

Losing the Dance: is the 'divine dance' a good explanation of the Trinity?

Kevin J. Bidwell

I. Introduction

Communicating the doctrine of the Trinity to the contemporary world is a necessary but highly demanding task. Some of the specifics of our postmodern and pluralistic situation might be new, but the challenge itself is certainly not. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) long ago expressed the nature of this well-worn path: 'In no other subject is error more dangerous or inquiry more laborious, or the discovery of truth more profitable.'¹ In light of these real challenges, some popular preachers simply refrain from talking much about the Trinity. Timothy Keller, however, is not among them. He is rightly esteemed as an outstanding contemporary communicator whose writings consistently feature the knowledge of God, as reflected in the very titles of his books.² The doctrine of the Trinity plays a significant role in these works, and Keller is to be affirmed in his desire to convey this great truth to the current generation.

Likewise, there is no question as to whether Keller intends to teach the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. He certainly has this intention. The question before us is whether his most prominent and distinctive method of communicating the Trinity—the 'divine dance' imagery—is altogether faithful to Scripture, the Nicene Creed and the orthodox Reformed tradition. This is the question that is discussed in this chapter. In other words, this is not a critique of everything that Keller ever said about the Trinity, but only of his use of a particular imagery of questionable validity and having problematic implications.

In order to determine the answer to this question, we must consider whether this imagery and teaching related to it does justice to various elements of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. These elements are the unity of the Godhead, the ontological ordering of the three persons, and the authority-submission relationship between the Father and the Son that is so crucial for our salvation. In the final analysis, however, this essay is not really about Keller personally but rather about the Triune God. It is an attempt to clarify the historic doctrine of the Trinity as it applies to the church and her work.

We have to be honest. The Western evangelical church can hardly be credited with top marks for its approach to the Trinity. There is a fundamental modalism ever-present, a minimalist idea that there is one God with three different faces. The Trinity has sadly been too long neglected. Therefore, it may appear that Keller's desire to emphasize the Trinity with his 'divine dance' motif is at least aiding that recovery. It is my intention to explain that 'dance imagery' projected upon the Triune God is not to be accepted and does not enhance a recovery of the Trinity for the church.

Of course, even legitimate critical analysis can easily slide into the exhibition of an unhelpful critical spirit. It is my honest desire to avoid such an 'elder brother' attitude, while simultaneously being aware that I am in fact my 'brother's keeper'. It is likely that, in his desire to make the main doctrines of the Christian faith relevant to the contemporary culture, Keller does not realize all of the implications of his teaching. In such cases, we ought to act in everyone's best interest by pointing out why a teaching is problematic. Such scrutiny is not harmful, but loving and salutary. Some readers may not concur with the critique that is presented here. However, we hope that everyone would agree with the larger suggestions that this paper offers: the recovery of the Trinity in our churches for the strengthening of our worship, evangelism, and mission.

II. Understanding the 'divine dance'

Some preliminary considerations

We must always hold before our minds the fact that we are not talking about an abstract theory, but rather the very person and character of almighty God. Therefore great care must be taken in order to guard the church from any inaccuracy, even if unintentional. It is for this very reason that the church fathers laboured so long and hard to express this doctrine exactly. Precise language has been hammered out over many years by the church's ablest theologians to express the mystery of the Triune God. This means that, more so than with perhaps any other area, the introduction of new language to articulate the Trinity must be regarded with extreme caution. There is space for doctrinal development; but not at the expense of faithful creedal or confessional definitions.

