weitzmann 1978:130-1). An unusual horizontal format was chosen for this icon. This allowed the iconographer to display a broadly laden table which emphasised the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah. The angelic pilgrims visiting Abraham eat the fruits of the earth under the refreshing shade of the oak of Mamre, while Abraham brings water to wash their feet. Kamperidis (1990:5) notes that for those who have not experienced the heat of the noonday sun of the Asian climate, it is difficult to describe the appreciation the sojourners must have felt. The meal that Abraham and Sarah share with the pilgrims describes the hunger that God feels for God's creation and the spiritual hunger of humans that is satisfied at the eucharist (Kamperidis 1990:5-6). The angels sit far apart from each other to allow room for Abraham and Sarah who serve them. A rhythmic pattern is created by contrasting the red garments of the angels with the black robes of the hosts (Weitzmann 1978:131). The horizontal landscape makes for a long architectural backdrop that lacks the depth that Rublev's icon has (Weitzmann 1978:131). This icon shows the influence of the dematerialising process of Palaeologan art; the angels are more slender and their bodies are buried under togas with accumulated crumpled folds (Weitzmann 1978:131). This theme is continued in the garments of Rublev's angels.

Although Rublev eliminated the broadly laden table and Abraham and Sarah from his icon to highlight the dogmatic meaning of the trinitarian *perichōrēsis* more than the Biblical illustration, these elements are still part of the dynamism of the icon and are therefore still present even though they are absent. Rublev's Holy Trinity icon is still an icon of *philoxenia*. The hospitality in Rublev's icon is clearly displayed in the Spirit's hand of hospitable invitation which indicates that

we are invited to become part of the divine circle; God invites us to become part of God.

Rublev's icon of the Holy Trinity binds together the Old Testament church and the New Testament church (Ouspensky 1983:200). Abraham and Sarah's guests become the triune God. The tent becomes the church and the oak of Mamre becomes the tree of life. The calf that was slain in honour of the guests becomes the lamb that was slain for the salvation of the world (Evdokimov 1976:170). The conversation of the three pilgrims becomes the *perichōrēsis* that we are invited to share. The buildings, mountains and vegetation in the Trinity icon are representative of the cosmos that shares in the process of transfiguration (Kala 1993:28). For example, the tree and the mountain bow in reverence and humility towards the central angel.

### 2.3 BACKGROUND FEATURES: TREE, MOUNTAIN AND TEMPLE

Vegetation, mountains and buildings in icons are represented by allusions that defy logic (Kala 1993:36 and Quenot 1992:91). While Western artists remain true to the physical anatomical detail and colours and perspective are true to their surroundings, Eastern iconographers abandon these details and embrace the realm of the spiritual, immaterial and eternal where time and space have no meaning (Quenot 1992:77). This explains the somewhat distorted features of some of the icons. The tree and mountain are portrayed as odd forms that have little in common with the reality that they are meant to represent (Quenot 1992:87). The non-naturalist, unreal features of the architectural design indicate that the event that is being represented is not confined to a particular place and time in history. The distortion of these iconographic symbols serves to highlight their spiritual significance and function (Baggley 1987:83 and Kala 1993:36)<sup>4</sup>. Thus the question of style in iconography is theological rather than aesthetic. The iconographer does depict either the historical event or the person, but does so in such a way as to emphasise its eternal significance and transfiguration (Oleska 1983:46).

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<sup>4</sup>Ouspensky (1978:226) comments that the "strange and unusual character of the icon is the same as that of the Gospel". The Gospel is a challenge to the wisdom of the world. For example, in 1 Corinthians 1:21 Paul quotes "the Lord by the mouth of His prophets" (Ouspensky 1978:226): "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart". In a similar way, the iconographic forms which sometimes border on deformities, offend the so-called 'normal' eye (Ouspensky 1978:226).

### 2.3.1 *The tree*

The tree that is drawn is symbolic of the response of the Spirit and the Redeemer to the Creator; it is therefore positioned between them (Ciobotea and Lazareth 1990:203). The symbol of the tree stands out in the icon because of its brightness of colour and because it has no mirror symmetrical match. The word “symbol” in Greek means to draw together (Baggley 1987:33). Symbols allow us to draw together various levels of interpretation and dimensions (Baggley 1987:33). The symbols in icons are not merely representations of a Biblical theme; there are several layers of meaning, truth and interpretation. On one level, the tree is the oak of Mamre where Abraham and Sarah hosted their three divine guests. On another level the tree becomes the tree of life that is testified to in Genesis and Revelation. In the book of Genesis, Adam and Eve are forbidden to eat of the tree of knowledge and the tree of good and evil. In the Apocalypse the tree of life stands near the water of life. Its leaves are for the healing of the nations. It seems that in the vision of salvation as painted by the author of the Apocalypse, the Old Testament curse on the tree has been removed and eating the leaves of the tree is a journey into healing and wholeness. There is a third level of interpretation of the tree that can be offered. The tree of life is the true vine which is Christ himself, the Father is the vinegrower. The prayer of this icon is John 17, that humankind should be one even as the Father and the Son are one. Christ’s teachings in John 15:4 echoes the prayer of this icon:

Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you abide in me. I am the vine and you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them will bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing (NRSV).

Thus the tree is a symbol of life, of God’s abundant provision, of spiritual growth and healing. It exemplifies the icons’s message that Christ’s followers should abide in the eternal love life of God just as the branches abide in the vine.

### 2.3.2 *The mountain*

In Scripture, mountains play a pivotal role in the development of a plot. Moses, Elijah, Ezekial and Jesus are placed on hills at moments of key importance in their relationship with God. On Mount Sinai Moses receives the ten commandments. Ezekial sees the restored Jerusalem from the top of

a mountain. In the New Testament Christ is transfigured on Mount Tabor and he dies on the Mount of Olives. In Revelation the mountain is the foundation of the sacred city, the New Jerusalem. Some ideas surrounding mountains are based on the theology of the Southern kingdom. Mount Zion, for example, was the place where the two rivers met - it was the abode of El Elyon. In antiquity, the mountain has cosmic significance. It is the paradise of God, the place where heaven and earth meet.

Iconography develops themes that are given in the Scriptures (Baggley 1987:34). Iconographers use the mountain as a symbol of closeness to God, the giving of revelation and to represent an event of profound spiritual significance (Kala 1993:33 and 36). For Christians the significance of the mountain illustrates the spiritual heights of prayer and contemplation that are reached in becoming part of this icon.

### *2.3.3 The house - temple - church*

The architecture in icons, as with the vegetation, is drawn in defiance of human logic (Quenot 1992:91 and Ouspensky 1978:223). Correct proportions are ignored, the height of the buildings do not correspond to the heights of the figures and the representation of the building also do not conform to the laws of gravity (Quenot 1992:91). In other icons, a draped curtain in a building indicates that the scene is taking place inside, by creating a sense of enclosure<sup>5</sup> (Quenot 1992:91). This is the veil that conceals the Holy of Holies of the Old Testament which is opened to reveal God's message to the world (Kala 1993:26). Rublev has remained true to this theme by painting the underside of the church structure a faint red.

A common feature in icons is the presence of a dark cave (Kala 1993:33). This symbolises the cosmos in darkness that awaits divine revelation (Kala 1993:33). In the icon of the Holy Trinity the dark doors of the church, like the caves in other icons, are a reminder of Christ and revelation (Kala 1993:33). The black of the night promises the dawn of light and can symbolise a time of transition leading to new life (Kala 1993:33). The black doors promise that sharing in the Trinity is the transition that leads to new life.

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<sup>5</sup>The red cloth that is draped across a building to enhance the sense of enclosure is particularly clear in the right hand corner of the Athenian icon of the hospitality of Abraham (plate three).

As with the other symbols, the temple in the backdrop has multi-layered meanings. On one level the building is the tent of Sarah and Abraham. On another level it is the temple. The temple in Scripture is a symbol of the place where God and God's people meet (Baggley 1987:35). In Revelation for example, the opening chapters describe that the vision took place in the temple. On a further level, the temple, as the extension of Christ's incarnation (Evdokimov 1990:250), is the church, the body of Christ.

Besides the visible symbols in the icon of the Trinity, the hidden geometrical structures also contribute to the message of the icon through their symbolic function. Abraham's hut, the oak tree and the rock are visible symbols of the gradations of Divine knowing that are placed within a hidden circle (Ivanov 1987: 57). Their meaning is further accentuated by internal structures such as the triangle, the rectangle, the octagon and the cross.

## 2.4 GEOMETRY (see plate 7)

The mood of the icon is contemplative, detached and meditative. This sense of stillness and inner recollection that the icon conveys is the same message of watchfulness and attentiveness that the monastic traditions preach (see section 2.6.1). This sense of stillness is achieved through the application of techniques in the design which create harmony and order (Kala 1993:34). The circle, the cross, the octagon, the rectangle and the triangle are geometric forms that structure the icon from within (Evdokimov 1990:249).

### 2.4.1 *The rectangle* (see plate 7a)

The rectangle that is painted on the lower part of the altar-table is the hieroglyph for the earth (Evdokimov 1990:249). The four points of the rectangle refer to the four points of the compass. The rectangle is symbolic of universality. According to the early church fathers, the number four represents the fullness of the four Gospels (Evdokimov 1990:250); the four corners of the altar-table on which the rectangle is painted are symbolic of the completeness of the four Gospels described by the early church fathers. The rectangular hieroglyph contained within the rectangular altar describes how the four Gospels go out into the four corners of the earth. The rectangle speaks about the narrow road leading to the house of God; according to the Gospel, "the gate is narrow ... that leads to life (Matthew 7:14). For Nouwen (1987:24), the rectangle is the road of

suffering and self-sacrifice (Nouwen 1987:24). For St Macarius the Great, the rectangle is the path which leads to the narrow gate (Ouspensky 1978:225). The rectangle could therefore be an analogy of spiritual progress. The beginning of this spiritual journey, for which the rectangle is a symbol, is *metánoia*. The authentic meaning of *metánoia* is “the reversal of the intellect” (Ouspensky 1978:225) or a change of heart.

#### 2.4.2 *Cross-axial symmetry* (see plate 7b)

The use of axial symmetry, where a strong central line forms the organisational centre around which the other elements of the icon are arranged, instills calmness and harmony to the icon. The central angel is the organisational centre providing stability, balance and focus (Baggley 1987:80). The central angel's halo, the chalice and the earth's hieroglyph are all found on the same vertical axis that divides the icon in two (Evdokimov 1990:251). This vertical axis shows that the left and right sides of the Trinity are mirror symmetrical: The faces and outlines of the left and right angels coincide exactly and the mountain and temple are mirror symmetrical. This mirror symmetry, which instills an atmosphere of equilibrium and stability, is broken by the outline of the central angel who imparts energy to the icon. The inclined head of the central angel leans away from the vertical axis to the left (Ouspensky 1983:202). The chalice that the angel points to is shifted off-centre to the right (Evdokimov 1990:251). The oak of Mamre also has no mirror symmetrical match and therefore underlines the asymmetry of the centre (Voloshinov 1999:103:113). The luminous circles of the left and right angels form a horizontal line. Gradually a cross becomes visible with the vertical beam formed by the central angel, rectangle and chalice and the horizontal beam formed by the heads of the outer angels. The cross is formed and inscribed in the sacred circle of divine life<sup>6</sup>. The cross is the living axis of trinitarian life and love (Evdokimov 1990:251).

#### 2.4.3 *The circle* (see plate 7c)

The Circle, which can be traced along the exterior contours of the angels, is the basic form of the icon and distinguishes it from other icons (Ouspensky 1983:201). Since time immemorial the circle has been regarded as the most perfect shape, possessing the highest degree of central symmetry (Voloshinov 1999:103-113). The circle is the unifying structural feature that holds all the elements

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<sup>6</sup>The cross within the circle recalls the text in John 12:32 “When I be lifted up I will draw all people to me.”

of the icon in harmonious order and balance. It creates a sense of controlled energy that is held in tension (Baggley 1987:80). It is this hidden circle, uniting all the elements in a single flowing movement, that gives structure to the icon. The effect of this inner circle is to direct attention to the inner work of prayer and transfiguration to which all humankind is called (Kala 1993:35). The three angels are united in the smooth flowing movement of profound peace and complete each other in an endless circle of communion and ecstasy (Ouspensky 1983:201 and Kala 1993:75). The movement that is introduced into the icon begins at the feet of the right angel and comes to rest at the left angel (Evdokimov 1976:168). This circular movement describes the eternity of the icon, it irresistibly includes in its energy the rock, the church and the tree (Evdokimov 1976:168). St Dionysius the Areopagite notes that circular movement signifies that God remains identical to Godself and that God recalls to Godself all that has gone forth from God (Ouspensky 1983:202).

The centre of this circle is the hand of the central angel that points to the chalice which is the key to the icon (Evdokimov 1976:168).

#### **2.4.4 *The octagon*** (see plate 7d)

The theme of the octagon is a logical continuation of the theme of the circle. The contours of the thrones, footrests, temple and mountain form an octagon. The octagon is the symbol for the eighth day which is associated with eternity. According to the philosophy of Rublev's time, the earth was octagonal (Evdokimov 1976:168). The circle of the angels is contained within the octagon that is drawn with earthly elements: the tree, the mountain and the building. This communicates how the divine world embraces the earthly world.

#### **2.4.5 *The triangle and inverse perspective***

There are two triangles within the internal structure of Rublev's icon. A line drawn from the points of the altar-table to a point above the head of the central angel forms an equilateral triangle (Evdokimov 1990:251). The triangle is a sign of the equality and unity of the three *hypostases* of the Trinity. A second triangle is formed by the two heads of the angels on the left and right. The third point is the beholder (see plate 7e). This technique is referred to as inverse perspective and has the effect of abolishing depth, distance and the horizon. The use of inverse perspective brings the vision of the triune God right before the beholder and communicates that God is here and now:

the beholder is in the gaze of God (Bell 1994:7).

According to the laws of optics, the lines of perspective converge in the distance, the dimensions of objects decrease the further back they are in the picture (Ouspensky 1978:224). With inverse perspective the line does not converge in the distance but in front of the icon. Plate 7f demonstrates the difference between normal perspective and inverse perspective. The use of inverse perspective places the converging point in the eye of the beholder, making the beholder feel essential to the completion of the icon (Ouspensky 1978:224). In doing so it establishes a communion between the event represented by the icon and those who stand before it. The icon is "made present" to those who contemplate it. The distortion of normal perspective is used to indicate that our everyday world is also the scene where the Divine continues to work, moment by moment (Kala 1993:35 and Bagglely 1987:81). The world of matter is the context in which the inner and spiritual world moves, lives and has its being.

#### 2.4.6 *The chalices* (see plate 7g)

The calm and peace that is created by the circle, axial symmetry and octagon cannot last forever. At the centre of the icon is the chalice; it is the chalice that moves us into action. The emphasis of the chalice is reinforced by the vertical lines of the Christ figure which draw attention to the chalice. The chalice is made to stand out even further by the contrast of the white altar with the density of the red and blue colours of Christ. The chalice is the central aspect in the composition. It is the force that unites and illuminates the Trinity. The hands of all three angels are directed towards the chalice. This is not, however, the only chalice. The interior contours of the outer angels form the second chalice (Voloshinov 1999:103-113). The third chalice is formed by the outer contours of the left and right angels and their thrones (Voloshinov 1999:103-113).

What is the significance of these three chalices? Voloshinov (1999:103-113) argues that while the first cup represents Abraham's cup of faith, the second cup represents God's sacrifice of love for humanity. The first cup contains the head of a lamb. The second cup contains the central angel - Christ. The third cup is the Trinity's sacrifice for the hope of salvation (Voloshinov 1999:103-113). The third chalice is made up by the Trinity and contains the Trinity (Voloshinov 1999:103-113). This third chalice describes the divine movement of the Trinity into the world in order to involve the world in the economy of God (Voloshinov 1999:103-113). It seems that what the icon

is communicating is that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity. The three cups are the infused graces of faith, hope and love.

## 2.5 THE ANGELS

The angels are quiet and gentle, yet anxious and sorrowful. They are neither male nor female. The angels are grouped according to the *isocephalous* principle; they sit side by side to show that they are of equal rank (Ouspensky 1983:201). Their equality is also signified by the rod that each angel carries. Rublev depicts all three angels as equal to challenge the antitrinitarians (Boguslawski 1998:2). Although the angels are all equal, their attitudes are different (Hackel 1954:10). The heads of the two angels on the right incline towards the angel on the left whose head is inclined towards the central angel. The right-hand angel leans forward as an offering of the self (Hackel 1954:10). The bowed figures show reverence and humility.

The three angels represent the three *hypostases* of the Trinity. Who is who in the Trinity? The equality of the angels is so strongly emphasised that no clear rule is defined for saying which divine *hypostasis* is represented by which angel. The identity of the three angels is open to interpretation (Evdokimov 1990:252).

According to one school of thought, the angel on the left represents Christ, the angel on the right is the Spirit while the Creator holds centre stage (Evdokimov 1990:248-252). Evdokimov (1990:252) argues that the Creator is the central angel at the altar and the Spirit and the Son, as the two hands of the Father, sit on either side: the Spirit on the left and the Word on the right. Evdokimov's argument can be supported by the Nicene creed that proclaims that Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father<sup>7</sup>. The basis for his argument (Evdokimov 1990:248-9) is the testimony of Stephen of Perm who was a contemporary of Sergius of Radonezh and an older contemporary of Rublev. St Stephen is said to have carried an icon of the Trinity with him on his mission to the area of Great Permia. The icon which St Stephen carried to the Zyrianese people, who lived in the region of Great Permia, is similar to the one that Rublev painted (Evdokimov 1990:248). Each angel in St Stephen's icon is identified by an inscription (Evdokimov 1990:248).

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<sup>7</sup>"On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father."

The Zyrian name *py* identifies the angel on the left as the Son (Evdokimov 1990:248). The middle angel is identified as the Father with the Zyrian letter *Ai* (Evdokimov 1990:248). The Spirit, *puiltos*, is the angel on the right (Evdokimov 1990:248). Evdokimov (1990:248) further argues his case by noting that the icon can be divided into three vertical panels (see plate 7h). The background elements interpret the angel in the foreground within each vertical panel. The sceptre of Christ points to the body of Christ - the Church. The temple-church in the background deciphers the angel on the left as Christ. The sceptre of the Creator points to the tree of life. This is a valid association since the tree of life in the Garden of Eden is associated with the Creator as is the tree of life in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21 and 22). The Spirit's sceptre points to the "scarpd rocks" which, according to Evdokimov, are symbolic of ecstasy, prophetic heights and the "breath of spaces" reached in contemplation (1990:249). Evdokimov (1990:256) hypothesises that the densities of colours and the darkness of light of the central angel describe the inaccessibility of the Creator who is revealed in the softened, luminous colours of the Word and the Spirit. The Spirit's head tilts between the gaze of the other two angels. The Spirit is the Spirit of circumincession. The Spirit is the love-bond binding the Creator to the Redeemer and the Redeemer to the Creator. The Spirit's arm refers to the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Evdokimov 1990:255).

Evdokimov's hypothesis can be further supported by Voloshinov (1999:103-113) who speculates about the philosophy of the geometry of Rublev's icon. Voloshinov (1999) argues that while mirror-symmetrical entities imply passivity, an asymmetrical entity connotes activity. He states that the asymmetrical angel in the centre (see section 2.4.2) is the source of energy and the source of existence in Rublev's icon (Voloshinov 1999:103-113). The angel is revealed through the two angels on either side who listen to her in immovable mirror-symmetrical equilibrium. According to the philosophy of the geometry, the central angel could be the first *hypostasis* of the Trinity.

Another school of thought regards Christ as the central angel. Ouspensky (1983:202)<sup>8</sup> argues that the angels are grouped according to the article of the creed from left to right: I believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. In this case the icon has a christological centre, with the Creator on the left and the Spirit on the right. Ouspensky (1983:202) argues his case by

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<sup>8</sup>Ivanov (1987:57) also contends that the central angel is Christ: "This iconographic translation endows Rublev's central angel with the attributes of Christ: the clavus and a cruciform halo."

remembering the reluctance of Eastern Orthodox Christians to depict the first person of the Trinity. The Word of God has become incarnate. Iconographers can reflect the image of Christ in icons. God the Creator, however, remains Unseen and Unknowable. The incommunicability of God the Creator is reflected in Rublev's indecisive use of colour for the angel on the left (Ouspensky 1983:202). The angel wears a garment of an indefinite pale pink-brownish colour over a toga of blue-green light (Ouspensky 1983:202). The precision, clarity and brightness of the central angel contrasts the indefinite hues of the angel on the left. The bright and bold maroon and blue are the customary colours used to depict the Son (Ouspensky 1983:202).

Ouspensky's (1983) argument for Christ's position at the centre of the icon can be further supported by the following six ideas. First, the blue and red robes of the central angel are the colours usually associated with Christ (Ouspensky 1983:202). The red-maroon colour shows his human nature while the blue suggests his divine nature<sup>9</sup>. Second, the two fingers that Christ holds up in blessing the chalice are also symbolic of Christ's two natures. Icons of Christ all feature the two fingered blessing<sup>10</sup>. Third, the testimony of a replica of the Rublev icon helps show that the central angel is Christ. This replica of the Holy Trinity was painted in the Novgorod School in the late fifteenth century (Baggley 1987:112), not long after Rublev completed his masterpiece. The central angel is clearly identified as Christ by the inscription *ic xc* and the cross inscribed in the halo (plate six). Fourth, in response to Evdokimov's contention that Christ is "seated at the right hand of the Father", it can be said that the purpose of the icon is to invite us to share in the Trinity and so when we accept the Spirit's invitation to kneel at the altar, Christ within us is seated at the right hand of the Father. Fifth, Rublev's icon is an externalisation of the hesychast tradition (see section 2.6.1). Christ's centrality in the icon is suggested by hesychasm. Hesychasm means stillness, rest and inner peace (Behr-Sigel 1992:64). The hesychast fathers taught that it is through

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<sup>9</sup> Two examples are given of Christ wearing the customary red and blue garments. The first example, the "raising of Lazarus" is an example of an early model. The "Christ Pantocrator" is an example from a later period.

Plate four shows the raising of Lazarus. The icon is from the first half of the twelfth century and was completed either at Cyprus or at Sinai (Weitzmann 1978:76). The Christ figure is identified by the red and blue garments, by the blessing of his right hand and the scroll he carries in his left hand. Christ is also pointed out by St Peter and Lazarus' sisters who genuflect before him.

Plate five portrays the icon of the Christ Pantocrator who wears the customary colours of a red chiton with a blue toga. This seventeenth century icon is from the Moscow School. What is accentuated in the facial expression is the tenderness and inexhaustible mercy of the Pantocrator - the one who holds all things in being (Kala 1993:70-71).

<sup>10</sup>Plates four and five serve as examples of the two fingered blessing associated with Christ.

stillness and contemplation that Christ's followers can aspire to unity with God (Behr-Sigel 1992:64). An important element of hesychasm was the Jesus prayer. Through the Jesus prayer humankind 'has access to Christ' and through Christ humankind has 'access' to the Trinity. Christ's centrality in the icon is therefore indicated by the hesychast tradition which Rublev phenomenalises in the Holy Trinity icon. Finally, the identity of the Central angel as Christ is implied by the internal geometrical structure of the icon. Section 2.4.7 describes how a chalice is formed by the interior contours of the left and right angels (Voloshinov 1999:103-113). This chalice contains the middle angel - Christ.

The debate as to who is who in the Trinity is somewhat thwarted when it is pointed out that when believers stand before the icon in the gaze of God, they will intuitively determine the identity of the angels according to their personal and particular noetic coincidence with the Trinity icon. So for some believers, the left angel might be Christ, for others Christ is the central angel or the one on the right. Furthermore, the identity of the angel can change according to the changing spirituality and growth in grace of those who pray through Rublev's icon. For the purposes of this research project the central angel in Rublev's icon will represent Christ, the right angel will represent the Creator and the left angel the Spirit.

Rublev's icon shows the Creator, Redeemer and Spirit in a relationship of self-giving love. Their relationship expresses diversity and unity. The use of light and colour in Rublev's icon as well as the gestures of the angels all reflect different aspects of their unity and diversity and work to invite the beholder to become a part of that unity and diversity. The next two sections describe how Rublev's use of light and colour, as well as the features and forms of the angels, serve to invite the beholder to participate in the icon.

## **2.6 THE USE OF LIGHT AND COLOUR**

Light is the predominant theme of iconography (Quenot 1992:106). Colours are refractions of pure light. Iconographic colours, which seem to emit their own light, are a language of their own (Evdokimov 1990:255). The use of light and colour in the icon creates the awareness that the beholder is contemplating a world that is not illuminated by external light, for that creates shadows. What the beholder is being drawn to is a world that is illuminated by the light of grace

which transforms those who contemplate the icon (Baggley 1987:81). Neoplatonic philosophy emphasised the role that light plays as the mediator between the world of spirit and matter. The use of colours by the iconographer mediates the world of the spirit to those who behold icons. It takes them to a point where they share in the transfigured creation (Baggley 1987:81).

### **2.6.1 Rublev's icon as a theology of light**

The theology of the icon is based on the Palamite distinction between divine essence and energy (Evdokimov 1990:185). Gregory of Palamas describes the distinction: "God is called light not according to his essence but according to his energies" (Evdokimov 1990:185). In Eastern Orthodox spirituality, to be deified<sup>11</sup> means to contemplate uncreated light and to allow it to penetrate us. Gregory Palamas taught that humankind has received the order to become God by grace; having come close to the light the soul is transformed into light (Evdokimov 1990:185). In other words, participation in the divine energy leads a person to become light (Quenot 1992:153). The spiritual life in Moscow in the mid-thirteenth century discovered an inner affinity to the hesychast tradition (Evanov 1988:50). Hesychasm is stillness that facilitates the process of divinisation. The hesychasts aimed at discovering an inner capacity in humanity to receive divine light (Evanov 1988:50). The Palamite theology which taught contemplation of the Divine light contrasted the humanistic atmosphere of Constantinople which favoured refined literary and artistic culture (Evanov 1988:50). The hesychast tradition describes the human person's intoxication with God, the experience of the indwelling Trinity that has a contemplative orientation and finds perfection in humanity's perfect love of God and neighbour (Maloney 1981:12). The way to achieve this stillness is through the Jesus prayer.

Jesus sits at the centre of the icon because it is through the Jesus prayer that our hearts are purified, that our minds become attentive. The Jesus prayer is the prayer of the heart, the prayer of one's whole being (Baggley 1987:64) The usual form of this prayer is "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner." Gradually the prayer is shortened until just the name of Jesus is repeated. The hesychasts, in practising pure prayer, progressed towards a vision of divine light which is the uncreated grace, light or energy of God (Mantzaridis 1984:96). The light seen by the disciples on Mount Tabor and the light of the hesychasts is the light of the Kingdom of God (Mantzaridis 1984:104).

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<sup>11</sup>See section 4.2.1.1 for an explanation on deification.

The work of Rublev is an externalisation of the hesychastic tradition that was developed through Sergius and his disciples (Baggley 1987:68). In the icon of the Holy Trinity an inner luminosity permeates matter. The icon reflects and mediates stillness and attentiveness which lies at the heart of hesychasm (Baggley 1987:68). Rublev's icon is a means of entering stillness of heart where God can be known and loved (Kala 1993:37). The world participates in the light of the icon and is deified by that participation (Quenot 1992:89). Refractions of this light are colours. The refraction of light into its constituent colours could represent the principle of unity in diversity.

### 2.6.2 Colours

All three of the angels wear blue togas. Blue is the deepest most immaterial of all colours. It is the colour of the heavens. Dark blue is symbolic of the mystery of divine life. The blue togas point firstly to the divinity of the three angels. The blue togas are also a dogmatic reference the one *ousia* shared by the three *hypostases*. The equality of the Creator, Redeemer and Spirit is indicated by the blue togas that all three angels wear.

The blue toga depicts the equality of the angels, yet they are not deprived of individuality. The complimentary colours that harmonise with the blue togas differentiate the angels and describe the perichoretic relationship of the three *hypostases* of the Trinity.

The colour of the Creator's garments are difficult to define. Ouspensky (1983:202) argues that the sober and indefinite hue of the left angel's upper garment corresponds to the reserved and reticent way in which the Creator is referred to in the creed. He describes the upper garment as a pale-pink coat with brown and blue-green highlights (Ouspensky 1983:202).

The central angel wears garments that are purple-red and blue. The purple-red colour has close links with blood - the principle of life. Red has a terrestrial character and is the colour of wealth, love and war (Quenot 1992:108 and 112). Red is symbolic of life. The red and blue garments of the central angel portray contrasting spiritual themes, but harmonise beautifully. The two colours indicate the two natures that are united in the one *hypostasis*; red is symbolic of the humanity of

Christ while blue signifies his divinity<sup>12</sup> (Ouspensky 1983:202). Dionysius the Areopagite considers that the red chiton and blue cloak of the second angel means “youth and fullness of powers” (Ouspensky 1983:202).

Situated between the coolness of blue and the warmth of red is green, the colour of the outer garment of the Spirit. Green is a balance between blue and yellow which represents calmness and stability. Green is a symbol of revival. It is the colour of the plant world and reminds us of springtime, growth and renewal. It is the appropriate colour for the third person of the Trinity to whom the process of sanctification, growth and revival is ascribed.

The three angels are encapsulated by golden wings. While other colours are refractions of light, gold is pure light (Quenot 1992:108). Gold, the Divine light, is unalterable and denotes the eternal life (Quenot 1992:108). The gold speaks of the super-abundance of Trinitarian life to which all people are invited (Evdokimov 1990:256).

As a symbol of their holiness, the angels are surrounded by a white halo. In strict terms, white is not actually a colour, it is the sum of all colours. White has connotations of purity and it is the colour of Divine wisdom and complete knowledge (Quenot 1992:112)<sup>13</sup>.

Rublev’s use of light and colour communicates the divine life to the beholder. In a similar fashion, the Fathers of the Church believed that the senses are the doors of the soul (Quenot 1992:97). Those who gaze prayerfully at the icon of the Holy Trinity become aware that the features of the figures illustrate the way of contemplation. The forms and facial expressions of the figures are the door to their souls. Through this door that is opened to the beholder, the beholder contemplates God.

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<sup>12</sup>Evdokimov (1990:255) argues that the central angel is God the Creator. For him the colours do not signify the humanity and divinity of Christ; rather deep purple is the colour of heavenly love and blue is the colour of heavenly truth.

<sup>13</sup>Baptism, for the early Christians, was called illumination. The newly baptised were clothed in white as a sign of their new life in Christ (Quenot 1992:112).

## 2.7 THE FEATURES AND FORMS OF THE ANGELS

The angels have elongated bodies. Their bodies are fourteen times the size of their heads as opposed to the normal dimension of seven times (Evdokimov 1990:246). The elongated bodies suggest that the three figures are spiritualised beings (Evdokimov 1990:246). The bodies in Rublev's icon disappear behind Roman togas. These togas cloak bodies that have been transfigured and shine with translucent colours and light. The drapes in the clothing not only express physical movement but also the spiritual activity of the entire person (Quenot 1992:92). The vertical lines of the folds of the robes and the rods suggest the movement of earth to heaven and heaven to earth (Hackel 1954:10). The dematerialised figures are shown in silhouette. The blue light that silhouettes the angels emphasises the work of attentiveness, contemplation and stillness that leads to transfiguration (Kala 1993:38). To show that they belong to the heavenly world, the three persons of the Trinity are depicted as winged angels (Ouspensky 1983:200). An immaterial and weightless vision is created through the elongated, winged angels whose feet hardly seem to touch the footrests (Evdokimov 1990:246). The sense of weightlessness serves to give the feeling that the beholder is rising to heaven in the limitless spaces of God's heart (Evdokimov 1990:252). The triune God exists for the sake of humankind. Rublev therefore turns the Trinity to face the audience. The frontality of the three persons attracts the beholder to the angels and opens their inner life to those who come prayerfully before the Rublev's icon (Quenot 1992:94).

The face is the centre of the body and so dominates everything else (Quenot 1992:93). Faces in icons are rarely ordinary portraits (Quenot 1992:93). This is because the iconographer aims to depict the divine presence within the being (Quenot 1992:93). Since the circle is the emblem of perfection, the heads of the angels are painted in the shape of a circle to show that they are symbols of divine grace (Kala 1993:25). The almost identical faces of the three angels suggest that they share a single *ousia*. If the beholder looks closely at the faces of the angels depicted in Rublev's icon, he or she will notice that only the lower half of the ear is uncovered. In other icons the interiorised ears listen to the commandments of God (Quenot 1992:97). In Rublev's icon, the angels are listening to the intimate conversation of which they are all a part. They also listen to the words that we speak as we become part of the conversation. The dialogue that is taking place is the source of unity between the three *hypostases* and the source of our unity with them. The eyes

of the angels gaze into eternity<sup>14</sup>. The eyes of the Redeemer and the Spirit gaze into the Creator while the Creator looks lovingly at the Redeemer. The angels' thin and elongated noses afford a nobility to their character (Quenot 1992:97). The nose smells the sweet scent of Christ (Quenot 1992:97)...The mouth is reduced to a finely drawn geometrical shape in order to reduce its sensuality (Quenot 1992:97). The lips are closed, for true contemplation is through silence (Quenot 1992:97).

The gestures of the hands in icons are eloquent. The simple gesture of pointing can draw attention to either a person or a mystery that is at the heart of the icon (Kala 1993:37). In Rublev's icon of the Holy Trinity, the gestures of the hands of the angels draw attention to the chalice. The hand that is blessing the cup is the centre of attention; its emphasis is reinforced by the straight lines of the altar (Evdokimov 1990:252) and by the lines in the drapes of the togas. The chalice at the centre of the icon is the uniting force. Recent research has discovered the contents of the cup: the later layer, representing a bunch of grapes, hid the original design which depicted the head of a lamb<sup>15</sup> (Evdokimov 1976:168). The gestures of the angels' hands reveal the significance of the lamb in the chalice in different ways. The Redeemer points to it indicating his mission to be the sacrificial lamb through his incarnation and death. Through his sacrificial death on the cross, the Redeemer is the High Priest wearing the golden stole as the sign of his glory and of his sacrificial love (Ciobotea and Lazareth 1990:203). The Creator sacrifices the Redeemer as life for the world<sup>16</sup>. The Creator also blesses both the Redeemer and the Spirit in their mission to involve the cosmos in the economy of the Trinity. The Spirit, by pointing to the square in the altar, indicates that the lamb in the chalice is the sacrifice for the world (Voloshinov 1999: 103-113). The gesture of the Spirit's right hand also invites beholders to take their place at the altar and become part of the intimate conversation that is taking place. The Spirit's rod is at a diagonal angle. A diagonal movement in an icon can denote either a spiritual journey or else depict an incarnational movement

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<sup>14</sup> Psalm 25:15: "My eyes gaze continually at the Lord."  
 Luke 2:30: "My eyes have seen thy salvation."

<sup>15</sup>The lamb in the chalice links the icon with the Apocalypse (Evdokimov 1990:247). The lamb's head in the chalice might startle Westerners but would not repulse those who practice African traditional religions. In African traditional religions, sacrificial slaughtering is a central theme.

<sup>16</sup> John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son so that whoever believes in him will not die but have eternal life."

of divine grace from the heavenly world to the earthly realm (Kala 1993:34). In Rublev's Holy Trinity icon, the diagonal movement is the movement of God's grace to God's people in order that they may partake of the Divine economy, it is also a demonstration of the spiritual journey of transfiguration the beholder makes in contemplating this icon. It is appropriate that it is the Spirit who invites us to become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). By extending the invitation to become part of the *perichōrēsis*, the Spirit is the love-bond that unites us to God through Christ.

## 2.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

We are invited by the hand of the Spirit to take our place at the altar on which is painted the hieroglyph of the earth as this is the place that has been reserved for us. As we share in the ecstasy of the Divine *hypostases*, we look down and notice the chalice. We are reminded that it is through the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ that we are able to accept the invitation of the Spirit and be united to the Godhead. The chalice reminds us of the words of Christ that unless we drink of his blood we will have no part of him<sup>17</sup>.

Kneeling before the altar, lifting our gaze from the chalice to the Christ figure we gaze in grateful adoration to the one whose sacrifice made it possible for us to be there. In this moment of wonder and ecstasy we follow the gaze of the angel on the right who gazes at the angel on the left. Through this gazing we are struck by the hidden cross. We remember the words of Christ beseeching us to deny ourselves and take up the cross. We are interrogated also by the words of Mark's Gospel (10:35-45) "Can you drink the cup?" We are aware that there is a joyful-sorrow in being part of the never-ending circle of loving and being loved. This explains the sense of joy and sadness intertwined in the single expression of the central angel. In the energy of this circle we are inspired that the rock, the tree and the building are part of the circle of grace and therefore a part of us. As we follow the movement of the Spirit through the rock of spiritual heights and closeness to God, we pause for a moment at the tree which is planted near Christ. Christ said that he is the vine and we are the branches. We are asked to remain in him and to bear much fruit. In remaining in Christ, we become the fruit of the tree that is given for the healing of the nations.

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<sup>17</sup>John 6:53 "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you will have no life in you" (NRSV).

Abiding in Christ is the way in which Christ's high priestly prayer is answered: "... that they may all be one. As you Father are in me and I am in you may they also be in us so the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). Passing through the temple of God's presence to the vinegrower, we find ourselves back at the altar at the right hand of the Creator. We acknowledge that it is Christ within us seated at the right hand of the Father<sup>18</sup>. We meditate further that the I AM which is God the Creator coincides with the I AM which is Christ which in turn coincides with the I am that we are. In this eternal circle of I AM, of loving and being loved, we are lifted up and held secure by the movement from the Creator to the Redeemer and the movement of both Redeemer and Spirit to the Creator (Nouwen 1987:21).

The three chalices of faith, hope and love invite us to action. In the same way that God goes out from Godself, so too are we expected to live the *perichōrēsis* in self-emptying, self-sacrificing love in the world. In our commitment and struggle for peace and justice and as we are part of the ambiguities of community life, we never leave the home of perfect love (Nouwen 1987:20). Contemplating Rublev's Holy Trinity icon is a way in which we can remain united to the divine life while still engaging in the struggles of a hate-and-fear-filled world (Nouwen 1987:20).

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<sup>18</sup> Colossians 1:27 "To them God chose to make known how great among the gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (NRSV).

**PARTICIPATION:**  
**THE PERICHŌRĒSIS OF RUBLEV'S HOLY TRINITY**  
**ICON**

### 3.1 INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

The previous chapter offered an interpretation of Rublev's Holy Trinity icon. This chapter asks what significance the icon could have for spiritual living. As we gaze at the icon, our gaze becomes our prayer. This silent prayer allows our inner restlessness to melt away as we are lifted up in a circle of love; a circle that cannot be broken by the powers of fear, hatred and violence. This circle of love has no boundaries; it embraces everyone who chooses to dwell there. It is this circle of love, the relationship between the three angels, that fashions our spirituality.

### 3.2 *PERICHŌRĒSIS*

The energy in Rublev's icon elucidates a fundamental teaching of the Fourth Gospel recorded in 10:30, 14:10, 14:11 and 17:20. These verses testify to Christ's awareness of the radical union that he shares with the Creator: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" and "the Father and I are one." The energy of the icon is expressed in the gestures of the angels, the inclination of their heads and their postures (Ouspensky 1983:202). Through the movement of the three figures, Rublev expresses the mystery of *perichōrēsis*. This action creates a motionless peace - the three angels are at rest. The rest is intoxicating because of the authentic ecstasy of the angels. The greatest paradox is that this stability and movement are the same thing (Gregory of Nyssa in Evdokimov 1990:247). The doctrine of *perichōrēsis* epitomises this paradox.

#### 3.2.1 *Etymology of the term 'perichōrēsis'*

The term *perichōrēsis* was first used by Gregory Nazianzen to express the way in which the divine and human nature of Christ coinhere in one person without the integrity of either being diminished by the presence of the other (Torrance 1996:102 and 170). Later the term was used to describe

how the three *hypostases* in the one God mutually indwell one another while remaining distinct from one another. The effect of defining *perichōrēsis* as the mutual coinherence of the *hypostases* of the Trinity was that the notion could no longer be applied to the hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ without serious damage to christology. The unqualified application of the term *perichōrēsis* to the doctrine of Christ results in a form of docetic rationalising and the depreciation of Christ's humanity (Torrance 1996:102).

Athanasius, although he never used the term *perichōrēsis*, provided the theological basis for the doctrine by elucidating Christ's statements to his disciples, particularly "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (John 14:11). The context in which Athanasius was writing was the Arian controversy where the Arian defenders asked "how can the one be contained in the other and the other in the one?" Athanasius argued that we are to understand Christ's statement as a reciprocal relation wherein the whole Being of the Creator and the whole being of the Redeemer mutually indwell and coexist (Torrance 1996:169). In formulating his argument, Athanasius used the patristic concept *homousion*. *Homousion* gave expression to the underlying oneness between Redeemer and Creator in terms of being and activity. Athanasius explained that this term referred to the real distinctions between the divine *hypostases* and the coinherence of all of the divine *hypostases*. Each *hypostasis* is wholly in the others and the others are wholly in each *hypostasis* (Torrance 1996:169).

The term *perichōrēsis* is a refined concept that enables us to develop a theological way of interpreting the mutual indwelling of Creator and Redeemer and the communion of the Spirit. (Torrance 1996:102). The term is derived from two Greek words: *peri* meaning 'around' and *chora* meaning 'space' or 'room' or the verb *chorein* meaning 'to contain', 'to make room' or 'to go forward' (Torrance 1996:102). The Greek word has a double meaning. First, it describes how one being is contained in another. The Latin equivalent *circuminsessio*, which was Aquinas' preferred term, portrays this static understanding (Boff 1988:135-6 and Fatula 1990:67). The Latin word is derived from *sessio* which means 'being seated' (Boff 1988:135-6). The second meaning signifies the interweaving of one *hypostasis* with the others (Boff 1988:136). The Latin *circuminsessio* corresponds to this interpretation. The word is derived from *incedere* which means 'to permeate'.

We might be inclined to say that the Holy Trinity icon portrays the static meaning - *circuminsessio*. In the icon the divine figures 'sit around' the altar table. However, we are also aware of the eternal movement that is created through the inclination of the angels' heads and the circle of ecstasy that structures the icon internally (see plate 7c). This eternal, dynamic energy begins at the foot of the right angel and includes in its creative and perpetual movement the rock, tree and temple. In defining what the term *perichōrēsis* means, theologians emphasise the dynamism of the love relationship that God is.

### 3.2.2 *Perichōrēsis explained*

*Perichōrēsis* describes the relationship between the three 'persons' or *hypostases* of the Trinity. One problem in understanding the *perichōrēsis* is our perception of the nomenclature 'person'. When classical theology used the term 'person' it understood the term differently to the way we understand it now (Boff 1988:117). Lacugna (1973:250) blames Augustine's introspective psychology for defining 'person' as an individual centre of consciousness who knows and is known, who decides and acts. Although such an understanding helps us see that God is personal, when it is applied to the triune God the result would be an understanding of three gods who are all independent, conscious individuals. The philosophical developments in the Enlightenment reinforced the idea of 'person' as a self-conscious reality. The individualism and rationalism of the Enlightenment has forcefully been extended into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Descartes, alone in his room, writes his *Meditations*. Cartesian methodology, whereby the self establishes its existence through the reality of its own thinking process, means that the human subject is defined as a free and autonomous centre which is isolated from the world beyond the self. Cartesian metaphysics presupposed that the self can be a self apart from a relationship with anyone or anything else. Christian theology needs to be wary of the modern interpretation of the 'person' as an autonomous self. One option is to ignore the philosophical developments from the seventeenth century and use the word 'person' with an ecclesial definition. The problem with this is that the doctrine of the Trinity would be peripheral and unintelligible to the new age. Another option is to integrate the psychological developments into the theological notion. The danger with this idea is that Trinitarian dogma lapses into tritheism. Barth's option was to replace 'person' with 'modes of being' or 'modes of coming to be' or 'manner of being' (Lacugna 1973:252 and Boff 1988:117). This is a translation of the Latin *modus entitativus*. In using this taxonomy Barth

was able to maintain the unity of God while still remaining true to the diversity in God (Boff 1988:117). He was also able to avoid tritheistic interpretations, for a 'manner of being' is not a 'new being' (Boff 1988:117). The danger is that such a formulation could be construed as modalism' (Boff 1988:117). A further option is to use the ontological language of antiquity and describe the 'persons' as *hypostases*. The word needs to be described carefully so as to avoid the trap of interpreting 'person' in terms of modern philosophical and psychological categories of an individual autonomous self. The hermeneutical principle that we adopt in translating the meaning of 'person', or in our case *hypostasis*, is trinitarian *perichōrēsis*. Trinitarian *perichōrēsis* is opposed to notions such as individualism, isolationism and asocial personhood (Lacugna 1973:277 and Boff 1988:148). In perichoretic terms, *hypostasis* means open relationship with others. It means relating outwards to fellow human beings and creation. It means relating inwards to the depths of one's own being in the mystery of God who is present there. A *hypostasis*, while interpersonal and intersubjective, is also ineffable, concrete and unique. (See also section 3.6.1).

Eighth century John of Damascus' formulation of the doctrine of the eternal *perichōrēsis* grasps the circular character of the divine life, the dynamic character of each divine *hypostasis* and the coinherence and immanence of each *hypostasis* in the other two (Lacugna 1973:270 and Moltmann 1981:174). It is because of their eternal love that the divine *hypostases* live in one another to such an extent that they are one. Through the *perichōrēsis* the very thing that divides the *hypostases* is that which unites them (Moltmann 1981:175). They are what they are by virtue of their relation to one another (Lacugna 1973:271). The doctrine of *perichōrēsis* links together the threeness and the oneness of the Trinity without reducing the threeness to oneness or the oneness to threeness (Moltmann 1981:175 and 1991:86). Aurobindo makes the same point with a slight nuance:

The Supreme reality is an Absolute not limited by either oneness or multiplicity, but simultaneously capable of both; for both are its aspects, although the oneness is fundamental and the multiplicity dependant upon the oneness.