Moreover, the doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation for everything else in the system of theology. The introduction of novel terminology for the Trinity could quickly move us into a whole new trajectory, one having far-reaching consequences that may not be fully obvious now. The church is intrinsically connected to the Trinity. However, the church must always ensure that the historic and orthodox doctrine of the Trinity is the teaching that it upholds. A flawed construction of the Trinity will certainly be projected onto the church, with potentially damaging consequences. We ought therefore to receive Calvin's wise counsel regarding our handling of the doctrine of the Trinity; 'Let us use great caution that neither our thoughts nor our speech go beyond the limits to which the Word of God itself extends.'³

The 'divine dance' motif for the Trinity is no minor key in Keller's thinking and it is not restricted only to his ideas for the doctrine of God. He rolls out this new metaphor upon the story-line of redemption. In the beginning, according to Keller, was the 'dance of Creation'; the Fall was mankind apparently 'losing the dance', the fruit of which was becoming self-centred; salvation supposedly becomes the way back of 'returning to the dance' and getting out of self-centredness; the eschatological conclusion in the new heaven and new earth is summarized as the 'future of the dance'.⁴ However, does this 'divine dance' idea fit within the parameters of Scripture and historical Trinitarian theology?

The Nicene Creed is the universally agreed settlement for orthodox Trinitarian teaching. We cannot venture beyond its boundaries and remain safe; whatever we teach must square with this summary of scriptural doctrine. Here is the Creed as it relates to the Trinity:

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

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, Begotten by his Father before all ages, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made; of one essence with the Father, through whom all things came into existence, who for us men and for our salvation came down from the heavens ...

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver, who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]; who is worshiped and glorified together with the Father and the Son, who spoke by the prophets ... Amen.

This language is subsumed in the Westminster Confession of Faith: 'In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding: the Son is eternally begotten of the Father: the Holy Spirit eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son' (WCF 2:3).

The measuring rod for Reformed orthodoxy is made plain. The only basis for Trinitarian unity is that the Triune persons are of the same essence ('of one substance' in the Confession). The only possibility for distinguishing between the persons of the Triune God is that the Father is unbegotten and the Son is eternally begotten (John 1:14, 18; 3:16; 1 John 4:9–10); the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son (John 15:26). This statement must be constantly set before our minds as we evaluate the possibility of using Keller's dance terminology to explain the Trinity or to distinguish between the Trinitarian persons.

Finally, it is necessary to maintain a distinction between God's being and his attributes.⁵ The Confession draws this distinction in its initial definition of God: 'There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being'—note the term—'and perfection' (WCF 2:1). This distinction is then reflected in the content that follows. The brief initial clause—'a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions'—defines the being of God, while the long list after this defines his attributes. On the other hand, less faithful attempts to define God often confuse or misplace these things. This is often seen in the recent tendency to install the attribute of love into the definition of God's being. If love is part of our definition of the very being or essence of God, then any attribute (such as justice or wrath) that appears inconsistent with this definition is then commonly dismissed or downplayed, resulting in a distorted theology.⁶ We would therefore do well to maintain the distinction between God's being and attributes.

Keller's definition of his teaching on the Trinity

This Trinitarian teaching is encapsulated by the idiom ‘The Dance of God’ which is expressed most fully in the last chapter of Reason for God and in the first chapter of King’s Cross.⁷ Keller begins his discussion in Reason for God with a statement no one would argue with: ‘The doctrine of the Trinity is that God is one being who exists eternally in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.’⁸ This should serve as a notice that, however things actually turn out, Keller intends to teach the orthodox truth. However, this traditional language soon gives way to a discussion that centres on the metaphor of human dance. Here is the quotation at length for reference:

The life of the Trinity is characterized not by self-centeredness but by mutually self-giving love. When we delight and serve someone else, we enter into a dynamic orbit around him or her, we center on the interests and desires of the other. That creates a dance, particularly if there are three persons, each of whom moves around the other two. So it is, the Bible tells us. Each of the divine persons centers upon the others. None demands that the others revolve around him. Each voluntarily circles the other two, pouring love, delight, and adoration into them. Each person of the Trinity loves, adores, defers to, and rejoices in the others. That creates a dynamic, pulsating dance of joy and love. The early leaders of the Greek church had a word for this—perichoresis. Notice the root of our word ‘choreography’ within it. It means literally to ‘dance or flow around.’⁹

This language is clearly in step with contemporary sensibilities and it has the appearance of conveying the idea of the Trinity. What is the problem? The problem is that, upon closer examination, this language does not refer to the eternal movements of begetting and procession or of unity being based on consubstantiality (of one essence). These are not minor omissions.

Furthermore, the idea is brought forward that the divine attribute of love underpins everything and that the divine movement manifests itself in a Trinitarian revolving dance; voluntarily circling each other. However, these are not the movements described in the Nicene Creed. Keller uses the early church fathers’ use of the doctrine of perichoresis to support his claims with a tenuous etymological link with the English word choreography.

Keller’s scriptural supports

Since it appears that Keller’s ‘divine dance’ teaching on the doctrine of the Trinity is problematic, we must review the sources that he cites in support of it, starting with Scripture. Keller rightly wants to demonstrate that what he is teaching is biblical. Even in the apologetically-oriented Reason for God, Keller provides his readers with no less than five biblical citations in a single paragraph supporting his most traditionally orthodox statement of the Trinity.¹⁰ Yet the same cannot be said of the three pages explaining the ‘dance’ imagery, where the only Scripture to be found is a reference to Mark 8:35 in support of a subsidiary point.¹¹

There is more biblical material in King’s Cross, but it is not any more compelling. Here is the main point of exegesis in context:

According to the Bible, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit glorify one another. Jesus says in his prayer recorded in John's Gospel: 'I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had with you before the world began' (John 17:4–5). Each person of the Trinity glorifies the other. It's a dance.¹²

It is difficult to perceive any meaningful connection between the first four sentences explaining the well-established, thoroughly biblical concept that the Father and the Son glorify one another, and the abrupt conclusion, 'It's a dance.' In what way, precisely, do these words provide clear support for the idea of the 'divine dance'? We are left to wonder, as Keller quickly moves on to lengthy quotations from C. S. Lewis and Cornelius Plantinga.

His main references are to the baptism of Jesus (Mark 1:9–11); the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ that 'whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it' (Mark 8:35); and Christ's high priestly prayer (John 17:4–5).¹³ While the baptism of Jesus indisputably teaches the Trinity, overall these passages do not present the slightest hint of a dance, in my view. This is not a solid Reformed hermeneutic on which to assert such a far-reaching teaching as the 'divine dance', which affects our understanding of the very being of God. The Westminster Confession of Faith helpfully guides us: 'When there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly' (WCF 1:9). The citing of these three Bible passages that contain not the slightest hint of Keller's suggestion is no sound exegetical footing, and we are left doubting the validity of this analogy already; but let us continue.

The nub of his argument appears to be an emphasis upon a single divine attribute, which is love. 1 John 4:8 of course tells us very clearly, 'God is love,' so the problem is not whether love ought to be considered a divine attribute. The problem is rather one of selectivity; Keller does not go on to mention other things that God declares Himself to be, such as that he is 'holy' (Isa. 5:16), that he is 'a consuming fire, a jealous God' (Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29), that he is incomprehensible (Job 38:1–41; Isa. 40:25), or that he is gracious, compassionate and merciful (Exod. 34:6–7; 2 Cor. 13:14).¹⁴

He simply decides to focus exclusively on love. He more or less assumes that there is a 'divine dance' and labels it as 'the dance of love'.¹⁵ This magnification of the single attribute of love also happens to be a classic feature of contemporary social Trinitarianism. This school, whose leaders include Jürgen Moltmann and Miroslav Volf, deliberately advocates self-giving love and freedom at the expense of Lordship and a whole array of other divine attributes.¹⁶ Insufficient grounding in Scripture leads Keller to make the same sort of mistake. On top of that, he boldly claims that 'The life of the Trinity is characterized not by self-centredness but by mutually self-giving love ... that creates a dance ... so it is, the Bible tells us.'¹⁷ Simply put, 'the Bible does not tell us': there is no scriptural evidence for a movement of dance within the inner life of the Trinity.