(in Devdas 1980:612)

The doctrine of *perichōrēsis* thus holds in tension firstly, the intrinsic unity of the three *hypostases*, secondly, the one *ousia* and thirdly, the distinction of the *hypostases*. Rublev's icon testifies to this. The three figures are clearly three distinct beings, yet we are also made subtly aware of the

unity between them. Their inherent unity is communicated through the blue robes that they all wear, their similar features and by the fact that all three angels carry a rod.

The perichōretic energy of the icon shows a relationship of ontological interdependence whereby the divine *hypostases* live in one another; they are one another's home (Fatula 1990:67). Torrance (1996:163) describes this as their being for one another in which they not only dwell in one another, they also love one another, give themselves to one another and receive from one another. The three *hypostases* are relations of love. These relations are intrinsically ontic and dynamic (Torrance 1996:163). That is to say the relations of love belong to what the *hypostases* are hypostatically in themselves as *hypostases* and to what they are homously together in their love for one another, in their self-giving and receiving to and from one another (Torrance 1996:63). Thus each *hypostasis* is a unique way of containing the identical essence, of receiving that essence from the others, of giving it to the others and thus of being the foundation for others; each person lives for the others (Evdokimov 1990:243; Ciobotea and Lazareth 1990:203). "Each are in each, and all in each, and each in all, and all in all, and all are one" (Augustine in Johnson 1997:309).

In sum: the doctrine of *perichōrēsis* describes the nature of God as essentially dynamic. *Perichōrēsis* is the ecstasy and entasy of God; entasy, in the sense that it is the intradivine desire that one *hypostasis* has for another; ecstasy, in the sense of God's desire for us to become part of God. *Perichōrēsis* is also the source of unity and relationship in the Trinity. The character of the unity is that it is a unity without confusion. The character of trinitarian relationship is that it is eternally self-giving and receiving. The doctrine of *perichōrēsis* teaches that the three persons of the Trinity are so related that none of them can claim a separate selfhood: "A person is never himself, but by the very fact that he is a person is always a constitutive relation" (Panikkar in Devdas 1980:613). Because of *perichōrēsis*, the selfhood of the Creator has been emptied into the Word. The Word has no selfhood because the Word exists as the "thou" of the Creator (Devdas 1980:608). The Spirit has no selfhood since the Spirit exists as the Spirit of the Word and the Creator (Devdas 1980:608).

### 3.3 WE ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN THAT *PERICHŌRĒSIS*

In Rublev's Holy Trinity icon, the angels are arranged in a circle inclining towards each other, yet the circle is not closed. This suggests that the mystery of *perichōrēsis* is not a self-contained reality; divine communion is lovingly open to the world and seeks to nourish the world (Johnson 1997:298). When contemplating this icon, the beholder is instinctively aware that he or she is invited to participate in the circle of *perichōrētic* love. In gazing on the icon he or she is already a part of it.

Moltmann (1991:87), like Johnson, makes the point that the *perichōrēsis* of the Trinity is a *perichōrēsis* of an "open Trinity". Trinitarian hospitality is an inviting unity that is open to humanity and the world (Moltmann 1991:87). Moltmann (1991:87) argues that the perichoretic concept of unity between the Creator, the Redeemer and the Spirit would not correspond to salvation history were it not understood soteriologically as an integrating concept of unity. This unity is not extrinsic; unity with Jesus ontologically structures our existence: through being conformed with the Redeemer (Rom 8:29) humanity is taken up into the relationship of Christ with the Creator. Through the gift of the Spirit we become God's children (Rom 8:14) and the Trinity indwells us. In the light of this, the role of the Redeemer and the Spirit in making it possible for us to participate in the *perichōrēsis*, is now discussed.

#### 3.3.1 *Christ and our participation in the perichōrēsis*

Christ, at the centre of the icon, is the axis of the invisible cross that is formed horizontally by the heads of the outer angels and vertically by the vine, chalice and altar (see plate 7b). The Christ figure in the icon conveys the theological truth that at the incarnation 'God dwelt among us.' In the incarnation God bound the divine destiny to the human in such a way that it extended to death itself (McFarland 1997:343). The incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Christ reveals that God loves us without reserve. The whole undivided Trinity is present and active in fulfilling the eternal purpose of God's love for humankind, namely the intimate union of the divine and human communities. This unity is achieved through our participation in the *perichōrēsis*. Christ established *koinonia* between us and God through his incarnation and death on the cross. The

circle and cross are inseparable, for it is by virtue of the cross that we become part of the circle.

### 3.3.2 *The Spirit and our participation in the perichōrēsis*

The Spirit is confirmation of God's refusal to be separate from the human community. The triune God lives ecstatically through the witness of those who heed the Spirit's invitation to become part of the Divine *perichōrēsis* (McFarland 1997:346). According to Brian Gaybba (1987:143), the mission of the Spirit is (a) to be the love-bond binding the Creator to the Redeemer, (b) to give us a share in that unity, (c) to create community by uniting us to Christ and each other and (d) to transform each of us and our world so that our energies are united in the service of self-sacrificing love and not egotism and selfishness.

The first aspect of the Spirit's mission is that the Spirit is the love-bond that unites the Creator and the Redeemer. Rublev's Holy Trinity icon portrays this aspect of the Spirit's mission: the Spirit's head is tilted and leans between the gaze of the Redeemer and the Creator indicating, its role as the bond of love. Secondly, the Spirit is the *koinonia* and dynamic communion of love between the Creator and the Redeemer and the ecstasy of God directed towards us (Fatula 1990:80). Thus the Spirit's mission is also to unite us to the Creator and the Redeemer and to give us a share in the unity that the Creator and the Redeemer share. The Spirit's identity is constituted by the fact that the Spirit is the way in which God and Christ are made present to us. The Spirit's mission and personality is indicated in Rublev's icon by the Spirit's hand of invitation that beckons humanity and the cosmos to take its place at the altar and thereby partake in the *perichōrēsis* of the three *hypostases*. The third aspect of the Spirit's mission is that the Spirit creates community by uniting us to Christ and to each other. The Spirit's hand points to the space in the open circle. The space that the cosmos is invited to occupy has a rectangle as its symbol. The four corners of the rectangle testify to the all-embracing *perichōrēsis*. Finally, the fourth aspect of the Spirit's mission is to transform us and the world so that our energies are united in the service of love. This is indicated by the diagonal angle of the rod held by the Spirit. In iconography a diagonal indicates the process of transformation (Kala 1993:34).

These ideas do not deny the traditional idea that the purpose of the Spirit is to achieve a divine indwelling and bring about our sanctification (Gaybba 1987:143-4). When we gaze at Rublev's

icon, we accept the Spirit's invitation to become part of the *perichōrēsis*; therefore the Divine triune God indwells us as we indwell the triune God. Our sharing in the inner trinitarian *perichōrēsis* brings about our sanctification. This is the transformation that love achieves and that must take place within anyone who has a relationship with God (Gaybba 1987:144). To be one as the Creator and the Redeemer are one (John 17:21) is to be transformed so totally that even the limitations of space and time are broken (Gaybba 1987:144). Such a transformation has already been achieved: It is the risen life present in Jesus and also in Mary, as Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Christians would argue. Eastern theology recognises that Christ's transfiguration on Mount Tabor is an example of the same process of divinisation for which we all hope and pray: "May God be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28).

Through the Redeemer and the Sustainer<sup>19</sup> we are taken into the triune fellowship in God, we participate in the *perichōrētic* love. Unity with the Godhead through Christ in the Spirit incorporates unity with the cosmos, others, our bodies and within ourselves. This is the transformation that love brings about - a transfiguration into wholeness.

### 3.4 WE ARE TRANSFORMED THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN THE *PERICHŌRĒSIS*

Sin is the misery of creation separate from God. Sin is the failure to love God and neighbour. The effects of sin are division and disharmony. Sin divides human beings from God, from the environment, from each other and inwardly. Salvation is unity with God. In the context of this research project, it is participation in the *perichōrēsis* of the Trinity that is depicted in Rublev's icon. By being drawn into the ecstasy of God, the division between us and the cosmos is healed. We experience greater unity with each other and wholeness within ourselves.

Ken Wilber (1993:21-33) provides a model for understanding salvation as transformation into wholeness (see plate eight). The spectrum of consciousness is a pluridimensional approach to human consciousness (Wilber 1993:22). At each level of the spectrum there is a marked and easily

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<sup>19</sup>This explanation of the Redeemer and the Spirit's role in our sanctification does not hinder Augustine's principle that the divine activities *ad extra*, ie beyond the 'borders' of God, are common to all three *hypostases* (Gaybba 1987:146). In applying the 'ad extra' principle it must be remembered that each divine *hypostasis* subsists in the divine *ousia* in a distinct way. Each of the divine *hypostases* will be involved in every *ad extra* activity, but in accordance with the way in which that particular *hypostasis* subsists in the divine *ousia* (Gaybba 1987:146).

recognisable sense of personal identity (Wilber 1993:22). The Supreme Identity is union with the Godhead at, what Wilber calls, the level of the Mind (Wilber 1993:22). Through participation in the *perichōrēsis* of the Triune God, we identify ourselves at the level of Mind. Our innermost consciousness is identical to the ultimate reality of the universe. In Hinduism, this state is referred to by the axiom: Atman and Brahman are one:

The Advaitic<sup>20</sup> character of reality does not permit ultimate dichotomies between matter and spirit, thinker and thought, creator and created, and the like. Nor does it blur distinctions. On the contrary, it underlines them: the three worlds of the divine, the cosmic and the human are differentiated, but not separated; they are the three dimensions of the one and the same reality, and it is precisely this three-dimensionality, as it were, which makes up one reality.

(Panikkar in Devdas 1980:610).

When we participate in the *perichōrēsis* of Rublev's icon we are at one with the Godhead, we are also, therefore, at one on an existential, ego and shadow level.

### 3.4.1 *Unity with the cosmos - the existential level*

The community that is invited to partake in the *perichōrēsis* of the divine community and to be transfigured through that participation, is not limited to human beings but includes all of life - the entire cosmos (Bruteau 1990:501). The belief in the Resurrection justifies the Orthodox belief that creation will share in the transfiguration of the universe, that the physical world will participate in eternity and has an essential function to serve now in the kingdom (Oleska 1983:45). The veneration of icons in the Orthodox tradition promotes a positive view of the cosmos.

The whole universe is structured in such a way that all members depend on one another. These members are in fact dynamic processes whose identity is constituted by their relationship to one another. The universe thus images, embodies, shows forth, incarnates and phenomenalises the inner Trinitarian *perichōrētic* life depicted in Rublev's Holy trinity icon (Bruteau 1990:501):

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<sup>20</sup>Advaita is the realisation of the oneness of reality that does not deny plurality.

The entire universe consists of creative processes in which the multiplicity of things and events interact with and interpenetrate one another without obstruction. Particularities are not obliterated or deficient in any way, yet are unhindered in the perfect harmony of the total.

(Hee-jin Kim in Bruteau 1990:504)

The entire cosmos is invited to participate in the eucharistic *perichōrēsis* of the icon. What is the answer to the questions: “who is my mother and who are my brothers and sisters?” The answer is the rivers, mountains trees and ecology (Bruteau 1990: 508). The character of these ecological processes is that they are interactive, interpenetrative and in relationship, they are therefore among those who “do the will of the Father in heaven” and can be considered to be our “brother and sister and mother” (Matthew 12:48-50). Rublev’s icon calls us to understand ourselves as living beings within a larger living being (Elisabet Sahtouris in Bruteau 1990:505). If we can achieve this, the resulting sense of unity with the cosmos will give rise to universal compassion. The boundaries of the self will become more and more fluid as we become conscious of our unity with other selves and entities. The perichoretic pattern in Rublev’s Holy Trinity icon testifies to this.

### 3.4.2 *Unity with our bodies - the ego level*

Generally, the church regards physicality as a reluctant necessity that is incidental to the lasting concerns of the individual and a hindrance to our growth in holiness (Cotter 1993:108). What are the building blocks of this attitude? The first generation of Christians expected Christ’s imminent return; the world was not expected to last long; physicality, therefore, was not high on the list of their priorities (Cotter 1993:108). Later, through the influence of Hellenistic philosophy, celibacy was considered spiritually superior to marriage. Celibacy was also the quality that gave some the opportunity of having spiritual power over others (Cotter 1993:110). Thus, only priests could preside at the eucharist. Purity taboos regarding sexual activity, which are prescribed by Levitical law in the Hebrew Scriptures and parts of the New Testament and continued in the early church, were further espoused by Augustine, a foundational theologian for Western Christianity (Cotter 1993:110-1). The dualism divorcing body from spirit and locating evil in the one and good in the other, aggravates our spiritual journey to wholeness. Physicality is not incidental but intrinsic to our whole being, just as the bread and wine are intrinsic to the eucharist (Cotter 1993:116). We are called to be holy in nature and flesh and not to rise above our physicality.

Salvation, which in this research project has been described as transformation into wholeness, is bodily. At the Incarnation Christ took on human flesh and declared God's acceptance of humanity. Christ was born from the womb of Mary. During his ministry, his salvific acts of healing involved body-to-body contact. One example is Mark 5:21-42 where Christ healed the woman "with the issue of blood"; another example is the healing of Jairus' daughter. Both miracles of healing involved body-to-body contact. That salvation is bodily can further be seen from the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ through which we are taken into God's divine life. In the triune God the divine body is always at risk; it is given over to the body of another and experiences the love of God in return.

Trinitarian *perichōrēsis* gives us a number of clues as to how we should treat our bodies and the bodies of others (Cunningham 1998:301). It achieves this by reshaping our priorities. As a result of our cultural and social background we are inclined to think that the most important aspect of our bodies is its physical appearance. In the predominant western milieu of our time, people are most valued for their rational minds. The tendency is to live in the mind; intellectual and symbolic processes dominate. Humans are inclined to say not "I am my body" but "I have a body" (Wilber 1993:24). The character of *perichōrēsis* enables us to reshape our priorities by questioning the character of our relationship to our bodies and the bodies of others: are these relationships mutually inclusive? Are they holistic?

#### **3.4.4 Unity within ourselves - the shadow level**

Wilber (1993:24) notes that in certain circumstances we can alienate various aspects of one's psyche and disidentify with them. One disowns and alienates unwanted aspects of the self. How does one reintegrate these 'shadow' aspects in the path of transformation to wholeness? By participating in the *perichōrēsis* of Rublev's icon. Through the cross which is made visible vertically by the vine, chalice and altar and horizontally by the heads of the outer angels, we are justified and become part of the circle of divine energy which is, in turn, made visible by the outer contours of the angels. By participating in the *perichōrēsis* we are acceptable in the sight of God. We are the beloved of God.

Henri Nouwen (1992), in his book *Life of the beloved*, offers a way of reintegrating the shadow aspects of our psyche through realising that we are the beloved of God. At the heart of Henri Nouwen's understanding of the spiritual life is this importance of realising that we are the beloved of God. At Christ's baptism, the Creator said to Christ: "You are my beloved son with whom I am well pleased." How can we own the experience of being God's beloved? Nouwen (1992:42) advocates that we realise our belovedness by living eucharistically. At the Last Supper Christ took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to his disciples. In the same way we need to be taken, blessed, broken and given.

In order to become the beloved, we have to claim that we are taken or chosen (Nouwen 1992:43). This is the first step in becoming the beloved because we can only desire to become the beloved when we realise that we are the beloved (Nouwen 1992:43). We are taken or chosen when we are enveloped into the ecstatic *perichōrēsis* of the Trinity which is depicted in Rublev's icon. Acknowledging our own chosenness involves recognising our uniqueness. Nouwen (1992:45-6) cautions against understanding chosenness and uniqueness in a worldly sense. From a secular point of view, chosenness implies exclusivity in the sense that if one person is chosen, this is only because others were not (Nouwen 1992:45-6). To be chosen as the beloved of God is radically different to being chosen from a secular point of view (Nouwen 1992:46). Instead of rejecting others as less valuable it accepts them as unique (Nouwen 1992:46). The *perichōrēsis* in Rublev's icon is the paradigm for recognising the uniqueness of each person in a spiritual sense. The doctrine of *perichōrēsis* teaches us that uniqueness is not established through separation and isolation, but through communion and relationship. Thus when we discover the reality of our chosenness we also discover a deep desire to reveal to others their chosenness (Nouwen 1992:53). Being chosen is the basis for our sense of belovedness (Nouwen 1992:54). The more we claim that we are chosen or taken, the more we discover another aspect of being the beloved - our blessedness (Nouwen 1992:54).

As a result of Christ's atoning death, which we remember at the eucharist, we are adopted as God's children. With reference to the icon, through the cross we become part of the circle (see plate seven). As the beloved children of God we are blessed. What does the word 'blessed' imply? "That God blesses us is to say that God accepts us, affirms us, encourages us, is generous towards us" (Cotter 1993:73). The fact of our blessedness is "not just a sentiment, but a truth that shapes

our lives" (Nouwen 1992:62). We need affirmation that we are chosen and taken. Our blessedness is affirmed in prayer and through the eucharist; in prayer we will hear the truth of God's word to us: "You are my beloved child." The eucharist is the celebration where we receive the blessing that affirms that we are God's chosen beloved. When we say 'yes' to our chosenness and blessedness we are ready to face up to our brokenness and the brokenness of other people (Nouwen 1992:68).

We are all broken people. Our brokenness is highly personal and intimate (Nouwen 1992:71). The way we are broken reveals our uniqueness, a uniqueness that is affirmed when we claim the truth of our chosenness (Nouwen 1992:71). During the last years of his life, Nouwen worked at L'Arche in Daybreak, a community where abled and differently-abled people lived side by side. He noticed that the greatest source of brokenness was not the experience of being handicapped but the feelings of worthlessness, inappreciation and being unloved (Nouwen 1992:71-2).

Nouwen (1992:73) argues that it is obvious that our brokenness is often most painfully experienced with respect to our sexuality. Our sexuality is the way we think about ourselves, it "reveals to us the enormous yearnings for communion. The desire of our body to be touched, embraced and safely held belong to the deepest longings of our heart and are concrete signs of our search for oneness" (Nouwen 1992:73). The fragmentation and commercialisation of our age makes it difficult for our whole beings; body, mind and heart, to feel safe and protected (Nouwen 1992:74).

How do we respond to our brokenness? We befriend it and bless it (Nouwen 1992:75). The metaphor for this is the banquet scene in Luke. Just as Jesus welcomes all the undesirables at the feast, so too does he love and accept the shadow parts of our psyches. As Christ accepts us our brokenness becomes the opening to the full acceptance of ourselves.

We are chosen, blessed and broken to be given (Nouwen 1992:83 and 84). Being given is the fourth aspect of becoming the beloved. The paradigm for this self-giving is Christ. The hymn in Philippians 2 comments on the *kenōsis* of the son. Christ's self-giving love is seen ultimately in his death on the cross. The sacrificial nature of the eucharist invites us to participate in Christ's sacrifice by being living sacrifices. The way in which this is achieved is through self-giving love.

Being the beloved is the origin and fulfillment of life in the Spirit. From the moment we claim the truth of being the beloved, we are faced with the challenge to become who we are. We become the beloved by living eucharistically, by being taken, blessed, broken and given.

### 3.5 THE PARTICULAR NATURE OF THE *PERICHŌRĒSIS* IS EUCHARISTIC

God is love and can therefore only reveal himself in communion and be known in communion (Evdokimov 1990:253). Rublev's icon shows this communion, this circle of divine loving and being loved. The living centre of the icon is the eucharist (Evdokimov 1990:253). All people are called to unite around the one cup and in so doing become part of the *perichōrēsis* (Evdokimov 1990:256). The faces of all three figures focus on the chalice as the symbol of their ecstasy. The chalice is the symbol of the gift of oneself for others and communion with others.

Rublev's icon is a perichoretic icon because of the circle that is created through the endless flow of love between the three angels. The icon is a eucharistic icon because of the chalice which acts as a centrifugal force for all movement in the icon and because of the chalices that structure the icon internally (see plate 7g). The term "eucharistic perichōrēsis" is used because the intertwining of the chalice with the circle of perichoretic love describes the *perichōrēsis* as eucharistic and the eucharist as perichoretic. Thus there are several layers of meaning in the icon. On one level there is the intradivine Trinity, the trinity *in se*. It is the circle of God loving Godself. On another level there is the Trinity sitting at table with us, with the chalice at the centre. This is the economic Trinity, the trinity *pro nobis*. These two processes are not two; they are not separate in any way. The Trinity *pro nobis* and the Trinity *in se* are part of the same dynamic movement.

Christian participation in the body and blood of Christ is a central perichoretic trinitarian practice. Christ instructed that "whoever eats of my flesh and drinks of my blood" will have eternal life. Perhaps due to the fact that we have heard this statement so often, the language fails to startle us, but how do we indwell a person more deeply or have that person indwell us more deeply than to have that person's body enter our own body and become our body?

We are united to Christ, we are also united to each other. This is because unity with Jesus involves unity with the Creator and unity with the Spirit. Unity with Jesus, therefore, is a relational concept:

Christ's Parent is our Parent and the bond of love that unites Christ to the Creator and the Creator to Christ also unites us to the Creator and Christ. We participate not only in God but in each other as well. In being united to Christ we are united with those with whom Christ identifies, the poor, marginalised and rejected of society. Eucharistic *perichōrēsis* drives us toward a new social, political and social vision. In partaking of the divine *perichōrēsis* through sharing the bread and wine, we see the connection between the sharing of eucharistic bread and the sharing of resources that force us to question the economic disparity between the wealthy and those who are hungry.

In sum: in the eucharist, *perichōrētic* participation is communicated on several levels. On one level we participate in God by eating of Christ's flesh and drinking of his blood. On another level we feed on and thus become the body of Christ as we are drawn into communion with others. Our communion with each other is further suggested by coming together to share a meal. On a basic level our willingness to eat together is a sign of our perichoretic participation in one another. It is common knowledge that in antiquity, table fellowship was a very important matter. Willingness to eat with another signifies an acceptance of that person (Acts 10-11). Thus Jesus was regularly condemned for eating with sinners (Matt. 9:11, Luke 5:30 and Mark 2:16). By sharing in the one loaf and drinking the cup we are made at one with Christ and therefore each other. We are called to display this unity through ethical and spiritual living.

### **3.6 IMPLICATIONS OF THE HOLY TRINITY ICON'S 'EUCHARISTIC PERICHŌRĒSIS' FOR OUR SPIRITUALITY**

#### **3.6.1 *Eucharistic perichōrēsis and our understanding of personhood***

... The standpoint from which one sees oneself in others and loves one's neighbour as oneself means that the self is the home-ground of every other in the "nothingness" of the self, and that every other is the home-ground of the self in the same nothingness. Only when these two are one - in a relationship of circuminsessional-interpenetration - does this standpoint come about.

(Keiji Nishitani in Bruteau 1990:505).