Keller's appeal to perichoresis, historical theology and etymology

Keller also seeks support for his teaching from historical theology. In *Reason for God*, he speaks of the 'divine dance' concept as if it were a matter of long-established orthodoxy:

Each person of the Trinity loves, adores, defers to, and rejoices in the others. That creates a dynamic, pulsating dance of joy and love. The early leaders of the Greek church had a word for this—perichoresis. Notice the root of our word 'choreography' within it. It means literally to 'dance or flow around'.¹⁸

Such a construction gives the impression that the early Greek fathers taught this 'pulsating dance' concept and even had a technical term for it, which is not the case. Keller then goes on to say that the word they had for 'this' is perichoresis; but this is a confusing equation of a widely-accepted element of historic orthodoxy with something else entirely. ¹⁹

Keller's definition of perichoresis is misleading because this is not how the church fathers used this word. Here is the line or circle of logic: The persons of the Trinity are love—that creates a 'divine dance'—the church fathers labeled this 'divine dance' as perichoresis—the root of the English word choreography means 'to dance or flow around'—it is derived from the Greek word perichoresis—therefore the persons of the Trinity 'dance or flow around' each other. If any of these steps in this circle of logic are broken, then this argument will fall down and the 'divine dance' idea is lost.

The early Greek fathers did not use perichoresis to explain the Trinity. It is believed that it was first used in reference to the Trinity around the eighth century by John of Damascus.²⁰ When it was used, it was used to preserve the teaching of the Nicene Creed to uphold the unity of the one God and the distinction of three persons who have their being in each other, without any coalescence (John 14:10–11). There had never been any mention of a 'divine dance' by the early Greek church fathers, and I believe that it would mystify them.

Keller cites in support of his definition the fourth-century church father Hilary of Poitiers and the contemporary Reformed theologian Robert Letham.²¹ One would suppose, then, that when we turn to the endnote we would find quotations from them along the lines of 'perichoresis means to dance or to flow around'. However, this is not actually what we find. The quotation from Hilary provided in the endnote is that 'Each person of the Trinity reciprocally contains the others, so that one permanently envelops and is permanently enveloped by, the others whom he yet envelops.'²² If Keller wants to argue that this somehow amounts to 'dancing' or 'flowing', he is free to do so; but this is hardly direct support for his definition. Incidentally, in the very same section of the writing that Keller quotes from, Hilary concludes that we will never 'find an analogy for this condition of Divine existence'.²³ It is therefore ironic that Keller imports a human analogy of 'dance' into the very being of God, the very kind of thing that Hilary warns against.

The quotation from Robert Letham, who is discussing T. F. Torrance, does not help Keller's case either: "'Perichoresis" involves mutual movement as well as mutual indwelling. It is the eternal

movement of Love, or the Communion of Love, which the Holy Trinity is ever within himself.’²⁴ ‘Mutual movement’ comes a little closer to what Keller is looking for, although this is still a way off from ‘perichoresis means to dance or to flow around’. However, valid support does not come from mere verbal similarity but from agreement in meaning. Here is the section that Letham quotes in full in his book, and this quotation is cited by Keller in his endnotes to support his own case:

Torrance understands perichoresis in a dynamic way as the mutual indwelling and interpenetration of the three persons ‘in the onto-relational, spiritual and intensely personal way’ in which he expounds the Trinity. This involves ‘mutual movement as well as a mutual indwelling,’ in which ‘their differentiating qualities instead of separating them actually serve their oneness with each other.’ It is ‘the eternal movement of Love, or the Communion of Love, which the Holy Trinity ever is within himself.’²⁵

Within the same sentence, Letham defines Torrance’s ‘mutual movement’ by explaining that ‘their differentiating qualities instead of separating them actually serve their oneness with each other’.²⁶ In other words, Torrance’s concept of ‘mutual movement’ is predicated on the ‘differentiating qualities’ or personal properties. Indeed, one can immediately see how some sort of ‘mutual movement’ is suggested in eternal begetting and eternal procession.

If a Trinitarian proposal does not include the slightest reference to the oneness of God’s essence and any distinguishing qualities based on begetting and procession at all—and we have confirmed that this is the case with the ‘divine dance’ account—then there is no possibility of finding support from Torrance’s definition of perichoresis. You simply cannot have one without the other. Furthermore, Torrance is merely representative of the overall thrust of historical theology in using perichoresis to uphold the essential unity of God and distinction of the three persons, which is a rather different direction of travel than using this concept to authorize a picture of three persons engaging in a ‘divine dance’.²⁷

Further still, it is drawn from an etymological mistake. He writes, ‘... perichoresis. Notice our word “choreography” within it. It means literally to “dance or flow around.”’ To assume that a supposed etymological connection, which is tenuous anyway, then equates to a theological truth, is an etymological fallacy.²⁸ Divine dance ideas are not supported by historical theology and the application of perichoresis to a ‘divine dance’ has no precedent within the Trinitarian theology of the church fathers. Therefore, the line or circle of Keller’s logic is broken and his argument for the dance metaphor falls down.

Feminist theologians such as Patricia Wilson-Kastner and Catherine Mowry LaCugna find the ‘divine dance’ imagery appealing for an obvious reason; by eliminating divine ordering of the persons it provides a consistent theological basis for egalitarianism in the church. However, even LaCugna has to admit that ‘philological warrant [connecting perichoresis to dancing] for this is scant’.²⁹ Keeping in mind the fact that proponents of the ‘divine dance’ have been compelled to emphasize an etymological connection because they cannot point to any actual support from the history of theology, such an admission by a proponent serves to underscore

how precarious this concept is. There is no biblical warrant for it, the early church did not teach it, the very doctrine used to bolster it—perichoresis—is undermined by it, and the philological connection with the word perichoresis turns out to be specious.³⁰

Keller's two primary theological sources

We now turn to the two main sources that Keller draws from in his Trinitarian teaching, the first of whom is Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.³¹ Keller uses Plantinga to buttress his own proposal for the 'divine dance' in *Reason for God*:

The Father ... Son ... and Holy Spirit glorify each other ... At the center of the universe, self-giving love is the dynamic currency of the Trinitarian life of God. The persons within God exalt, commune with, and defer to one another ... When early Greek Christians spoke of perichoresis in God they meant that each divine person harbors the others at the center of his being. In constant movement of overture and acceptance each person envelops and encircles the others.³²

It is apparent that Keller and Plantinga mutually endorse and reinforce each other. We have already considered the 'warp and woof' of Keller's 'divine dance' and therefore indirectly Plantinga's ideas for perichoresis and 'divine encircling', concluding that it is flawed logic and unsuitable for an orthodox Trinitarian teaching. However, it is necessary to highlight the insertion of the concept of 'defer to one another' from Keller's citation of Plantinga.

Such a concept is not to be found in the Nicene Creed or the Reformed confessions and catechisms. We will return to this when we consider the problematic implications of the 'divine dance'. One place such language is to be found, however, is in the 'Men, Women, and Biblical Equality' statement of which Plantinga is listed as an endorsing signatory. The statement includes the following: 'In the church, spiritual gifts of women and men are to be recognized ... in pastoral care, teaching, preaching, and worship [...] In the Christian home, husband and wife are *to defer to each other* ...'³³ Rather than being guided by Scripture or the orthodox tradition, it appears that Plantinga has simply projected his egalitarian agenda—a vision of interchangeable individuals having neither personal distinctions nor authority-submission structure—onto the Triune God.

Keller's other main source is the popular Christian writer C. S. Lewis.³⁴ A passage in *Mere Christianity* that seems to be the first instance of 'divine dance' imagery is quoted in *King's Cross* as well as in *The Reason for God*:³⁵

In Christianity God is not an impersonal thing nor a static thing—not even just one person—but a dynamic pulsating activity, a life, a kind of drama, almost, if you will not think me irreverent, a kind of dance ... [The] pattern of this three-personal life is ... the great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up at the very center of reality.³⁶

As with so much in Lewis, the writing is brilliant and the purpose laudable, but the theology cannot bear close scrutiny. First, this imagery is suspect because it has neither biblical warrant

nor (as already outlined) has it a precedent in historical Trinitarian theology. Lewis himself seems to have anticipated that there would be objections when he wrote 'if you will not think me irreverent, a kind of dance'.