The circuminsessional-interpenetration is subject-subject coinherence that defines *perichōrēsis*; it is the metaphysics of the communion paradigm. Bruteau (1980) distinguishes between the domination and communion paradigms. The domination paradigm has a "non-reciprocal relation

of determination of being” (Bruteau 1980:127). Selfhood in this paradigm is based on negating the attributes of others such that each individual in the domination paradigm has to say “I am I insofar as I am not you” (Bruteau 1980:128). Bruteau describes this as the logic of self-identification by negation and it underlies the metaphysics of alienation and isolation (Bruteau 1980:128). The domination paradigm operates when beings are separate and outside of one another. In the domination paradigm, individuals abstract attributes and properties and identify people according to these. This is an extrinsic approach; it regards people more as objects than persons (Bruteau 1980:128).

The communion paradigm, also known as the participatory paradigm, is on the other hand a “reciprocal relation of the enhancement of being” (Bruteau 1980:128). Persons in the communion paradigm say “I am in you and you are in me” (Bruteau 1980:128). The reciprocal relation of communion and being “in” one another produces an intrinsic unity (Bruteau 1980:129). Like *perichōrēsis* the communion paradigm is built on a metaphysics of indwelling that is rooted in the “logic of self-identity by mutual affirmation” (Bruteau 1980:130).

Bruteau (1980:128) argues that in order to move from the domination paradigm to the communion paradigm a gestalt shift has to occur. This *gestalt* shift happens as we gaze on Rublev’s icon. Our gaze becomes our prayer. We become part of the divine *perichōrēsis*. We dwell in the communion paradigm.

Eucharistic *perichōrēsis* envisions a new understanding of personhood as we leave the domination paradigm for the communion paradigm through participating in the *perichōrēsis*. In the domination paradigm individuals understand themselves according to the metaphysics of alienation and negation whereby entities define themselves in opposition to every other entity. We identify ourselves in terms of abstractions. In the communion paradigm, personhood is defined according to the metaphysics of mutual affirmation. A person in the communion paradigm is not a discreet node in a network of relationships but is defined by the relationship in which the person participates. In this unity, personal uniqueness is not dissolved nor absorbed; it is a unity which differentiates. If we desire to be in communion with others, and this is what the *perichōrēsis* of the icon asks of us, we will need to allow others to shape and influence our lives in profound and fundamental ways (Cunningham 1998:167). In this situation the boundaries between the ‘I’ and

the 'you' begin to blur. Those who participate in one another's lives are not 'individuals' in the modern sense of the word but persons. The *perichōrēsis* of the Trinity calls us to live lives of mutual participation where relationships are not something that we have, but that which constitutes us as beings (Cunningham 1998:169). Eucharistic *perichōrēsis* offers a paradigm for personhood in the communion paradigm.

### 3.6.2 Eucharistic *perichōrēsis* and relationships

The doctrine of *perichōrēsis* teaches that being a person means being in relationships. This *perichōrēsis* challenges the type of relationships that we have with other people. Rublev's icon shows that the three *hypostases* participate in one another; God is wholly constituted by relationality (Cunningham 1998:165). This virtue marks our lives as well. We need to think what it means to indwell each other. The *perichōrēsis* of the icon encourages us to not simply value relationality as an abstract concept, but to question the character of our relationships, for not all relationships are life-giving. This is especially true in our contemporary age where relationships are entered into for one's own convenience. The *perichōrēsis* on the other hand exhorts us to understand ourselves not as 'individuals' who may or may not choose to enter into relationships but as persons who indwell each other in such a way that all pretensions to a wholly autonomous existence are done away with (Cunningham 1998:166). Lacugna (1971:272-3) quotes Wilson-Kastner who recognises that inclusiveness, community and freedom are the hallmarks of divine *perichōrēsis*. She argues that these ethics would characterise the patterns of human persons in relationship. While inclusiveness is based on recognising our common humanity with other people, community points to relatedness at every level and critiques attitudes such as sexism and racism that contradict this community. Freedom is the exercise of responsibility under these conditions of community (Lacugna 1971:272-3).

Eucharistic *perichōrēsis* further requires that we revisit our understanding of difference in relationships. Violence often springs from the desire for homogeneity. The Crusades and the blood bath during the reign of Mary Tudor, when Protestants were persecuted, are examples of this. The concept of *perichōrēsis* has relevance for a society that has to live in more open communion with other people and have a respectful acceptance of religious, racial, ethnic and cultural differences. Cunningham (1998:198) argues that particularity or difference is a trinitarian virtue. Generally we



understand particularity as designating distinctiveness, exclusion and even isolation. We interpret the concept individualistically, as a quality which separates one entity from another. It is because God is three that particularity is a trinitarian virtue. It is because God is also one that we need to construe particularity in anti-individualistic terms (Cunningham 1998:198). In Cunningham's definition, particularity recognises that we are unique, but that does not render us isolated individuals. Rather, it understands these differences as a product of our interactions with others and realises that we are constantly in the process of being formed and reformed through these encounters (Cunningham 1998:202). Eucharistic *perichōrēsis* encourages us to accept differences. Unity is not the negation of differences or the reduction of differences into one. *Perichōrēsis* envisions a society of communion and the interpenetration of different strands of society (Boff 1988:140).

### 3.6.3 *Eucharistic perichōrēsis as a critique of oppressive structures*

Johnson (1997:307) comments emphatically that "the symbol of God functions." The kind of theology that we formulate underpins political ideology. Moltmann (1981:191) makes the same point: "Monotheism is monarchism." According to Moltmann, the notion of a divine monarchy in heaven provides for earthly domination in whatever form, whether it be religious, political, patriarchal or moral. The idea of an almighty ruler of the universe requires "abject servitude" (Moltmann 1981:192) and furthermore paves the way for a 'holy rule', a hierarchy (Moltmann 1981:192). In antiquity, the Christian preference for a theocracy and the Roman Empire during the time of Constantine, was based on the logic that polytheism is idolatrous (Moltmann 1981:194). The multiplicity of the nations is intertwined with polytheism and is the source of instability (Moltmann 1981:194). Christian belief in the one God, Christian monotheism, overcomes the divided world and as such is a universal peace (Moltmann 1981:194). In the time of Constantine the Great, emperors were seen as the image of God. "One God" meant one emperor, one empire and one church (Moltmann 1981:195). Moltmann believes that trinitarian doctrine must overcome this monarchism which perpetuates dependency and servitude and must evolve towards freedom (Moltmann 1981:192).

Johnson (1997:307) argues that the doctrine of the Trinity has been used in perpetuating patriarchy. Using the model of processions, a subtle pattern of dominance and subordination has

been set up. The one who comes forth is less than the source. Christ's subordination to the Creator even to death affirms this pattern. Johnson (1997:307) refers to Werner Neuer as an example of how this hierarchical pattern in understanding the Trinity has strong political effects in the way it legitimises and sustains patterns of social dominance. Neuer writes that in the same way that the creation is subordinate to the Creator so, too, is the woman subordinate to the man. He argues that this is not inequality, for it follows the pattern established by the Trinity. The submission of the woman to the man is a reflection of the Son's submissive relationship to the Father (in Johnson 1997:307).

How can this patriarchal, hierarchical and oppressive interpretation of the Trinity be critiqued? The Holy Trinity icon testifies to the equality of the three hypostases and questions the claim that any one hypostasis of the Trinity is greater than another. The *perichōrēsis* affirms the equality of the three *hypostases* and subordinationism is avoided. The complete circulation of life and perfect co-equality of the *hypostases* means that there is no anteriority or superiority of one being over another (Boff 198:93). This means that the Trinity cannot be used as a model of oppression.

The symbol of God as Trinity powerfully moulds the corporate identity of the community (Johnson 1997:300). Rublev's icon suggests that God is not an Unmoved Mover but a three-fold *koinonia* that has opened its inner life to the cosmos. The *perichōrēsis* in Rublev's icon states that mutual, loving relationships in a community are the highest good. It depicts this positively and negatively. Positively, the Trinitarian model creates community by uniting humanity and the whole web of earth's life in a radical oneness (Johnson 1997:300). Negatively, Rublev's Trinity icon prophetically challenges social, political ecological and ecclesiastical injustices (Johnson 1997:300). The trinitarian mystery empowers relationships of mutuality, equality and inclusiveness among persons, God and the earth for the goal of all creation is to participate in the Trinitarian mystery of love (Johnson 1997:300).

If we take this seriously, then eucharistic *perichōrēsis* has much to say in terms of the ecclesial and political-social structures we adopt or support. *Perichōrēsis* says that God is structured along the lines of self-emptying love. If this is how God is structured, then our ecclesial, social and political structures should mirror the self-emptying, mutual service, love and sharing which is the basis for distinction between the *hypostases* (Gaybba 1990:86). Hierarchical structures tend to

ignore this idea of sharing and entrench the privileges of those in authority. It is crucial for Christians, with a eucharistic, perichoretic vision, to oppose social and political structures that work against mutual belonging, service and sharing (Gaybba 1990:86). In so doing, Christians also need to criticise their own church structures. It is difficult to critique the power, domination and self-centredness of economic, social and political ills if the way in which Christians structure their own togetherness is at fault.

The earthly reflection of participation in the divine mutual *perichōrēsis* is, or is meant to be, the church. The members are bound together in profound ways such that their lives implicate and are implicated by others (Cunningham 1998:168). Trinitarian *koinonia* sets the standard for ecclesiastical *koinonia*. The church is the community of the faithful in communion with the Father through the Son in the Spirit, and, in communion with each other and their leaders, each person is distinct but accepts and surrenders to the others (Boff 1998:153-4).

#### 3.6.4 *A perichōrētic spirituality of eucharistic sexuality*

The mutual participation of eucharistic *perichōrēsis* is central in erotic relationships. Erotic relationships involve taking the body of another into our own and/or having our bodies received into the body of another. The intimacy with God that is established in the eucharist when we take into our bodies the body and blood of Christ is parallel to intimate sexual relations (Cotter 1993:75-6). Seeing the connection between eucharistic *perichōrēsis* and sexuality force us to think theologically on the meaning of erotic love. It further requires that we critique sexual expression that does not mirror the mutual, participatory character of eucharistic *perichōrēsis*. Sexual expression that attends to the desires of one person and ignores the desires of the other clearly fails to mirror the mutual participatory character of eucharistic *perichōrēsis*. This description refers most obviously, but not exclusively, to rape, child abuse, prostitution and violence.

Before describing erotic love further, there is an important caveat to note: this research project refers to only an aspect of erotic love. Moreover, this sexual love is discussed within a particular type of relationship. For some, the gift of marriage describes the context of this sexuality. Perhaps this understanding is a bit narrow, for it might exclude relationships of a homosexual orientation. The particular type of relationship that is the context of this discussion on erotic love is a

perichoretic relationship where each person lives for the other in a life-giving way. It is useful to distinguish between 'lust' and 'desire'. Whilst lust is inherently self-serving and seeks to gratify its own desires with no consideration for the other person involved; desire is perichoretic for it is self-emptying in its desire to attend to the needs of the other. An acute spiritual and moral problem is how to live with our sexuality and not with violence and violation (Cotter 1993:117). Sheldrake (1994:64) describes the moral dimension of sex as learning "to respond to arousal not with compulsive behaviour but by making options based on self-awareness and the awareness of other people." The moral dimension of sexuality is linked to our inner life in the Spirit and not simply to abstract laws and external guidance (Sheldrake 1994:64). The hallmarks of a mature, non-possessive, non-abusive, free and mature relationship are equality, mutuality, reciprocity and kenosis (Sheldrake 1994:65).

Broadly defined, sexuality is the capacity for relationship, ecstasy and self-transcendence and is an icon of who God is (Lacugna 1973:407). A *perichōrētic* spirituality of eucharistic sexuality describes how human passion gives us a hint of God's ecstasy for us; it describes how sexuality can be a sacred means of being divinised and a vital path of holiness (Lacugna 1973:407). We are most like God's *perichōrētic* love when we are aroused in the presence of our beloved and when our beloved pursues us. The desire that one person has for the other is rooted in Christ calling us to participate in God's *perichōrētic* being. Mutual desire is thus not for procreation alone. To consider sexuality exclusively in these terms is to fail to recognise sexual desire, the longing for total surrender of one being to another, as one of the triune eucharistic perichoretic marks that humans bear. Sexuality is concerned with human and divine intimacy (Cotter 1993:118). Rowan Williams describes this as grace:

Grace, for the Christian believer, is a transformation that depends in a large part on knowing yourself to be seen in a certain way: as significant, as wanted. The whole story of creation, incarnation, and our incorporation into the fellowship of Christ's body tells us that God desires us, *as if we were God*, as if we were that unconditional response to God's giving that God's self makes in the life of the Trinity. We are created so that we may be caught up in this; so that we may grow into the wholehearted love of God by learning that God loves us as God loves God. The life of Christianity has as its rationale - if not invariably its practical reality - the task of teaching us this: so ordering our relations that human beings may see themselves as desired, as occasions of joy.

( Williams in Cunningham 1998:299)

Jim Cotter (1993) argues that a sacramental understanding of sexuality recognises that sexuality is an intrinsic element of the embodied human's response to the impulses of God (Cotter 1993:75). A sacramental approach to sexuality appreciates that anything material can participate in the Divine and can communicate what can't be put into words. So it is with bread and wine and sex (Cotter 1993:75). Communion is interpenetration, coinherence with a greater Love that is known within our flesh bodies, but is not constrained to them (Cotter 1993:75). The prayer that we may be in Christ and that Christ may indwell us includes the dimension of the sexual (Cotter 1993:75). There is something disappointing about sex without mystery, just as there is something disappointing about the eucharist without mystery (Cotter 1993:75).

Eucharist-making and love-making are parallel (Cotter 1993:75-6). There is the mutual greeting at the beginning. In the eucharist this takes the form of the first eucharistic prayer: "Lift up your hearts." This is the prayer that we may be open and truthful to the "Other who is the Lover for otherwise love cannot be made" (Cotter 1993:75). In love-making the mutual greeting at the beginning takes the form of foreplay. Next comes the conversation, the dialogue. Through the ministry of words in the eucharist-liturgy we come to know God better. In the liturgy of love-making it is through conversation that we come to know one another better. The ministry of the Word or words is followed by an affirmation of trust and belief in each other (Cotter 1993:76). In eucharist-making this affirmation of belief is the Creed which is a renewal of the promise made in the covenant: "I will be your God and you will be my people." There is the acknowledgement that what is being celebrated is greater than us, it is intrinsic to the love of the whole world (Cotter 1993:76). This stage is the intercession, "the gathering of others" (Cotter 1993:76). Confession and absolution are part of the process, followed by a deliberate and sensitive touch of healing and peace (Cotter 1993:75-6). Offertory speaks of laying oneself down, "a naked offering", a gift of oneself to the other (Cotter 1993:76). Thanksgiving describes rejoicing and the pleasure of enjoyment. Thanksgiving is a recital of past gifts, it is awe in the presence of the Holy (Cotter 1993:76). In love-making, fraction speaks of a loss of control and a breaking of boundaries (Cotter 1993:76). In eucharist-making, fraction is the breaking of bread in order that the Body of Christ may be shared with the body of Christ. Communion in both eucharist-making and love-making is the mutual giving and receiving of new life (Cotter 1993:76). Thereafter follows a time of silence. Simply resting in the embrace of the other we are impelled by the encounter to love more widely; "to love the other and the Other and the others and the whole earth: the creativity of making love

and making the eucharist flows out to embrace the world” (Cotter 1993:76).

In becoming part of the *perichōrēsis* of Rublev’s Holy Trinity icon, the beholder is healed and transformed into wholeness. A perichoretic spirituality of eucharistic sexuality holds that sexual union is eucharistic (Sheldrake 1994:66). Sexual union is “a liturgy that may heal and restore loving partners to a spiritual centredness” (Sheldrake 1994:66). In the liturgy of love-making, like the liturgy of eucharist-making, “union is capable of performing something with deep meaning” (Sheldrake 1994:66). A symbol of one way in which we can participate in the perichoretic love-life of God as depicted in Rublev’s Holy Trinity icon, could be through practising a perichoretic spirituality of eucharistic sexuality. The eucharistic *perichōrēsis* of Rublev’s icon describes the characteristics of this relationship as self-sacrificing *kenosis*. Rublev’s icon also describes the implications of a perichoretic spirituality of eucharistic sexuality as being a liturgy with deep divine meaning that can have healing effect. By participating in God’s *perichōrēsis*, believers can be restored to their spiritual centre. By participating in the *perichōrēsis* of an erotic relationship, loving partners can also be restored to “a spiritual centredness” (Sheldrake 1994:66).

### 3.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Contemplating this icon leads us into the mystery of God’s revelation. The God that is revealed to us in this icon is the God of eternal communion. The nature of this eternal communion revealed to us in the icon is that it is a eucharistic *perichōrēsis*. The icon expresses the truth that the Creator, the Redeemer and the Sustainer are distinct persons with incommunicable properties (Torrance 1996:172). The *hypostases* nevertheless dwell in one another in such a way that their individual properties, instead of dividing them, unite them indivisibly. *Perichōrēsis* is not a static concept. It refers to the eternal Love and communion in God that flows unceasingly towards us. The doctrine of *perichōrēsis* is not a speculative concept; it arises out of the belief in the saving Love of God who reconciles us to Godself and takes us into communion with God (Torrance 1996:172). In the Trinity all members give themselves to one another as food for the sake of abundant life. The Trinity is a mutually feeding, mutually indwelling community (Bruteau 1990:501). We are called to embody the Triune community. Humankind also gives itself as food for others and the cosmos.

The Holy Trinity icon is an icon of *perichōrēsis*. Through our participation in that *perichōrēsis* we are transformed. In the icon the particular nature of the *perichōrēsis* is that it is eucharistic. The eucharistic *perichōrēsis* of the icon elucidates the text in 1 Peter 1:4 “Do you not know that you are participants of the divine nature?” The eucharistic *perichōrēsis* of the icon shows that salvation and sanctification are not individualistic but communal. This means that through our participation in the *perichōrēsis* we are eucharistic people living in a eucharistic planet. The icon exhorts our relationships to be mutual, self-emptying and self-sacrificing. In the same way that the icon embodies the Trinitarian *perichōrēsis*, so too, the cosmos is called to incarnate perichoretic living. The icon invites us to make the world a permanent place of eucharistic love.

# PERFECTION: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RUBLEV'S ICON FOR METHODISTS

## 4.1 INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

In the light of aspects of the doctrine of *perichōrēsis*, the previous chapter offered suggestions as to the significance which Rublev's icon could have on our spiritual living. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the meaning that the icon could have for Methodists in particular.

### 4.1.1 *Didactic use*

Rublev's icon has significance in a didactic sphere. Although we pray before the icon because it is the dwelling place of God's grace and as such is an object for veneration, it can also be a form of teaching. St Gregory instructs that "icons are for the unlettered what the Sacred Scriptures are for the instructed" (in Quenot 1992:155). In our academic situation it is easy to forget that South Africa is a "two-thirds world" where a large majority of the population is illiterate. In this respect, icons can be Scripture in visual form.

There are several advantages of conveying knowledge about God through Rublev's icon. Firstly, in general, an obscure, rational and overtly philosophical approach is adopted to explain the doctrine of the Trinity which means that, in practice, Christians are "mere monotheists" (Rahner 1970:10) who leave the doctrine to a few theological specialists (Moltmann 1981:1). The icon, on the other hand, offers a way of seeing and experiencing the doctrine. As Nouwen (1987:20) suggests, the icon was not painted only as a helpful explanation of a difficult doctrine but as a holy place to enter and stay within.

Another advantage is that when the icon is used in a didactic setting, the starting point in this teaching exercise is that God is three; the next step is then to explain how God is nevertheless one. Most approaches start from the point of view of the one God and attempt to explain how God is

three - hence the monotheistic faith. Rublev's icon, however, proposes that the starting point of trinitarian teaching is three beings, one God.

The third didactic advantage that icons have is in terms of the consciousness of twenty-first century people and how this influences the process of communication. We can broadly designate three epochs of communication. First, there is the primitive, tribal or primal period where face to face communication predominates. The characteristics of this epoch are sound, movement, dialogue and people communally involved with each other. Second, there is the 'print' epoch. The invention of the printing press changed human consciousness. In this epoch there is no longer sound or movement. Grammar, syntax and linear reading, structure human thinking. The characteristic feature and climax of this period is the age of Reason where only data that are scientific and empirical is considered to be the truth. Our present epoch is the 'electronic age'. The characteristics of this age are a bombardment of the senses, noise, pace, risk and images. Our consciousness shifts as the media and internet recondition our mode of perception. In this 'electronic' age, images flood our lives. Teaching with visual aids such as icons is a far more effective way of communicating than by only speaking, especially when the audience is so strongly influenced by the omnipresent media.

In sum, it can be argued that the medium is the message. Christian preachers, liturgists and educators need to take this into consideration when communicating the message of the Trinity. If communication is to have any authenticity, it has to take into consideration (a) the whole person, (b) that image communicates more than the heard or written word and (c) that the message be is experienced existentially.

#### **4.1.2. Liturgical significance**

If Rublev's icon were to be transposed on to a transparency or made into a banner, it could give visual structure to the liturgical act. The Methodist service is divided into three parts, namely the preparation, the ministry of the Word and the response to the Word. The 'preparation' includes the collect of purity, prayers of praise and adoration and the prayer of confession with its assurance of forgiveness (Methodist conference 1974: B19 and B5). Rublev's icon structures this moment of the worship service. As we stand before the icon we see God, but God also sees us.

This experience encourages self-examination which we do through the collect of purity. We rejoice with prayers of praise and adoration at the Spirit's invitation to participate in the *perichōrēsis* of the triune God. As we take our place at the altar, the chalice before us serves as a reminder that it is by virtue of Christ's death on the cross that we can become part of the circle. This invokes our prayers of confession. The Creator's hand of blessing and Christ's hand of blessing assures us that we are forgiven; that we are the children of God. The 'ministry of the Word' is a moment in the liturgical act that incorporates the reading of Scripture and the exposition of the Word in the form of a sermon (Methodist conference 1974: B20). The Holy Trinity icon is a revelation of the triune God who is revealed in Scripture. Taking this into account, Rublev's icon can elucidate almost all theological themes that are communicated through Scripture. The 'response' is a moment in the liturgical act that involves thanksgiving, dedication, intercessions and, once a month, the eucharist. While we are in the circle of divine love, we give thanks with the whole of creation for the circle includes in its energy the rock and the tree. Our unity with Rublev's icon testifies to the covenant between the divine and human communities; we dedicate ourselves afresh to the triune God and recommit ourselves to dwelling in the home of love. As we are seated before the altar, we notice the rectangular hieroglyph. We are reminded that the whole world is invited to become part of God. We ask the help of the Spirit in our prayers for the salvation of humankind (Methodist Conference 1974: B7). When the Methodist service includes the celebration of the eucharist, the Holy Trinity icon is a powerful symbol of what the eucharist is about: unity with the triune God and unity with each other.

#### *4.1.2.1 An example*

Using the theology presented in this research project, I have designed a liturgy that uses as its theme Rublev's Holy Trinity icon. This liturgy follows the Methodist format outlined in the *Sunday services* booklet (Methodist Conference 1974). The idea is that the liturgy be conducted before Rublev's Holy Trinity icon, displayed on an overhead projector or on a banner.<sup>21</sup> As far as possible, the congregation addresses its prayers to Rublev's icon; they worship God who is revealed to them in the forms and colours of the Trinity icon.