Along with countless other Christians, I am thankful for Lewis' contributions to popular apologetics and to children's fiction. However, one suspects that his apologetic motivation and literary imagination got the better of him when he adopted the language of dance to describe the Triune God. Now we can quickly forgive a layman such as Lewis for making this mistake; he had no formal theological training and he explicitly distanced himself from any impression that he was speaking as an authorized teacher of the church.³⁷ However, it may not be wise for an ordained minister of the gospel to be using Lewis as primary source material in order to articulate the doctrine of the Trinity.

In summary, it is clear that Keller personally believes the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity and wants to teach it to this generation in the most attractive way possible. Notwithstanding these good intentions, however, his 'divine dance' imagery lacks any substantial evidence to persuade us that it is a helpful metaphor to recover the doctrine of the Trinity. Keller's biblical warrant for his proposal is too superficial to convince us that this is nonetheless the clear teaching of Scripture. Support from the mainstream history of theology turns out to be illusory. Support from recent theology of dubious orthodoxy proves to be all too real. We thus cannot recommend the 'divine dance' imagery as a helpful way to teach the Trinity. I recognize that despite what has been written thus far, some readers may yet be reluctant to cast aside this creative attempt by Keller to communicate the Trinity. For this reason, it is important to press the matter further and to consider the problems and implications of accepting the 'divine dance' as an explanation of the Trinity.

III. Problematic implications of the 'divine dance'

Problem 1: the 'divine dance' does not uphold the unity of the Godhead based on essence

The first problem with this teaching is that it obscures the unity of the Godhead based on the divine essence. The historic and orthodox doctrine of the Trinity is characterized by an inherently balanced presentation that upholds both the unity and the three persons of God in perfect harmony.³⁸ Despite sound statements of Keller's Trinitarian orthodoxy, which we do not doubt, the lasting impression that remains following a reading of his Trinitarian teaching is that of the 'divine dance' motif. This image takes centre stage, as it were, in his presentation.

The foundation for sustaining divine unity, according to the Nicene Creed, is only to be on the basis of oneness of essence; and this is omitted in Keller's teaching. The importance of this aspect of the unity of the three persons founded upon the one essence (*homoousios*) cannot be over-stated. Trinitarian investigation has discovered historically that it walks a theological tightrope and that in every generation there lurk the dangers of modalism, tritheism and subordinationism. These dangers were the primary impetus that lay behind the completion of the Nicene Creed and the insistence upon the oneness of essence to sustain Trinitarian unity.

When the Nicene Creed and the Westminster Standards teach the Trinity, for instance, oneness, threeness and the co-unity of the three (Triunity) are in close proximity and presented in a way that reflects the fact that they are equally ultimate realities about God (WCF 2:3). This perfectly balanced teaching is distilled in the Shorter Catechism for popular dissemination: 'There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory' (WSC Q.6).

Keller obviously intends to convey this balanced truth: 'God is not more fundamentally one than he is three, and he is not more fundamentally three than he is one.'³⁹ Unfortunately, his preferred means of teaching the Trinity is fundamentally inadequate to accomplish this aim. Moreover, Keller's attempts to integrate the divine dance teaching theologically only make things worse. He unwittingly departs from the orthodox tradition when he rewrites the basis for the unity of the Godhead: that 'God really has love as his essence' and that the persons of the Trinity are 'characterized in their very essence by mutually self-giving love'.⁴⁰ Therefore, Keller's account demands that essential unity—an aspect of God's being if there ever was—be upheld by an attribute. It is at this point that we must recall the prior discussion concerning the problems that arise when we do not maintain a clear distinction between God's being and his attributes.

Keller insists that 'ultimate reality is a dance' wherein the Trinity is 'characterized in their very essence by mutually self-giving love. No person in the Trinity insists that the others revolve around him; rather each of them voluntarily circles and orbits around the others.'⁴¹ These statements which are intrinsically associated with this 'divine dance' teaching have problematic implications. First, God's essence is redefined as being 'love' instead of 'the same substance': thus love replaces substance as the premise for divine unity. Also, divine love is redefined as 'mutually self-giving love', which is a dance involving the persons of the Trinity doing voluntary circles.