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<sup>21</sup>The more privileged Methodist churches will usually have facilities such as overhead projectors. Rural churches will not necessarily have access to electricity. They do, however, have a rich tradition of banners.

## IN THE GAZE OF GOD

### WELCOME

Moses came face to face with God in the flames of the burning bush.  
We come face to face with God in the flames of the Holy Trinity icon,  
the home of Love.

**Almighty God to whom all hearts are open and all desires known.  
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts  
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit  
that we may perfectly love you  
and worthily magnify your holy name.  
Amen.<sup>22</sup>**

### 1. THE PREPARATION

#### CALL TO WORSHIP

Jesus Christ says: Come to me and rest, all you who are burdened and heavy laden<sup>23</sup>.  
**We come to you O Trinity.  
Hold us up in the circle of your love.**

Jesus Christ says: Come to me and rest all you that are anxious and fearful.  
**We come to you O Trinity  
for perfect love drives out all fears<sup>24</sup>.**

Jesus Christ says: There will come a time when we will worship God in spirit and in truth<sup>25</sup>.  
**The Sustainer is Spirit.  
Jesus is Truth.  
We worship God in Spirit and in Truth.  
We worship,  
we adore,  
the triune God.**

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<sup>22</sup> The collect of purity.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 11:28.

<sup>24</sup> 1 John 4:18.

<sup>25</sup> John 4:23-4.

HYMN: Suggestion: Holy, Holy, Holy.

Holy, Holy, Holy!  
 Lord God Almighty!  
 All thy works shall praise thy name,  
 in earth and sky and sea.  
 Holy, Holy, Holy!  
 Merciful and mighty!  
 God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

#### PRAYER OF PRAISE AND ADORATION

We are sojourners in the path of perfection.  
 Abraham and Sarah welcomed the divine pilgrims beneath the oaks of Mamre.  
 The Spirit invites us to participate in the love-life of God.  
 We are invited to draw near.  
 We are invited to become part of the circle of divine loving and being loved.  
 Therefore:

Enter his courts with thanksgiving  
**We enter his courts with praise<sup>26</sup>**

Enter into the heart of God.  
**We give thanks to God,  
 three and one.**

As the sparrow finds her home  
 and the swallow a nest for herself;  
**Happy are we who live in your house,  
 singing your praise<sup>27</sup>.**

We sing our praise to you O Trinity;

**O Trinity, uncreated and without beginning,  
 O undivided Unity, three and one,  
 Creator, Son and Spirit a single God:  
 Accept this our hymn from tongues of clay  
 As if from mouths of flame<sup>28</sup>**

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<sup>26</sup>Psalm 100:4.

<sup>27</sup>Psalm 84:3-4

<sup>28</sup>This prayer is adapted from the Lenten Triodion.

## READING OF THE LAW

The first commandment is this: hear O Israel the Lord your God, the Lord is One. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

**We are commanded by God's law to love God with our all.  
We are commanded to love God with our whole hearts, with our minds,  
with our strength, with our weakness,  
with our talents and shortcomings,  
successes and failures,  
with our money and with all our resources.  
We are commanded to love with all that we are<sup>29</sup>.**

The second commandment is this, you shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these two. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I have loved you, that you love one another.

**Lord have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep this law.**

## PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Sitting at the table with the Trinity,  
we are confronted by the chalice<sup>30</sup>.  
The chalice reminds us that it through the cross of Christ  
that we are part of the divine circle of love.  
As we look up from the chalice  
we gaze at Christ who invites us to repent.

**Holy Creator, Redeemer and Spirit.  
The love that you have for each is life-giving.  
You live for each other,  
and give your lives to each other.**

We confess that we have used our power to dominate.  
**Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner<sup>31</sup>.**

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<sup>29</sup>The congregation's response to the reading of the law is an interpretation of Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection. Christian perfection is first and foremost the perfect love of God; Christian perfection is the total dedication of every aspect of our living to God.

<sup>30</sup>The worship leader points to the chalice.

<sup>31</sup>This is a form of the Jesus prayer (see section 3.6.1).

We confess that we have used our weakness to manipulate.  
**Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner.**

We confess that we have not loved others.  
**Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner.**

We confess that we have not allowed others to love us.  
**Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner**

We turn to you O God of Love<sup>32</sup>.  
**We renounce hate**  
**We renounce division**

We turn to you O God of Love;  
**you make us whole.**

Hear the Good News: Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners.

In becoming part of the circle we become part of the cross that is formed  
 vertically by the tree, chalice and altar  
 and horizontally by the halos of the Creator and the Spirit.  
 We become part of the life, death, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ.

Hear then the words of Grace: Your sins are forgiven.

**Amen. Thanks be to God.**

HYMN

## 2. MINISTRY OF THE WORD

The glory of God is revealed in the icon before us.  
 Listen for the glory of God proclaimed in:

Old Testament reading:

New Testament reading:

HYMN

Listen for the Good news of Christ proclaimed in the Gospel of \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>32</sup>The worship leader turns to face Rublev's icon. The congregation, together with the worship leader, say these words to the icon.

### 3. RESPONSE

#### PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Seated in the circle of love,  
 we drop our gaze and notice the square that is painted on the altar table.  
 The square reminds us that all people,  
 from all corners of the globe  
 are invited to dwell in the home of love

**Women: O God you are more affectionate than any friend**

**Men: more just than any ruler,**

**Women: more loving than any parent,**

**Men: more a part of us than our own limbs**

**Women: more necessary to us than our own heart.<sup>33</sup>**

**Men: Come my light and revive me from death.**

**Women: Come my light and illuminate my darkness.**

**Men: Come my physician and heal my wounds.**

**All: Come flame of divine love and burn up the thorns of my sins,  
 kindling my heart with the flame of thy love.**

**Come my king, sit upon the throne of my heart and reign there.**

**For you alone are my king and Lord.<sup>34</sup>**

Holy Trinity you are Light.  
 In you there is no darkness<sup>35</sup>.

Where there is hatred  
**May we bring love**

Where there is loneliness  
**May we bring community**

Where there is violence  
**May we bring peace**

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<sup>33</sup>This prayer is adapted from the prayer of Nicolas Cabasilas.

<sup>34</sup>This prayer is adapted from the prayer of St Dimitri of Rostov.

<sup>35</sup>1 John 1:5.

Where there is injustice  
**May we bring justice**

Where there is poverty and greed  
**May we bring a willingness to share and to give**

Where there is prejudice  
**May we bring openness**

Where there is pollution and destruction  
**May we bring a willingness to care for the earth**

Jesus, light of the World, wherever your people are  
**May your light shine through them**  
**to effect change in your name**  
**Amen.**

#### PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING

For inviting us to become part of your Love  
**Lord, we thank you**

For sharing in your work of love, peace and justice  
**Lord, we thank you**

For communities of which we are a part  
**Lord, we thank you**

For families  
**Lord, we thank you**

That you sent your Son to die for us  
**Lord, we thank you**

That your Spirit renews us  
**Lord, we thank you**

**Lord we thank you**  
**that you are a part of us**  
**that we are a part of you.**

#### BENEDICTION

**Now may the grace of Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit remain with us now and always.**

HYMN

Suggestion: Guide me O thou great Redeemer

Guide me O Thou great Redeemer  
 pilgrim through this barren land.  
 I am weak but thou art mighty,  
 hold me with thy powerful hand:  
 Bread of heaven  
 feed me now and evermore!

#### 4.2 RUBLEV'S ICON AND THE DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

The Holy Trinity icon has relevance for Methodists didactically and liturgically. As an eternalisation of the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of deification, the icon has significance for Methodists in terms of spirituality. The icon phenomenalises, embodies, shows forth the doctrine of Christian perfection which lies at the heart of Methodist spirituality.

Spirituality concerns the Way, the Walk, and the goal of Christian discipleship. It considers the direction of our course, the manner of our journey, its tempers and discipline. It refers to our attitude to the world and to other people, and the end, the *summum bonum*, variously described as the vision of God, perfection, deification, entire sanctification, heaven, the kingdom of God (Working paper 1985:193).

The framework for a spirituality of Christian living offered by Wesley is Christian perfection. The above quote emphasises that this is both the goal and the journey of the spiritual life; Wesleyan spirituality envisions the process of growth in grace towards entire sanctification<sup>36</sup> (Working paper 1985: 195). The "direction of our course" is deification or perfection. The "manner of the journey"

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<sup>36</sup>The goal and journey of the spiritual life is Christian perfection. The doctrine of Christian perfection is one aspect of Wesley's theology of salvation; it is important to understand Christian perfection in the context of Wesley's soteriology. The journey in Christian perfection begins with God's prevenient grace. To say that the goal and journey of the spiritual life is Christian perfection is to view salvation as a process. The first stage in this process is God's preventing grace, the embryonic spirituality present in the lives of all people. The next stage in the process of salvation is justifying grace that pardons us, instilling in us an inner sense of peace and assurance. Justifying grace results in a real change in the believer, a new birth, which leads eventually to sanctifying grace. The drama of salvation has three acts: Conviction-Repentance, Justification-Rebirth, Sanctification-Perfection. Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection, as the final 'act' in the 'drama' of salvation, is one aspect of his soteriology.

is the means of grace. The “tempers and discipline” are social outreach and Christian *koinonia*. Rublev’s Holy Trinity icon is a means of grace that illustrates the doctrine of Christian perfection; the icon also prescribes the ethical basis for Christian *koinonia* and finally it embodies the social vision that is as a result of Christian perfection. The following section suggests how Rublev’s Holy Trinity icon has relevance for Methodists by explaining Wesley’s system of spirituality and showing how the icon illustrates the main tenets of his system:

- (4.2.1) The doctrine of Christian perfection, a gift of God
- (4.2.2) sought through the means of grace,
- (4.3.3) nurtured through Christian *koinonia* and
- (4.4.4) expressed through ethical and social living.

#### **4.2.1 Towards an understanding of Christian perfection**

In his pamphlet, *A plain account of Christian perfection* Wesley (1777:366-466) summarises the main influences on his understanding of the doctrine of Christian perfection. In 1725, during his preparation for ordination, Wesley read Bishop Taylor’s *Rules and exercises for holy living and dying*. Because of Taylor’s *Rules and exercises*, Wesley sought “a purity of intention” by dedicating all his thoughts, words and actions to God (Wesley 1777:366). The *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas ‘a Kempis convinced Wesley that he should seek “an inward religion of the heart” (Whaling 1981:9). William Law taught him that the work of salvation involves regeneration into the image of God (Watson 1985:42-3). Law’s work, *A serious call to devout and holy living*, convinced Wesley of the absolute impossibility of being a “half-Christian” (Wesley 1777:367). Wesley determined, through grace, to be all devoted to God, to give God his all. He also began not only to read but also to study the Bible, which for him was the only standard of truth, the only model of pure religion (Wesley 1777:367). Through this exercise Wesley began to see in a clearer light the necessity of having the mind that was in Christ and walking as Christ walked (Wesley 1777:367). The Apostolic fathers, whose writings formed the first volume of Wesley’s *Christian Library*, also influenced Wesley’s understanding of Christian perfection. Williams (1960:173) notes that the influence of the early church fathers is important for two reasons. First, the theme of perfection often emerges. Second, it is in these writings that Wesley is introduced to the notion of venial and mortal sins; an idea that parallels his own double definition of sin (see second

paragraph below).

What is Christian perfection? To love the Lord God with body, mind and soul and to love our neighbours as we love ourselves is “the whole of Christian perfection” (Wesley 1784:3). More than that, entire sanctification involves having “the mind that was in Christ” and showing forth the “fruits of the Spirit” which are love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance and fidelity. If all these ‘fruits’ are woven together in the soul of a believer, the product is Christian perfection (Wesley 1784:3). Christian holiness is a process where the believer is “renewed into the image of God” and “sanctified throughout in mind, body and spirit” (Wesley 1784:8). The marks of this Christian holiness are the inner witness of the Spirit and love (Wesley 1944:169). Genuine love results in obedience to God; the fruit of this love is love of one’s neighbour. The perfect love of God and one’s neighbour is Wesley’s foundational understanding of Christian perfection.

Wesley emphasised that the perfection that he described was not a perfection of angels. He acknowledged that a perfection which entailed the absence of all sin is not possible in this lifetime. To define a perfection that is nevertheless imperfect, Wesley resorted to two definitions of sin (Williams 1960:170). On the one hand, there is sin which is “a voluntary transgression against a known law” (Wesley 1784:8). On the other hand there are sins, “improperly so called that are involuntary transgressions against divine laws, known or unknown” (Wesley in Watson 1985:63). Wesley called these “sins,” mistakes. The perfection that Wesley regarded as attainable in this life was a spirituality of mature Christian discipleship (Watson 1985:63-4).

#### ***4.2.1.1 Christian perfection and deification***

Wesley’s doctrine of Christian perfection corresponds with the Orthodox teaching on deification. The phrase “you are gods”, found in Psalm 82:6 and John 10:34, has shaped the spiritual imagination of Orthodox theology (Mantzaridis 1984:7). For the Orthodox, Christianity is not adherence to a selection of doctrines or “an exterior imitation of Christ through moral effort”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Wesley, like the Orthodox fathers, came to the realisation that Christianity is “not an exterior imitation of Christ through moral effort.” Until his Aldersgate experience on 25 May 1738, Wesley had sought the sanctifying grace of God through moral effort. He maintained a disciplined spiritual regime and served the poor and needy to the point that it endangered his life. Despite this, he lacked assurance of God’s love and of God’s divinising love. The following

(Mantzaridis 1984:7). Christianity involves direct intimate union with the Godhead and the total transfiguration of the human person through God's grace. The Orthodox Fathers refer to this process as deification, divinisation, *theōsis* or *theopoiēsis*. St Basil, for example, comments that the human person is a creature that has received the order to become god: "He was made man that we might be made god" (Mantzaridis 1984:7). Likewise, St Athanasius asserts that "He became incarnate that we might be ingodded"(Mantzaridis 1984:7). Deification is God's greatest gift to humankind and the ultimate goal of human existence (Mantzaridis 1984:12)

The teaching on the deification of humankind is based on three premises (Mantzaridis 1984:15). Firstly, the anthropological understanding that humankind was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Secondly, the Christological assertion of the incarnation of the Word (John 1:1). Finally, the belief in humankind's participation in God through the Holy Spirit (Mantzaridis 1984:15). These three foundations of the teaching on deification describe how human persons, although created in the image of God and in communion with God, became estranged from God. The incarnate Logos made it possible for humankind to once again "achieve likeness with God" and be transfigured (Mantzaridis 1984:15).

Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection and the Orthodox doctrine correspond in several ways. In the first place, both Christian perfection and deification acknowledge that humankind was created in the image and likeness of God but that this image is tarnished. Both "spiritual maps" recognise that transfiguration involves regeneration into the image of God. For example, Wesley

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quote describes his spiritual anguish felt at the futility of trying to imitate Christ through an exterior moral effort.

Can they talk fluently upon spiritual things? The very same could I. Are they plenteous in alms. Behold I gave all my goods to feed the poor. Do they give of their labour as well as their substance? I have laboured more abundantly than them all. Are they willing to suffer for their brethren? I have thrown up my friends, reputation, ease, country; I have put my life in my hand, wandering strange lands; I have given my body to be devoured by the deep...consumed with toil and weariness, or whatever God should please to bring upon me. But does all this make me acceptable to God? Does all I ever did or can know, say, give, do or suffer justify me in His sight? This then I have learnt in the ends of the earth - that I "am fallen short of the glory of God"... that alienated from the tree of life, I am a child of wrath, an heir of hell...I have no hope, but that of being justified freely "through the redemption that is in Jesus."The faith that I want is a sure trust and confidence in God that through the merits of Christ my sins are forgiven and I am reconciled to the favour of God. I want that faith which enables everyone to cry out "I live not; but Christ lives in me" (Green 1937:27-28).

comments (1777:378) that:

This great gift of God, the salvation of our souls, is no other than the image of God fresh stamped on our hearts. It is a renewal of believers in the spirit and minds, after the likeness of Him that created them.

Secondly, both deification and Christian perfection have a christological focus. The process of deification recognises that divinisation is only possible because humanity and divinity were united in the Logos. Wesley (1777:389), in commenting on the role of Christ in the process of our entire sanctification, quotes Romans 8:3: “God sent his Son that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Thirdly, both Christian perfection and deification acknowledge the role of the Spirit in the process of transfiguration. Orthodox theology emphasises that it is through the Spirit that we participate in God. Wesley emphasises the role of the Spirit who instills in us an inner witness that we are the children of God; this inner witness is a characteristic mark of Christian perfection. Fourthly, both Christian perfection and deification have, as part of their system, the necessity of “praying without ceasing”. For the Orthodox, the Jesus Prayer is the way in which those who seek deification would pray without ceasing (see section 2.6.1). Wesley describes a Methodist as follows:

For indeed he prays without ceasing; at all times the language of his heart is this, “Unto thee is my mouth, though without a voice; and my silence speaketh unto thee.” His heart is lifted up to God at all times and in all places (1777:371).

#### ***4.2.1.2 Christian perfection and Rublev’s Holy Trinity icon***

Rublev’s icon shows forth Christian perfection and deification. In the first place, deification and Christian perfection are not instantaneous events; the terms describe the *process* of transfiguration. The Orthodox tradition describes deification as a process by teaching that deification is gradually brought about through stillness, *hesychia*. Wesley refers to the process of perfection by teaching that we are to “wait” for the gift of perfection. The uncreated and divinising grace in which human beings participate does not stagnate within them. Like *perichōrēsis* it is dynamic; it manifests itself in a life lived according to Christ (Mantzaridis 1984:61-2). Consequently, humans no longer sin

(Mantzaridis 1984:62). The doctrines of Christian perfection and deification both emphasise that sinlessness is as a result of regeneration in the image of God.

The process of transfiguration is illustrated in the icon through the dynamism of the perichoretic love that instills motion in the icon. The dynamic movement in the icon begins at the foot of the Spirit and includes in its ecstasy the rock, the tree and the church (see section 3.2). Like the *perichōrēsis* in the icon, deification and Christian perfection are not static; the terms describe not only the goal but the *journey* towards transfiguration.

In the Holy Trinity icon, the Spirit extends an invitation for the beholder to become part of the circle of divine loving. Through becoming part of the circle of perichoretic love we are sanctified wholly throughout in body, mind and spirit. The Spirit's rod is a diagonal; in iconography a diagonal depicts the process of regeneration (Kala 1993:34). The Spirit's rod also testifies to the transfiguration which is the goal and journey of Christian perfection and deification (see section 3.3.2).

Rublev's icon also shows the christological basis for the process of regeneration that is an important element in deification and perfection. The icon shows how the Creator blesses the Redeemer as the Redeemer is sent for the salvation of the world. The message of the icon is an invitation to become part of the circle, to participate in the *perichōrēsis* of God. In the icon, the Redeemer is the axis of the cross by which we are able to become part of the transforming circle of divine love. Through the Logos we can again achieve the image and likeness of God which is our supreme destiny. Both Christian perfection and deification are described as regeneration into the image of God (Wesley 1977:387). Rublev's icon shows that the image of God is a community that is bound together in perichoretic love. By accepting the Spirit's invitation to become part of God we are "participants of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4) and are regenerated into the image of God (Mantzaridis 1984:15).

In the circle in the icon, each *hypostases* gives self completely to the others and receives from the others. Ultimately, deification and Christian perfection involve the loving of God with body, mind, strength, heart and soul. How else can we love God in this ultimate way but by giving ourselves to God's perichoretic ecstasy that is so well portrayed in Rublev's icon.

#### 4.2.2 *The means of grace*

The framework for a spirituality of Christian living offered by Wesley is the journey of holiness and the goal of Christian perfection. Christian perfection is a call that is realised through the gift of God's sanctifying grace. Since it is a gift, it cannot in any way be earned. Justified believers are required to "wait" for the gift of sanctifying grace; this is the praxis of the Christian faith. Waiting for perfection involves participating in the means of God's grace: "All who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the means which he has ordained; in using and not in laying them aside" (Wesley 1944:139).

Wesley argues that God has ordained means as channels of God's grace. He notes that in the process of time, people began to mistake the means for the ends and that this led to the error of seeking justification by works (Wesley 1944:134-5). The means of grace do not earn the gift of grace; rather they ensure that believers remain open to the initiatives of Divine grace. Wesley taught that the means of grace have no intrinsic power in themselves; their value lies in that they increase the knowledge and love of God through the work of the Spirit (Wesley 1944:137). The means of grace do not have any power to atone for sin; salvation is the gift and work of God. Wesley affirms the evangelical slogan, "by grace are ye saved" (Wesley 1944:138). The means of grace are ordinances of God that convey sanctifying grace to us:

By 'means of grace' I understand the outwards signs, words or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby He might convey to men preventing, justifying or sanctifying grace (Wesley 1944:136).

Initially, Wesley recognised three means of grace:

The chief of these means is prayer, whether in secret or with the great congregation; searching the Scriptures (which implies reading, hearing and meditating thereon); and receiving the Lord's supper, eating bread and drinking wine in remembrance of Him; and these we believe to be ordained by God, as the ordinary channels of conveying His grace to the souls of men (Wesley 1944:136-7).

Firstly, Wesley recommends public and private prayer as the chief means of grace and describes sincerity in prayer as "the lifting up of the heart to God: all words of prayer without this are mere

hypocrisy” (Wesley in Williams 1978:133). Prayer, says Wesley (in Williams 1978:134) may be said to be the breath of spiritual life. Just as a person cannot live without breathing, so too are Christians in the path of Christian perfection required to pray without ceasing.

Secondly, Wesley teaches that we are to search the Scriptures in the journey towards Christian perfection. By referring to Acts 17:11-2, Wesley emphasises that it is not only in reading Scripture that we participate in God’s means of grace; we are required to hear it and meditate on it too (Wesley 1944:136-7). Acts 17 describes how the Bereans came to faith through hearing Paul preach to them. Thereafter they searched the Scriptures daily to find out if what he said was true (Wesley 1944:142-3).

Thirdly, all who desire God’s grace are to wait for it in partaking of the Lord’s Supper (Wesley 1944:136-7). The effect of the eucharist is not only unity in Christ and church unity; the sacrament also communicates grace to those who partake of the body and blood of Christ, thereby sanctifying them.

#### ***4.2.2.1 Rublev’s Holy Trinity icon and the means of grace***

##### ***Prayer***

Rublev’s icon is a prayerful means of grace. When we gaze at the icon our gaze becomes our prayer. There is an inextricable connection between Wesley’s emphasis on “praying without ceasing,” the hesychastic Jesus prayer and Rublev’s Holy Trinity icon. Deification is achieved through the divinising grace of God, but is facilitated by stillness. *Hesychia* means stillness, watchfulness and contemplation (Behr-Sigel 1991:63-4). The hesychasts aimed to achieve a fuller concentration of the intellect within the heart and aimed to pray more effectively (Mantzaridis 1984:93). They would sit for hours with their chins on their chest, gazing at their hearts repeating “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me a sinner” (Mantzaridis 1984:93). The Jesus prayer is thus a valuable aid to inner silence (Ware 1988:403). The Jesus prayer, the short, repetitive invocation addressed to the saviour, should not be understood as a Christian mantra (Ware 1988:403). It is not only a rhythmic incantation but also implies a specific personal relationship with Christ (Ware 1988:403). The prayer embodies an explicit confession of faith in the Incarnation of God (Ware 1988:403). By practising prayer in this manner, the hesychasts approached a vision of uncreated

light, a vision that is communicated in Rublev's icon. In receiving the radiance of uncreated light they experienced direct communion with God and were deified through that participation.

Rublev's Holy Trinity icon is an externalisation of the hesychast tradition that was developed through Sergius and his disciples (Baggley 1987:68). The icon portrays the stillness and inner recollection (Baggley 1987:80) preached by the hesychasts. The icon embodies the hesychast contemplation of Taboric light that is the first step in the process of deification.

### *Scripture*

Both Scripture and icons witness to God. Neither word nor image fully exhausts the fullness of God. The only way humans can convey knowledge or experience is through symbols, whether these are linguistic or pictorial (Oleska 1983:47)<sup>38</sup>. Both Scripture and the icon are symbols that make God present to us. The connection between the glory of God that is revealed to us in Rublev's icon and the good news that is revealed to us in Scripture is elucidated by St Basil the Great: "That which the Word communicates by sound, the painting shows silently by representation" (in Ouspensky 1978:10).

### *Eucharist*

The Holy Trinity icon is a eucharistic icon. When Rublev painted the Holy Trinity icon he could have been influenced by the Orthodox theology of the sacraments. His understanding of the eucharist would have influenced the meaning he gave to it in the icon. In Orthodox theology, the sacraments are a means of humankind's deification: "The regeneration and deification of human nature achieved in Christ is rendered accessible to all through the sacraments of the church"

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<sup>38</sup>That humans are symbolic creatures and can only experience God and gain knowledge of God through symbols is articulated by Rahner in his doctoral thesis *Spirit in the world* and his philosophy of religion *Hearer of the word*. In *Spirit in the world* Rahner asks the Kantian question of Thomistic metaphysics: "Can the intellect know anything without turning to the phantasm?" Rahner argues that the basic nature of human beings is that they are *spirit* and have a *vorgriff*, a pre-grasp of the Infinite Horizon. This pre apprehension of the Divine is the necessary condition for knowing. However, since human beings are also *in the world*, they are embodied creatures who are dependent on sense intuition and know in spatio-temporal categories. Rahner's doctoral dissertation is the theological anthropology that provided the basis for his philosophy of religion where he asks: "what kind of hearer does Christianity anticipate so that its real and ultimate message can be heard? In other words, what is the nature of the human person who is to hear the message? Rahner postulates that humans are by nature transcendental, they are open to God and listen for a word from God. But humans, as embodied beings, are by nature social and historical. Therefore when God reveals Godself to human beings God does so in a word or symbol. The kind of hearer Christianity anticipates is firstly *spirit* who is open to God and listens for God and secondly a material, social and historical being who waits for a symbol or word in history. The ultimate form of this symbol or word is the Incarnate Christ, but can also be an icon or Scripture.

(Mantzaridis 1984:41). The Orthodox Christians argue that it is because humans are created beings that they are in need of created means through which they receive the uncreated grace of the Holy Spirit: “The sacraments are a created media which transmit the uncreated grace of God” (Mantzaridis 1984:41). Rublev’s icon has a sacramental character; it is also a medium through which God transmits God’s uncreated grace.

The sacrament of communion makes it possible for humankind to enter into communion with the divinising grace “which the Logos of God bestowed upon human nature” (Mantzaridis 1984:42). Rublev’s icon portrays this point. We become part of the circle through the chalice in the centre of the icon. Through the eucharist we are able to partake of the divine life for each believer is perichoretically united with Christ. Rublev’s icon portrays this aspect too; we participate in the divine life by participating in the circle of the icon. The sacramental union achieved through partaking of the body and blood of Christ is a real ontological union with God’s divinising grace (Mantzaridis 1984:54). In the words of the early church Fathers, we are “of one body with him” (Mantzaridis 1984:54). When the believer is united to Christ through the sacrament, he or she is “transformed into a temple for the trinitarian divinity” (Mantzaridis 1984:54). In other words, through the eucharist, we become one with Christ; we are divinised because the Trinity indwells us (Mantzaridis 1984:54). Rublev’s icon illustrates how we indwell the Trinity.

There are three chalices within Rublev’s Holy Trinity icon (see section 2.4.6). One interpretation that has been suggested for these three chalices is that they represent the infused graces of faith, hope and love (Voloshinov 1999:103-113). The spiritual journey is characterised by these infused virtues of faith, hope and love. Through our participation in the eucharist we have access to sanctifying grace which is faith, hope and love.

#### 4.2.3 *Christian koinonia*

A characteristic of Christian perfection is that it is a *stage* in the *process* of sanctification. The critical question for Christian discipleship is *how* to foster an attitude of constant obedience so that sanctifying grace may work unimpeded. Wesley believed that Christian spirituality needed to be nurtured in gathered communities of mutual accountability and discipline. Wesley’s system of bands, classes and societies was structured to facilitate growth in Christian perfection in the

process of sanctification. The emphasis on sanctification as a *process* is what contextualises Wesley's spirituality in Christian *koinonia*:

Wesley believed that the necessity for mutual encouragement, mutual examination, and mutual service, within the context of the means of grace, required more than the hearing of the Word, the participation of the sacraments, and the joining in the prayers of the "great congregation." Wesley's view of holiness was woven into his ecclesiology. He believed that the gathering together of believers into small voluntary societies for mutual discipline and Christian growth was essential to the church's life (Snyder 1980:151).

At the beginning of the Methodist movement, the class meetings<sup>39</sup> were a "prudential means of grace" that were implemented as a method of behavioural conversion and a way in which Christians could assist each other in Christian living. These class meetings provided the context for the pastoral care of individuals. The class meetings were the only point of entry into the Methodist societies; the one requirement for admission into the classes was the desire to "flee from the wrath to come, a desire to be saved from sin" (Lawson 1965:192). This desire had to be demonstrated by its fruits: "first by doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind; especially that which is most generally practised" and secondly by "doing good of every possible sort and as far as possible to all men"(Lawson 1965:192). Finally, Methodists were expected to attend upon all the ordinances of God, the means of grace. (Lawson 1965:193-4).

The significance of Christian fellowship was that it provided a framework for believers to translate the meaning of spiritual living into their contemporary existence. The classes and the bands enabled individuals to build each other up in faith and relate their faith to the problems of their personal and social lives. The members of the bands and classes became priests to each other through mutual counsel and encouragement (Williams 1960:140). For those who seek to implement a spirituality of Christian living into their own lives, Christian *koinonia* in the form

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<sup>39</sup>The class meetings were one expression of Christian *koinonia*. A more intimate expression of Christian fellowship was the band meetings. The rules of the Band-Societies were based on the Biblical injunction in James 5:16. The rules emphasised mutual confession, the leader was required to ask each member the following questions (Baker 1965:219):

- 1) What known sin have you committed since our last meeting?
- 2) What temptations have you met with?
- 3) What have you thought, said or done of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?
- 4) Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?

described by Wesley, would be indispensable. The problems of applying such a structure to a twenty-first century situation are manifold. First, because of the individualistic consciousness of Western people, there is a resistance to communal accountability in the spiritual life. This accountability is a necessary characteristic of Wesley's means of grace. Second, Christian conference in the form of classes and bands may give rise to spiritual elitism. This attitude is countered when it is realised that the entire church benefits from groups who meet for prayer. Third, the structure that Wesley gave to his band and class system means that the Christian fellowship could become legalistic. The danger is that the leader or the group themselves could become fixated on the list of rules and regulations that are given as a guide. A legalistic attitude can be overcome by the reminder that spirituality is about participating in a relationship with God, not obeying a set of rules. On the other hand, a fear of being too legalistic could mean that a class or band would lack accountability. Finally, the routine of meeting weekly might mean that the classes and bands degenerate into social gatherings without any spiritual encouragement. This happens when the original function of Christian conference is lost sight of and not preserved (Maas 1992:324-326).

#### **4.2.3.1 Rublev's Holy Trinity icon and Christian *koinonia***

For Orthodox Christians, the church is a communion of deification (Mantzaridis 1984:56). For Wesley, Christian *koinonia* is the communion of perfection. Rublev's icon shows that persons in a life-giving community is the standard for all existence. In this way the icon preaches that the path of transfiguration is not an isolated journey. The icon depicts the necessity for believers, who become part of the divine community through gazing at the icon, to develop and nurture communities among fellow believers.

The *perichōrēsis* of Rublev's icon prescribes the ethics for Christian *koinonia* that nurtures Christian perfection. By gazing at the icon, we become one with the icon and therefore are in union with the triune God. We are also at one with each other by virtue of our unity in Christ. The nature of this unity with each other is perichoretic; that is to say that our Christian *koinonia* is mutual, equal, inclusive and non-judgemental. Rublev's icon teaches that our Christian *koinonia* has to be characterised by self-emptying, self-sacrificing love.

#### 4.2.4 *Ethical and social transformation*

The basic framework for a spirituality of Christian living offered by John Wesley is the doctrine of Christian perfection, sought through the means of grace, supported by the class meetings and a band-society system and evidenced in social outreach. Grace is efficacious, it must have real, palpable effects; the inward transformation must produce an outward change in behaviour and attitude if it is to be a genuine spirituality. The consequence of the love of God, which defines Christian perfection, is the love of one's neighbour:

The same love is productive of all right actions. It leads him into an earnest and steady discharge of all social offices, of whatever is due to relations of every kind: to his friends, to his country and to any particular community whereof he is a member. It prevents him willingly hurting or grieving any man. It guides him into a uniform practice of justice and mercy, equally extensive with the principle where it flows. It constrains him to do all possible good, of every possible kind (Wesley in Whaling 1981:123).

A Christian who seeks holiness of life and heart develops an ethical and social vision. Love, which is at the heart of Christian perfection, is the opposite of selfish self-regard, it is freely self-giving:

Religion, if it is not to be the pious form of worldliness, if it is instead to be the response to the action of God, must begin where God begins, among the poor, the despised, the oppressed and the marginalised (Jennings 1994:143).

How do we develop a social and ethical vision? Through stewardship and solidarity with the poor.

##### 4.2.4.1 *Stewardship*

The disparity between the wealthy and the poor, the consumer culture that is motivated and spurred on by the media, the greed of capitalism and the imbalance of the earth's resources are a feature of our existence today more than ever before (Jennings 1990:183). The American nation, which contains only a fraction of the earth's population, consumes more than half the earth's resources (Jennings 1990:183). Stewardship is the spiritual reply to capitalist greed and the selfish

vision of acquisition and consumption. Wesley felt that wealth<sup>40</sup> jeopardised spirituality: "Economics is the point at which worldliness threatens holiness" (Jennings 1990:153). Stewardship in Wesleyan theology is the spiritual way of managing our financial resources.

The basis for Wesley's understanding of stewardship is that God, the Creator of everything seen and unseen, is the sole owner of all created things. To render unto God what belongs to God means to give to God all that we have and are: "our souls, our bodies, our goods, and whatever other talents we have received" (Wesley 1872a:1). If God is the sole proprietor, then our relationship to things of this world is an indirect one; we are stewards of all with which God has blessed us (Jennings 1990:100-101). This means that we are not allowed to manage "our" resources as we wish, we manage them according to the will of the Creator:

We are not at liberty to use what he [God] has lodged in our hands as we please but as he pleases who alone is the possessor of heaven and earth, and the Lord of every creature. We have no right to dispose of anything that we have, but according to his will, seeing we are not proprietors of these things...And he entrusts us with them on this express condition, that we use them only as our Master's goods, and according to the particular directions which he has given us in his word. (1872a:1).

But what is the "Master's will" with the "goods" with which he has entrusted us? We are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, help the stranger, the widow, the fatherless and basically relieve all the wants of humankind (Jennings 1990:103 and Wesley 1872a:6). Wesley taught that on judgement day, we will be asked to give an account of our stewardship:

The Lord of all will next enquire...in what manner did thou employ that comprehensive talent, money? Not in gratifying the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, or the pride of life; not in squandering it away in vain expenses - the same as throwing it in the sea; not in hoarding it up to leave behind thee- the same as burying it in the earth, but first supplying thy own reasonable wants, together

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<sup>40</sup>Wesley believed that wealth was not only a stumbling block in the path of Christian perfection, but that it actually worked against us. He felt that spirituality was mortally wounded when the life of faith fell into the trap of acquisition and consumption. His concern was that we would either lose our souls or gain the kingdom of God (Jennings 1990:38). In his notes on the New Testament, Wesley argues that the foundation of the church was at Pentecost. The church's "first fall from grace" was the death of Annanias and Saphira; this punishment demonstrates the corrosive power of wealth (Jennings 1990:39). Wesley warns: "Mark the first plague which infected the Christian church; namely the love of money" (Jennings 1990:39). Wesley insists that we cannot serve God and mammon, "getting more wealth is incompatible with getting more holiness" (Jennings 1990:38).

with those of thy family then restoring the remainder to me, through the poor, whom I appointed to receive it. (1872a:6).

The Wesleyan ethic of stewardship can be summarised in four points. Firstly, we are called to be stewards for God and the poor. Second, everything that is beyond what is necessary for life belongs to the poor. Consumption and needless expense is robbery of the poor. Third, we are given gifts of wealth in order that we may give it to the poor: “but first supplying thy own reasonable wants, together with those of thy family, then restoring the remainder to me, through the poor, whom I appointed to receive it” (Wesley 1872a:6). Finally, we are to regard ourselves as another of the poor: “looking upon thy self as only one of that number of poor whose wants were to be supplied out of that part of my substance which I had placed in thy hands for this purpose” (Wesley 1872a:6). One way we can do this is through solidarity with the poor.

#### 4.2.4.2 *Solidarity with the poor*

Stewardship, or giving to the poor, is not enough. The Christian on the journey to perfection must practice stewardship by standing in solidarity with the poor. By merely giving to the poor, we are in danger of being unsympathetic to the cause of the poor; we are also in danger of romanticising poverty. One reason that “the rich, in general, have so little sympathy for the poor is because they seldom visit them” says Wesley (1872d:2). Romanticising the poor by extolling the virtues of poverty breaks down any attempt to alleviate conditions of deprivation (Jennings 1990:47). Without the experience of visiting the marginalised, the possibility of empathy is lost. The practice of visiting is necessary for instilling compassion that is fundamental for true religion (Jennings 1990:47).

Solidarity with the poor is expressed through visiting the destitute and marginalised. The consequences of this solidarity are threefold. First, class distinction disintegrated; the prosperous were converted to the cause of the poor:

... The breaking down of barriers between givers and the receivers of aid, between those who have and those who have not, is an essential expression of the solidarity that liberates the privileged from their blindness and the marginalised from their invisibility (Jennings 1990:62).

Second, solidarity is an important part of transformation into Christ; the value then of visiting the poor is that our hearts and minds may be transformed; experience may lead to compassion (Jennings 1990:55):

In visiting the marginalised we invite them to transform us, to transform our hearts, to transform our understanding, to transform us into instruments of divine mercy and justice” (Jennings 1990:57-8).

It is because visiting the sick, marginalised and oppressed is so transformative that Wesley recommended it as a means of grace in the path to Christian perfection:

Neither would it do the same good to you, unless you saw them [the sick] with your own eyes. If you do not, you lose a means of grace; you lose an excellent means of increasing your thankfulness to God ... as well as of increasing your sympathy with the afflicted, your benevolence and all social affections (1872d:2).

The result of transformation of a person’s heart and mind leads to positive action. An aspect of solidarity with the poor, therefore, is the organisations that were established to alleviate poverty. Wesley established “sewing collectives” to employ the poor and “lending stocks” to help the impoverished finance their own business initiatives (Jennings 1990:57-8). He also built “poor-houses” for the destitute (Jennings 1990:57-8). The effective ingredient in all these enterprises was continued solidarity with the poor. One of the ways in which this was expressed is that the preachers and their families lived with the destitute in the “poor-houses” (Jennings 1990:57-8).

In sum: Christian perfection does not entail withdrawal from the world. “The holiness project”, as the religion of love, is necessarily social (Jennings 190:150). Scriptural holiness involves outreach to the poor; a faith without works is a dead faith. Outreach to the poor is through stewardship and solidarity with the poor.

#### **4.2.4.3      *Rublev’s Holy Trinity icon and ethical and social transformation***

How does Rublev’s Holy Trinity icon espouse Wesley’s message of ethical and social transformation? Firstly, the attitude of the angels in the Trinity icon is such that as each angel gazes at the other, she gives herself totally to the others. The tilting of the heads of the angels

describes this self-emptying *kenōsis*. Thus the tilting of the angels' heads, their self-emptying love, asks those who prayerfully gaze at the icon to live in a self-emptying, self-sacrificing way. We can do this through giving to the poor and through solidarity with the poor.

Secondly, if we remember that the Old Testament basis for Rublev's Holy Trinity icon is the hospitality of Abraham, this theme of hospitality could characterise our spirituality of ethical and social living (see section 2.2.1). When Sarah and Abraham welcomed the pilgrims, they did not know that the three pilgrims were the Godhead, yet they regarded the strangers as sent by God. This is the same attitude of respect that we should have for strangers that come our way, especially the downtrodden of society: the hungry, the naked, the widows and the fatherless (Jennings 1990:103 and Wesley 1872a:6). Secondly, the hospitality that Sarah and Abraham offered was holistic, it did not just serve to satisfy physical hunger. Sarah and Abraham made their guests comfortable beneath the shade of an oak tree and washed their feet; their hospitality had a holistic orientation. Thirdly, through feeding their guests the fruits of the land, Sarah and Abraham were practising stewardship. They were giving to God through feeding their guests. In a similar way, Methodists embody a social and ethical vision by giving to God through giving to the poor. Wesley's third principle of stewardship outlined above asks that we use the gifts God has bestowed on us to supply our own needs and then "restore the remainder to me (God), through the poor, whom I appointed to receive it" (Wesley 1872a:6). In Rublev's Holy Trinity icon, Abraham and Sarah embodied a social vision through their gift of hospitality to the three heavenly pilgrims. Methodists can also embody a social and ethical vision by regarding all people that they meet as God-sent, including the poor, the lame, the hungry and the orphaned. By offering to the poor and the marginalised the true gift of hospitality, Methodists would echo the sentiments of Rublev's icon.

Hospitality in Christian churches is signified at the celebration of the eucharist. In receiving Christ into ourselves, we make Christ the Lord of our lives and should therefore regulate our words, actions and thoughts according to Christ's will (Mantzaridis 1984:56). In others words, our participation in the divinising grace of the Godhead through our participation in the eucharist must find expression in ethical living.

### 4.3 CONCLUSION

Being drawn into the perichoretic love life of God, which is facilitated by Rublev's Holy Trinity icon, can be a mystical experience of deification and Christian perfection. Scriptural holiness is the attainable goal of Christian living; it is the fulfillment of faith. Entire sanctification is to love God with body, mind and soul and to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. Christian perfection is the knitting together of all the fruits of the spirit in our lives; it is to be regenerated into the image of God such that we have the mind that was in Christ and are sanctified wholly throughout. Christian perfection is the end-purpose of all Christ's work on earth. It is the purpose for which people were created; it is the point of human existence. Perfect love can be known on earth and will ultimately be consummated in heaven (Whaling 1981:49). This holiness is a product of God's sanctifying grace; it is both an inward and an outward holiness. It was Wesley's aim to "promote as far as possible a vital and practical religion and by the grace of God to preserve and increase the life of God in the souls of people" (Whaling 1981:44).

Wesley's framework of Christian spirituality, espoused in the light of Rublev's Holy Trinity icon, has relevance in today's religious and socio-political contexts. He provides a holistic and balanced spirituality for contemporary people to articulate the divine in their lives. As Snyder (1980:147) comments:

This balanced emphasis gave Methodism a strong ethical sensitivity. But it also underscored the important role of the church, because Wesley knew the Christian community was either the environment where God's grace turned sinners into saints or else a cold, lifeless shell where new-born believers died of spiritual exposure.

Wesley's exhortation for an inward transformation and an outward transformation that has palpable ethical and social effects, has relevance in an ecclesial context. By contrast, the prosperity messages proclaimed by some pentecostal, fundamentalist churches are a threat to the Gospel. They celebrate wealth and power as a gift from God and preach the promise of material blessings and that socioeconomic mobility is a sign of divine approval (Jennings 1990:29). For these churches, poverty is a curse from God (Jennings 1990:29). This alliance of wealth and religion corrupts the Gospel because it establishes a pseudo-Christianity. Its interests are the maintenance of wealth, power and the middle class and not the propagation of scriptural

Christianity (Jennings 1990:42). Wesley's evangelical economics is based on scriptural holiness. The Methodist project was to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land and therefore throughout the earth. The success of this project did not depend on an increase in numbers, or in wealth, but an increase in holiness of life and heart. The empirical evidence for this holiness was that Christians practise social transformation.

Wesley's evangelical, ethical and social vision also has relevance in twentieth century spirituality. As a result of the Age of Reason, deism and the impact Newton, Descartes, Bacon *et al* had on human consciousness, people began to operate according to dualisms that saw the mind as separate from the body and the secular world as separate from the sacred. In the consciousness of many Christians, their religious life, which is often restricted to Sunday morning services, is seen as separate from the rest of their existence. They do not regard their interaction in the world of society, politics and economics as related in any way to their spiritual life. Wesley teaches us that the consequence of scriptural holiness is social and ethical living. Positive economic activity and constructive social outreach are an intrinsic part of the spiritual life.

## POSTULATING

### 5.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This research project investigates whether or not Rublev's Holy Trinity has significance for our spiritual living. To this end, chapter one positions the questions of this research project in the present secular, political, ecclesial and theological contexts. Chapter two offers an exegesis of the icon, an interpretation of Rublev's icon that forms the basis for exploring the spiritual significance of the icon. An important postulation is that the key of the icon is the circle of perichoretic love that is created by the outer contours of the three angels. The movement of this circle is depicted by the tilt of the angels' heads while each gazes lovingly at the other. The paradox of the geometry of the icon is that the movement creates a motionless peace. The centre of the motionless peace is the chalice. The chalice qualifies the ecstasy as eucharistic *perichōrēsis*. The third chapter, "participation", focuses on the *perichōrēsis* in Rublev's icon and offers an explanation of what *perichōrēsis* implies and what it means for us to participate in Rublev's icon by participating in God's *perichōrēsis*. This third chapter unravelled some implications that the eucharistic *perichōrēsis* in Rublev's icon could have on our spirituality. Taking into account the belief that we are transfigured through contemplation of the icon, the fourth chapter, "perfection", articulated the link between Christian perfection and Rublev's Holy Trinity icon.

Essentially, the central message of the icon is one of hospitality. All processes and entities of the cosmos, humanity and ecology, are invited to participate in the dynamic love-life of God's perichoretic being. Transfiguration occurs through participation in the *perichōrēsis* of God. The icon demonstrates that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice versa. The way that God meets and communicates Godself to humanity is the way in which God subsists (Boff 1988:95).

## 5.2 IMPLICATIONS

In Rublev's Holy Trinity icon, the Trinity *in se* and the Trinity *pro nobis* are aspects of the same dynamism. By gazing at the icon prayerfully and accepting the invitation to become part of the perichoretic love life of God, we can be spiritually formed by the dynamism of the Trinity portrayed in Rublev's icon. The eucharistic *perichōrēsis* of the icon fashions the way in which we live our lives, manage our families, structure our churches and political organisations and the way in which we relate to others and ourselves.

Rublev's Holy Trinity icon can also have implications for our spirituality in terms of how we conduct our prayer lives. Firstly, it broadens our understanding of prayer. Prayer is not necessarily petitioning God or even vocal. The icon can show how prayer is standing in silence before God, with the intellect in the heart and allowing our gaze to be our prayer. Secondly, Rublev's Holy Trinity icon affirms that there are three *hypostases* and one *ousia*. This will change the structure of our prayers; we will become conscious of the *hypostases* in our prayers. Instead of addressing our vocal prayers simply to 'God' we will become conscious of the different relationship that we have with each *hypostases* represented by the angels in the icon.

Rublev's Holy Trinity icon also has implications for the answers we give to questions such as "who am I? Spirituality is characterised by this question. Rublev's icon provides a "map" for answering this question. Who I am is dependent on my relationship with the cosmos and with people who, with me, are invited to become part of the *perichōrēsis* of God.

## 5.3 ISSUES ARISING OUT OF THE STUDY

### 5.3.1 *Rublev's Holy Trinity icon and African Traditional Religions*

Praying through icons in the Orthodox tradition affirms the essential goodness of matter. Oleska (1983:49-50) writes that this theological view allows for a tolerant, all-embracing attitude towards traditional cultures. African Traditional Religions have their own 'theology' of colours. This understanding of the significance of colours, and Rublev's use of colours in the icon, could provide a fruitful interplay. This is especially the case if Rublev's icon were to be made into a banner since

banners are often an expression of worship for Christians with an African Traditional background. Moreover, the chalice containing the lamb's head, could also be a useful contact point between Rublev's icon and African Traditional Religions for whom the slaughtering of an animal is an important element in rites of passage and other ritual ceremonies.

Another connection between Rublev's Holy Trinity icon and Methodist South Africans in the rural parts of our country, who are generally influenced by their African Traditional Religious heritage, could be the *perichōrēsis* depicted in the Trinity icon. One way in which *perichōrēsis* could be described is as a dance, with the three *hypostases* weaving in between each other. The beauty of this description is that it depicts the dynamic and energetic character of *perichōrēsis*. Dance is one characteristic of worship in African Traditional Religions. Dancing is a way in which the adherents relate to each other; it is a way of being holistic in worship. Dancing can also be a transpersonal experience as the choreography becomes more and more energetic and frantic and at times the dancers can reach an altered state of consciousness. *Perichōrēsis* can describe how each of the divine *hypostases* dance with each other; it therefore has connections with the style of worship that those who are influenced by African Traditional Religions, are accustomed to.

In section 4.1.1 of this research project, I described how three epochs of communication can broadly be designated. The first epoch is the primitive, tribal or primal period where face to face communication predominates. The characteristics of this epoch are sound, movement, dialogue and people communally involved with each other. Rublev's Holy Trinity icon would have developed in this epoch. The rural communities in South Africa could also be described as tribal. Since rural South African and the Holy Trinity icon could both be described as tribal, Rublev's icon could, therefore, have some connection with rural Methodist South Africans.

In section 4.1.1, I also argued that our present epoch of communication is the 'electronic age'. The characteristics of this age are a bombardment of the senses, noise, pace, risk and images; our consciousness is shaped by the media and internet which recondition our mode of perception. Thus, in this 'electronic' age, images flood our lives (Quenot 1992:45). In section 1.5.2 it was noted that these images, since they are used for the purposes of profit, can be used against us without our realising it (Quenot 1992:145). In this milieu, icons are a way of sanctification of the senses (Quenot 1992:45). Rublev's icon could therefore influence urbanised South Africans whose consciousness is influenced by the electronic age.

Since Rublev's icon has relevance for rural South Africans whose consciousness can be described as tribal, and also has relevance for urban South Africans whose consciousness can be described as 'electronic'. Rublev's icon could act as a bridge between the two epochs. Rublev's icon as a bridge between the two epochs could be a way of integrating rural and urban Methodist societies. The pictorial image of God's perichoretic hospitality transcends the epochs, links people from every age and invites all to participate in God's *perichōrēsis*.

### 5.3.2 Rublev's Holy Trinity icon and symbols

An area that could be investigated at a later point is the spirituality of symbols. The tendency in today's understanding is to see a dualism between symbols and the realities that they signify. Yet our consciousness is profoundly shaped by symbols. Language, which is a linguistic symbol, communicates a reality to us, as do symbols in visual form. Morse, for example, notes that through the liturgy of advertising, the world-wide symbol of Coca Cola imbibe's the American dream (Morse 1997:62).

Rublev's icon, and icons in general, are based on the philosophy that the symbol makes present what it signifies. In other words, the symbol and the signified reality participate in each other and are inextricably united to each other. This is a useful starting point in developing a spirituality of symbols. One example that has been suggested in this research project is how erotic relationships, if characterised by the principles of *kenōsis* and *perichōrēsis*, can be symbols for our communion with the Godhead.

## 5.4 CONCLUSION

Rublev's Holy Trinity icon does have significance for spirituality; it does have significance for Methodists. Rublev's icon shows that the Trinity is not an abstract, philosophical concept that has little to do with our existence. His icon demonstrates that the Trinity is that which undergirds our reality; we are called to imitate the Trinity in our Christian living. Contemplating Rublev's icon of the Holy Trinity, in the light of Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection, is one way in which Methodists can answer the call to deeper spirituality (see section 1.5.3).

Finally, the icon gives expression to the words of St Augustine: "My heart is restless until it rests in you." Amidst the anxieties and ambiguities of postmodern living, Rublev's Holy Trinity icon is a holy place to enter and stay within, where loving God is being loved by God and knowing God is being known by God. In the words of the psalmist:

Even the sparrow finds a home,  
and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may lay her young,  
at your altars, O Lord of Hosts,  
my king and my God.  
Happy are those who live in  
your house,  
singing your praise.

Psalm 84:3-4 (NRSV)

The icon, as a portal to the divine, is the door through which we enter the world of the spirit. As we behold the beauty of the Lord and are transfigured by the presence of Light, we see God, but God also sees us. We are in the gaze of God, gazing at God.

**Plate one**

**The Saviour *Acheiropoietos***

**Russian**

**Holy Trinity Church**

**Twentieth century**

**(Ouspensky and Lossky 1983:70)**

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The icon “made without hands” shows us the face of Christ. In Christian iconography, the possibility of representing Christ rests on the foundation of the Incarnation (Lossky 1983:72). It is this icon that is venerated at the feast of Orthodoxy (Lossky 1983:72).



**Plate two**

**The “Hodigitria”**

**Byzantine**

**Macedonian School**

**First half fourteenth century**

**(Ouspensky and Lossky 1983:79)**

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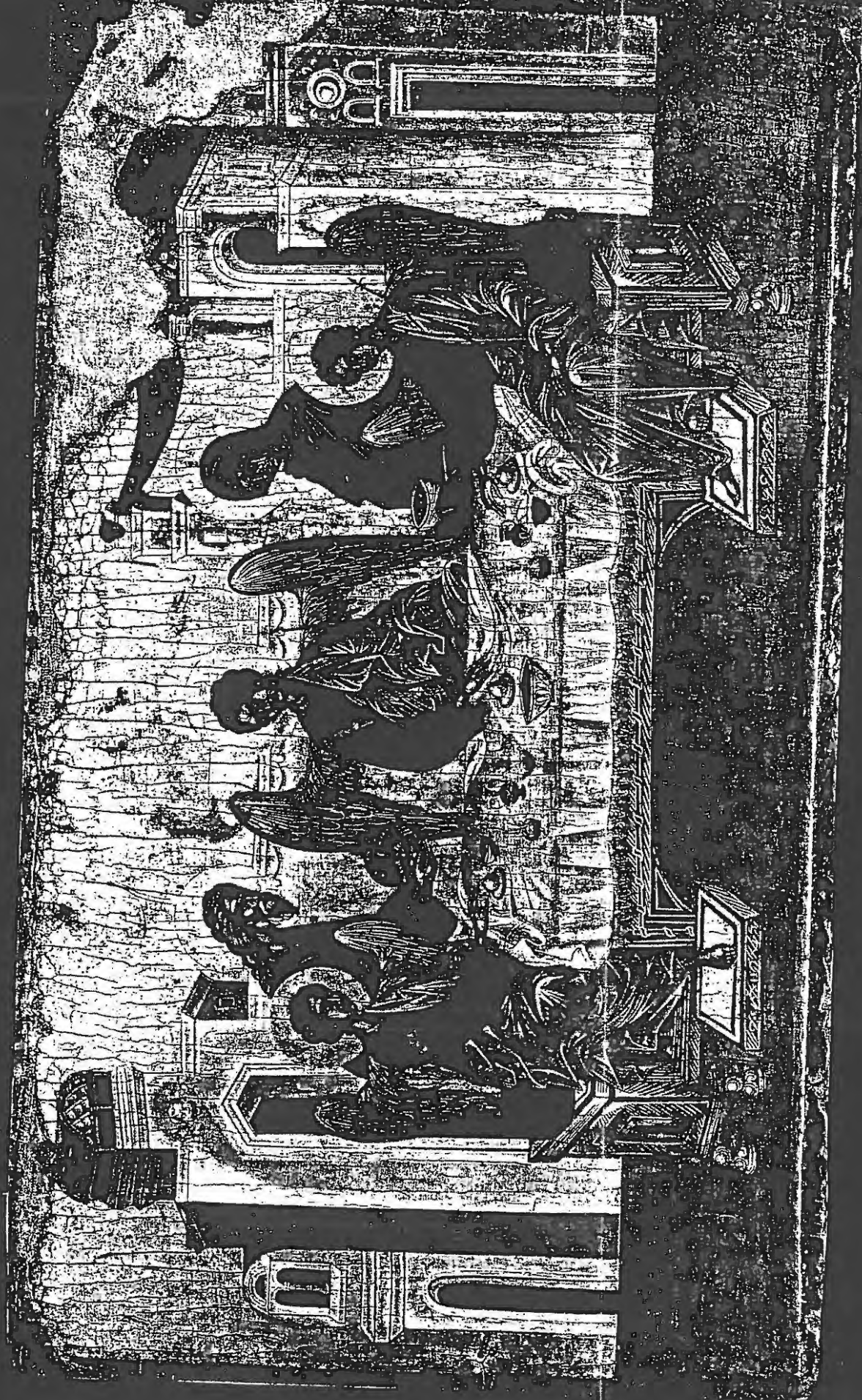
Byzantine tradition traces the original painting to St Luke who sent the portrait with his Gospel text to the “most excellent Theophilus” (Lossky 1983:80). According to this tradition, Mary is said to have blessed her portrait : “My blessing will remain always with this icon” (Lossky 1983:80).



**Plate three****Icon with the hospitality of Abraham****Athens****Late fourteenth century****(Weitzmann 1978:130)**

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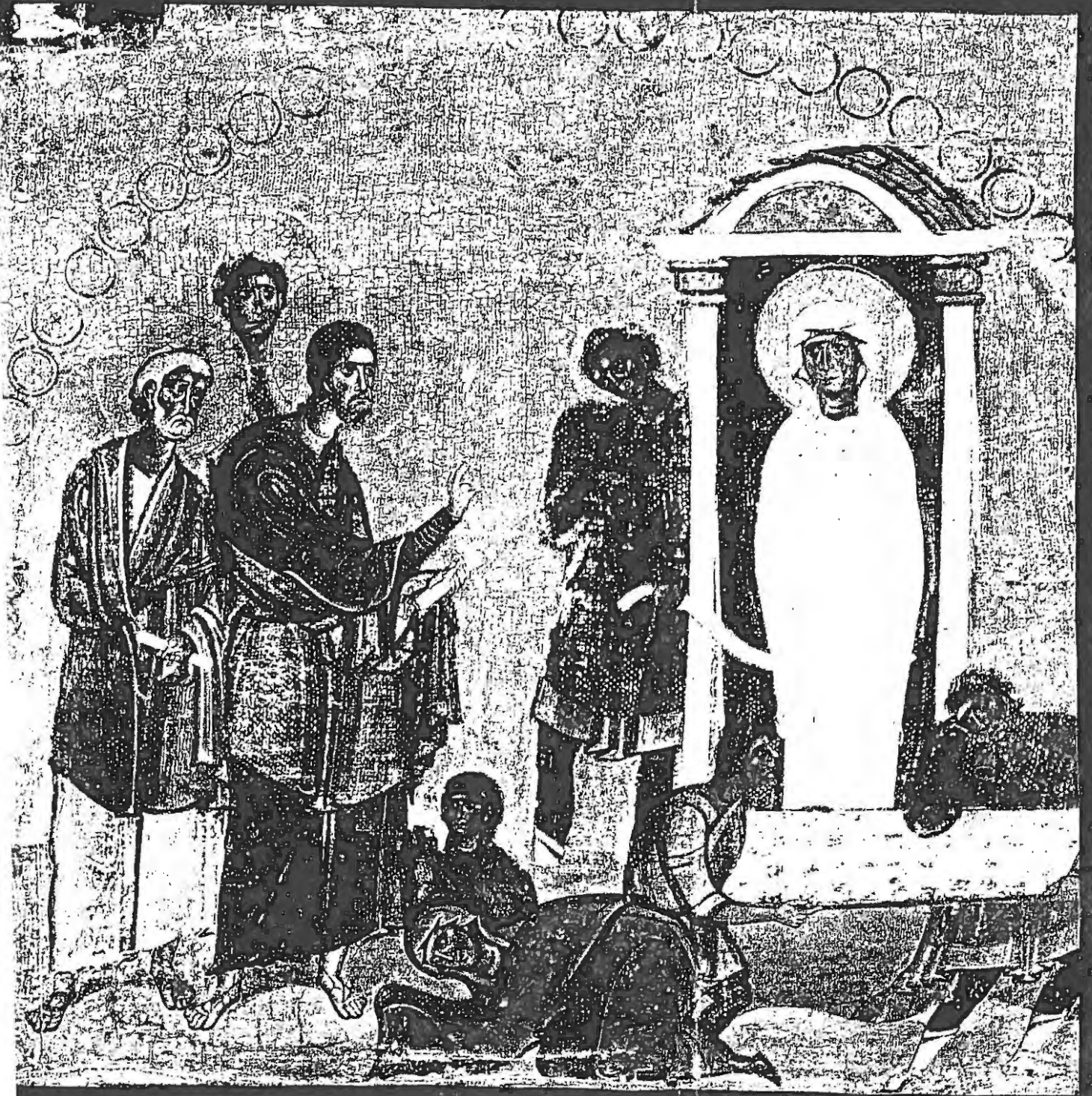
Plate one shows one of the earliest models of the Old Testament Trinity. This icon, which is more often called the Hospitality of Abraham, is from late fourteenth century Athens (1978:131). An unusual horizontal format was chosen for the icon. This allowed the iconographer to display a broad laden table which emphasises the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah. The angels sit far apart from each other to allow room for Abraham and Sarah who serve them. A rhythmic pattern is created with the alternating red garments of the angels with the black robes of the hosts (1978:131). The horizontal landscape makes for a long architectural backdrop that lacks the depth that Rublev's icon has. This icon shows the influence of the dematerialising process of Palaeologan art (1978:131). The angels are more slender and their bodies are buried under togas with accumulated crumpled folds. This theme is continued in the garments of Rublev's angels.



**Plate four****Iconostasis beam. Detail with the raising of Lazarus****Sinai****Twelfth century****(Weitmann 1978:77)**

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Plate four shows the raising of Lazarus. The icon is from the first half of the twelfth century and was completed either at Cyprus or at Sinai (1978:76). The Christ figure is identified by the red and blue garments, by the blessing of his right hand and the scroll he carries in his left hand. Christ is also pointed out by St Peter and Lazarus' sisters who genuflect before him (1978:76).



**Plate five****The Christ Pantocrator****Moscow School****Seventeenth Century****(Kala 1993:71)**

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Plate five portrays the icon of the Christ Pantocrator who wears the customary colours of a red chiton with a blue toga. This seventeenth century icon is from the Moscow School. The tenderness and inexhaustible mercy of the Pantocrator - the one who holds all things in being is accentuated in his facial expression (Kala 1993:70-71).



прїидите бабїи	папостї и ѡ
оца моего пасы	страннїх къх
доїте оуготоу	и не доустыи
ноу влїкї цр҃квїе	нагъ нодѣл
шлужїи и прѣ	стїи болнї
кзлїкї хлѣбїи	пностїи стїи
дїстїи жїтїи бо	не стїи стїи
зжлїхїи и	прїидстїи

**Plate six**

**The Holy Trinity**

**Novgorod School**

**Late fifteenth century**

**(Baggley 1987:112)**

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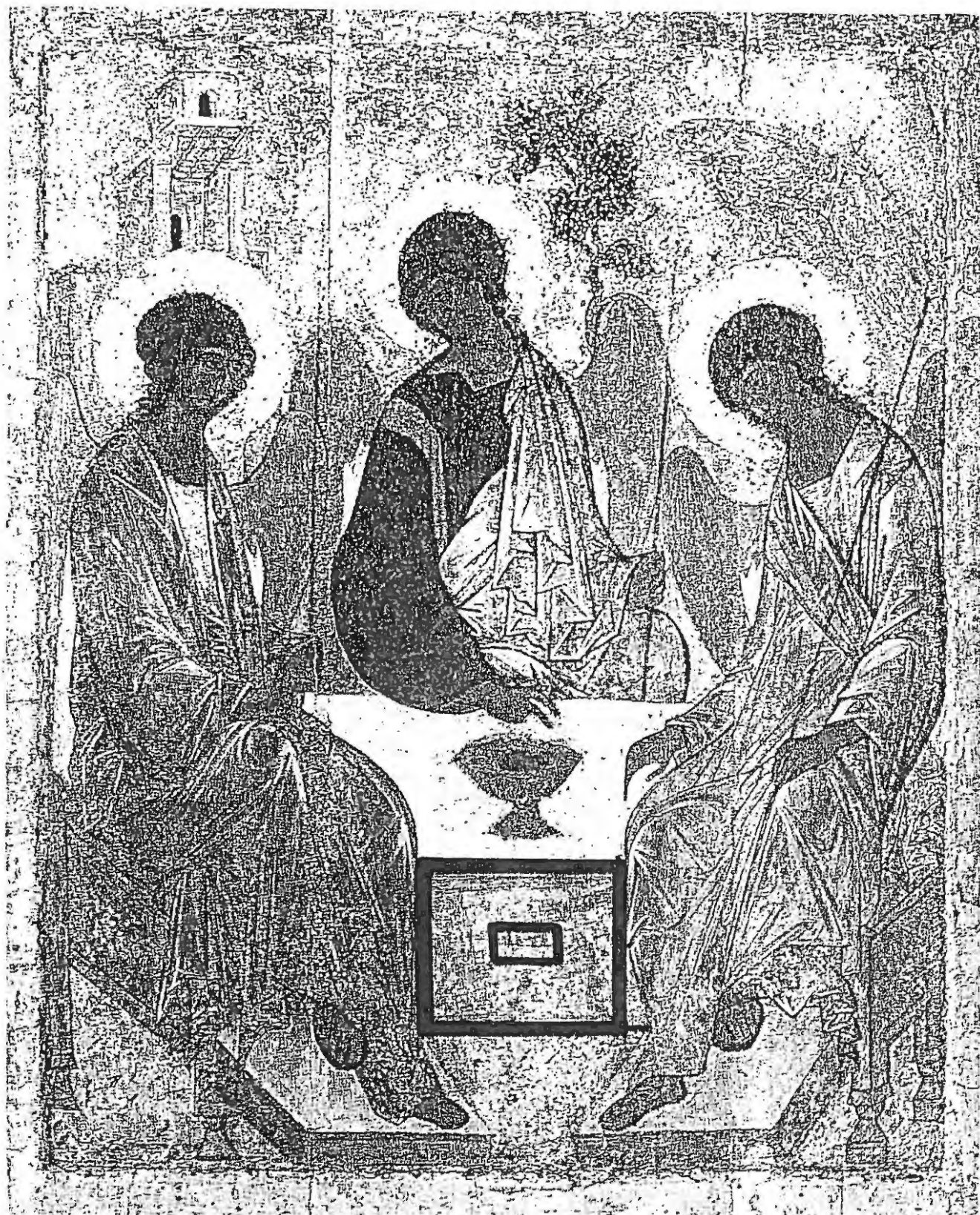


**Plate seven****The Holy Trinity icon****Geometric lines**

## Plate 7a

## The Holy Trinity icon

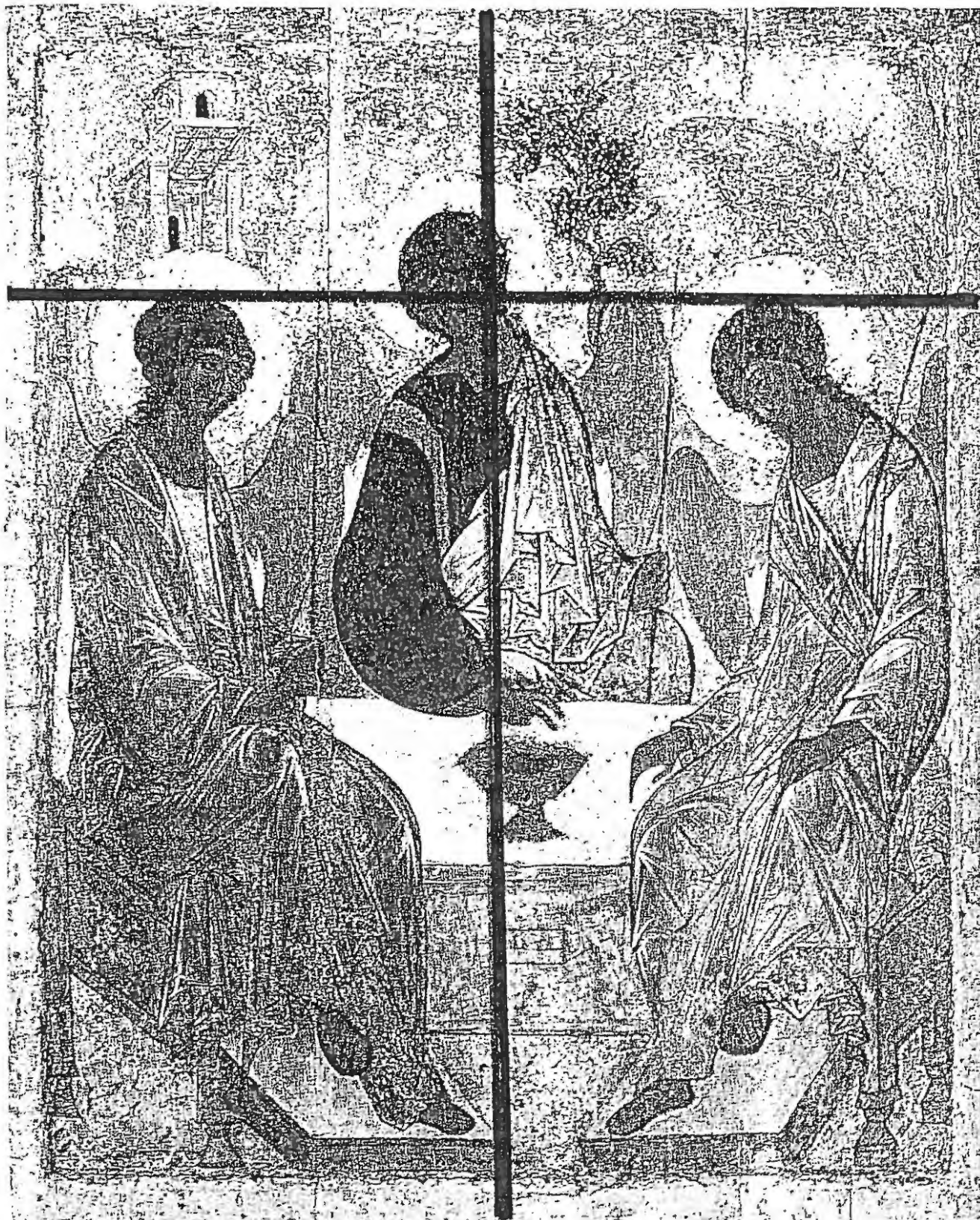
## The rectangle



## Plate 7b

## The Holy Trinity icon

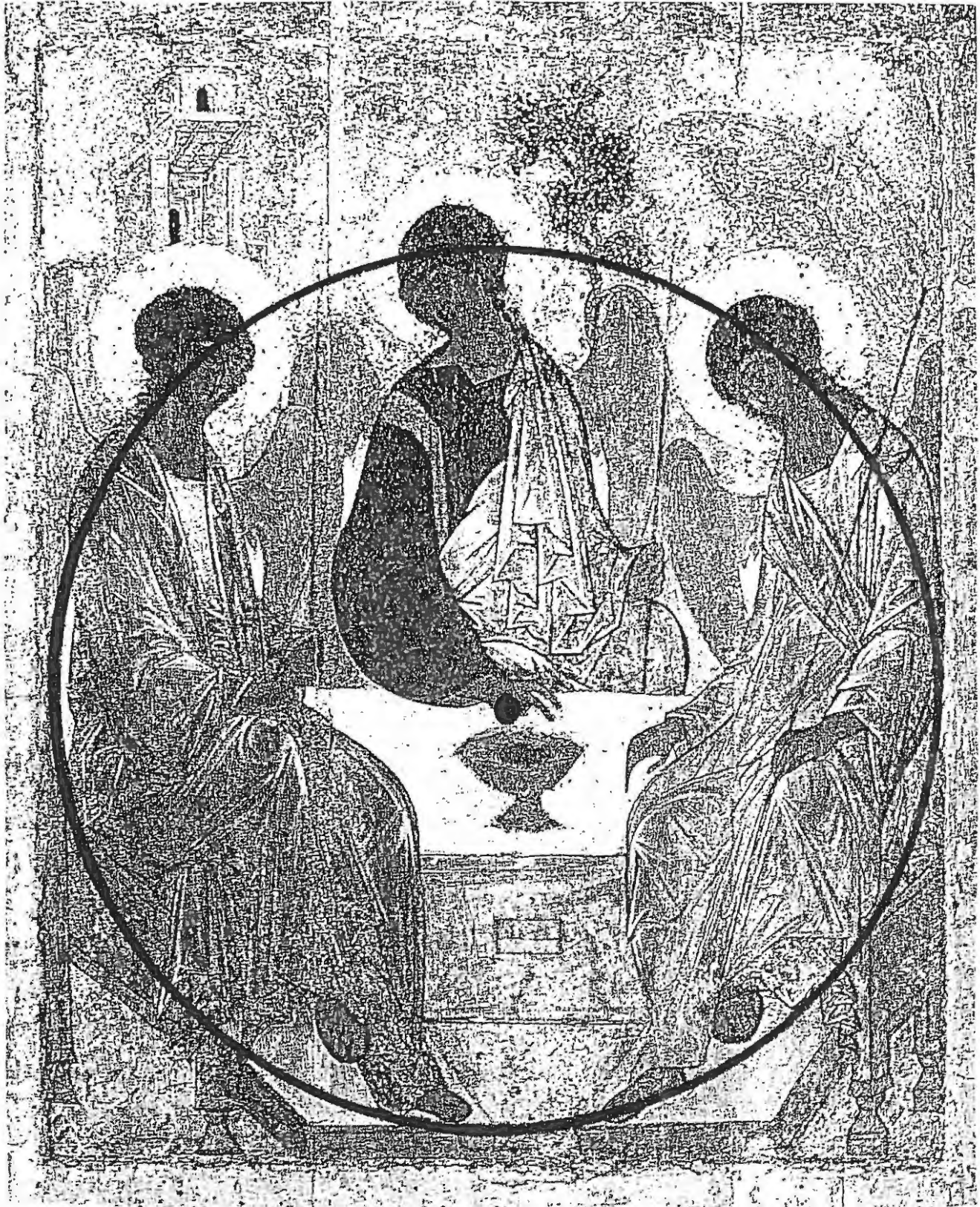
## Cross-axial symmetry



## Plate 7c

## The Holy Trinity icon

## The circle



**Plate 7d**

**The Holy Trinity icon**

**The octagon** .

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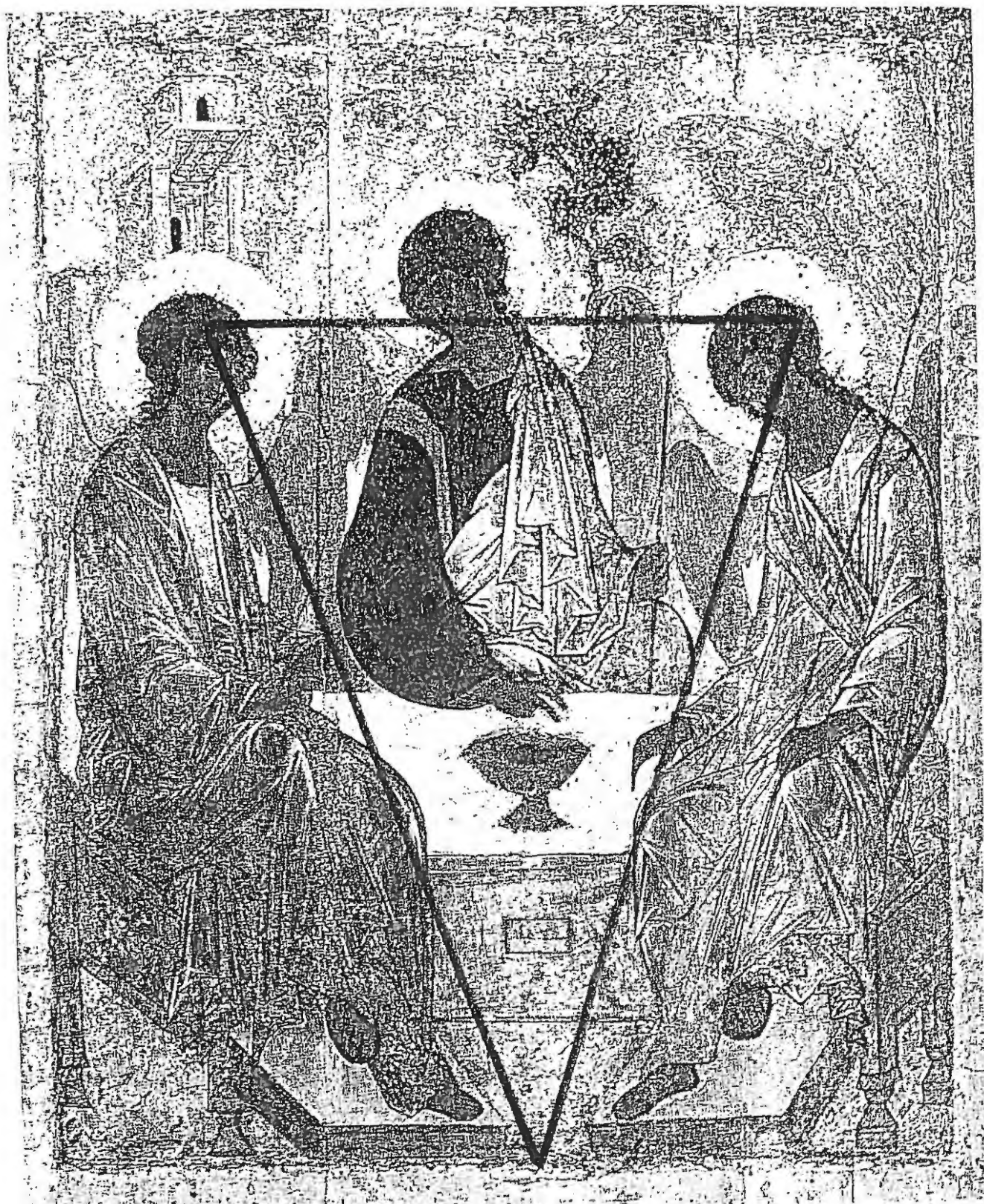
**Plate 7e****The Holy Trinity icon****The triangle**

Plate 7f

Normal and inverse perspective

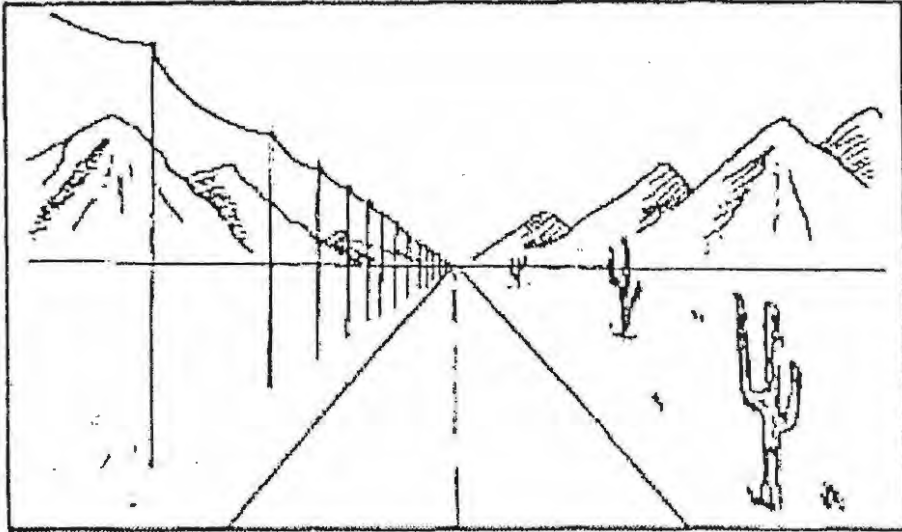


Figure 1. Normal Perspective

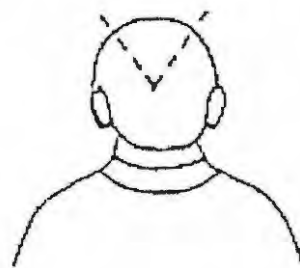
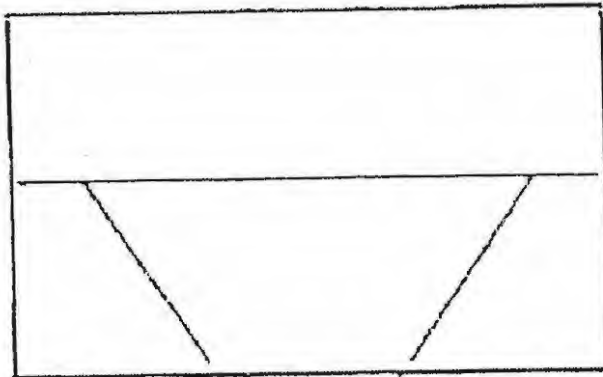
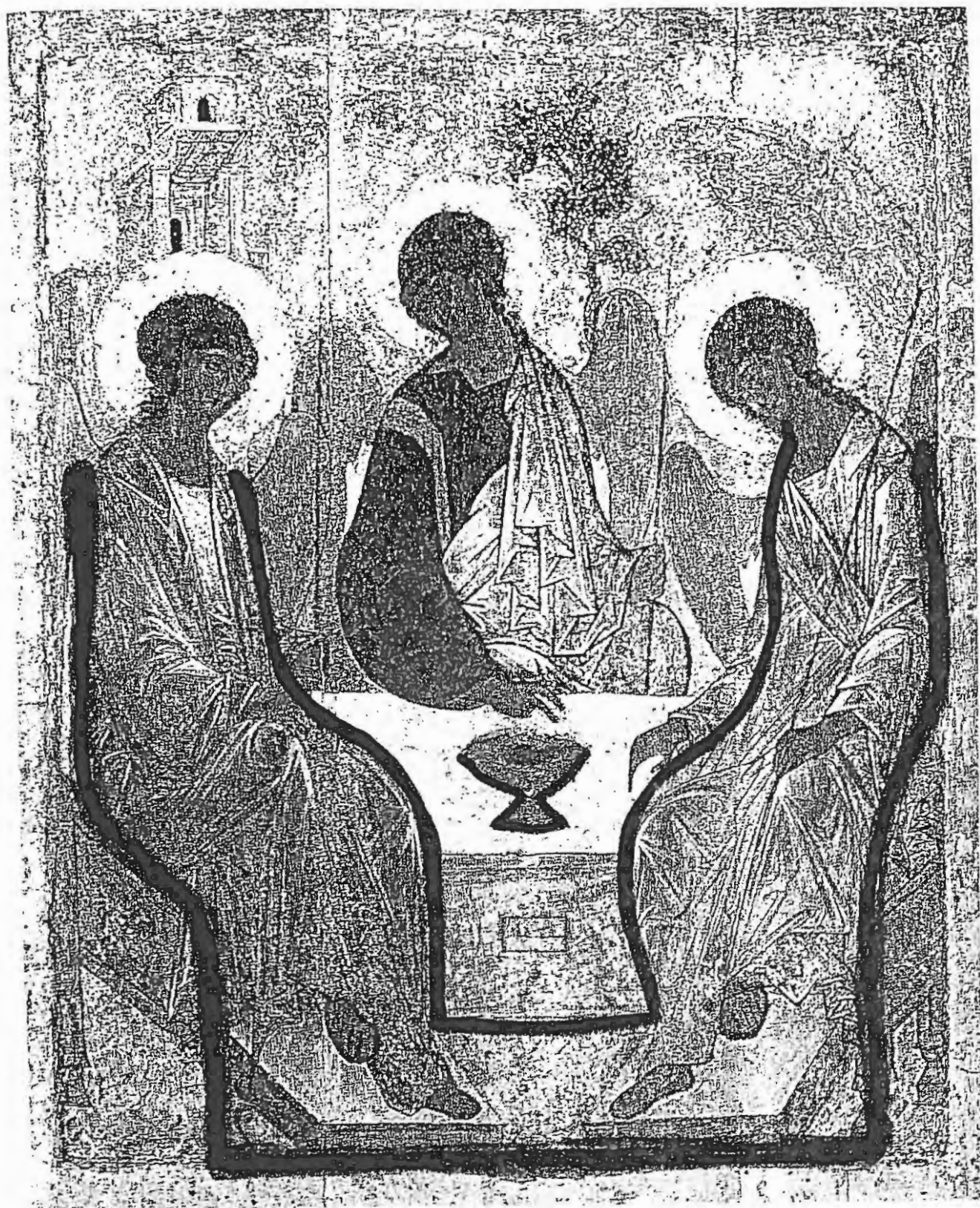


Figure 2. Inverse Perspective

## Plate 7g

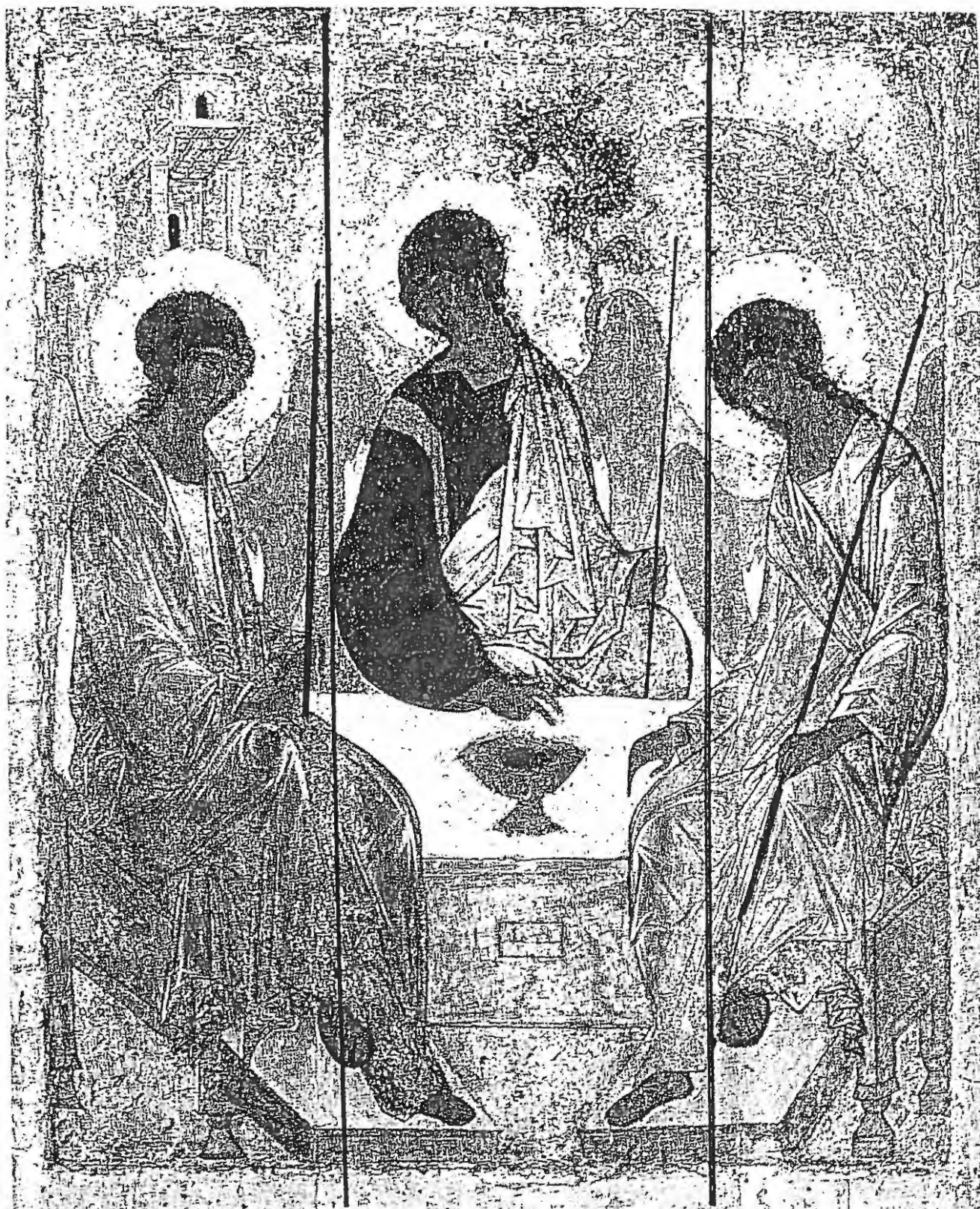
## The Holy Trinity icon

## The chalices



**Plate 7h****The Holy Trinity icon****The three panels**

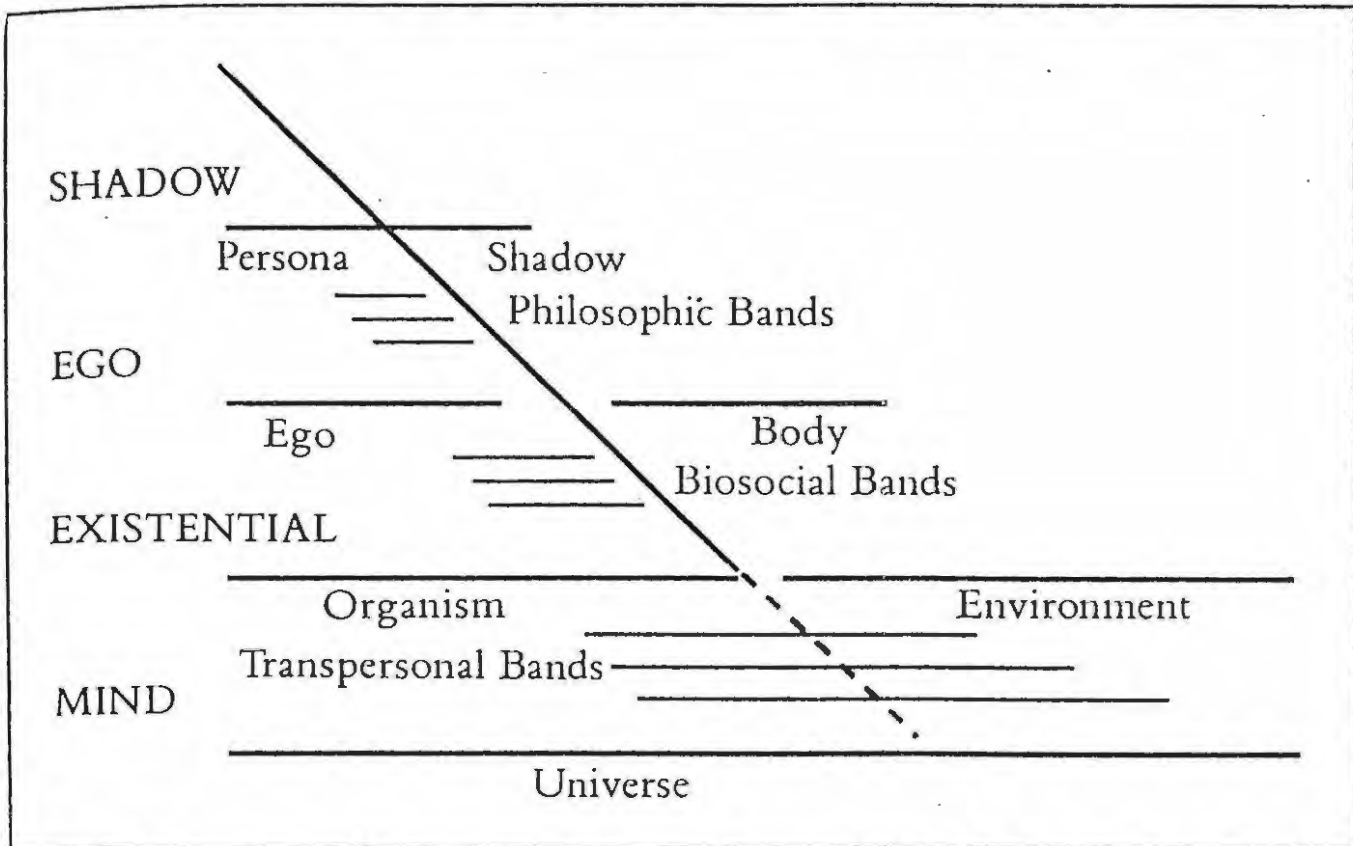
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## Plate 8

## Wilber's spectrum of consciousness

(Wilber 1993:23)



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