Keller has lost the dance. Trinitarian unity is not founded upon a 'divine dance' of love. It is only to be upheld upon the basis of God's essence. Calvin's statement representing Reformed orthodoxy is so much simpler to grasp: 'In Scripture, from the creation onward, we are taught one essence of God, which contains three persons.'⁴² I cannot envisage that Augustine, the early Greek church fathers who were the architects of the Nicene Creed, John of Damascus, or Calvin could subscribe to Keller's definition of essence and his suggested basis for Trinitarian unity. The Athanasian Creed sets valuable creedal boundaries and affirms: 'We worship One God in Trinity; neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance.'

Problem 2: the 'divine dance' movements portray the wrong kind of motion within the Trinity
There is a dynamic movement between the persons of the Trinity. This is the act of the Father eternally begetting the Son, and then sending him as the God-man, along with the action of the procession of the Holy Spirit. These movements do not portray the being of God as static, but that of one who is 'outward-moving'. Calvin and Owen display some of the finest Trinitarian theologies among the Reformed orthodox. Calvin states that the Father is 'the beginning and the source', and also 'the fountainhead and beginning of deity—and this is done to denote the

simple unity of essence'⁴³: yet he purposefully avoids any hint of subordination, inferiority or inequality among the three persons. These divine movements are not captured by 'voluntary circles or orbits'; but the clear pattern of order is: from the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; John 1:14, 18; 15:26; 1 Cor. 12:4–6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 4:4–6; Eph. 4:4–6).

A crucial question must be answered. How are we to distinguish the three persons if they share an identical essence? While they are identical in essence, they are not identical in terms of their particular relations, which Owen calls their 'peculiar relative properties'.⁴⁴ Letham represents Reformed orthodoxy as he defines these peculiar relative properties: 'The Father is not begotten, nor does he proceed; the Son does not beget, nor does he proceed; the Spirit neither begets nor spirates.'⁴⁵ On the basis of Paul's Corinthian benediction (2 Cor. 13:14), Owen magnificently demonstrates that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit display identifying attributes. Grace (charis) is particularly communicated by the Son, love (agapē) by the Father and fellowship (koinōnia) by the Holy Spirit,⁴⁶ and simultaneously the one being of God is indivisible. Owen does not constrain the Trinity to a single attribute.

The imagery of a dance would never have been thought imaginable as a suitable portrait for Owen and Calvin's theology. Why? Dancing in their day was restricted to the realm of worldly or lewd entertainment; the Westminster Larger Catechism associates 'lascivious dancings' as one of many sins in connection to the breaking of the seventh commandment (WLC 139). Is contemporary culture so different that a dance can accurately depict movement within the eternal Godhead? Dancing at its best is to move rhythmically to music, to a particular sequence of steps, with the goal of entertaining people or for the personal pleasure of the dancers.

How about the range of dance genres that could be invoked in the minds of readers to aid them to conceive of the ineffable essence of God? To one reader, break-dancing may be invoked in their thinking, to another the tango or the waltz, to someone else ballet, or to others disco-dance. None of these contemporary dance movements remotely convey the theological implications of outward-moving divine action. In fact, dance movements with voluntary circles are incompatible with the biblical concepts of begetting, sending and procession. It is therefore inconceivable that Calvin, Owen or any of the Reformed orthodox could subscribe to the introducing of a 'divine dance' motif to pastorally help churches to rightly understand the Triune God or to fulfill the great commission.

Problem 3: the 'divine dance' does not promote a balanced presentation of the Trinity as found in the Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed is one of the most important presentations of the Trinity in the history of the church. It is a statement of theology proper, one which strengthens the church's doctrine, worship, apologetics and mission when it is rightly understood. This balanced presentation of the Trinity avoids the use of speech that goes beyond the limits of the Bible. It teaches the faith that we profess, which is to 'believe in the one God'. There is no confusion as to understanding the distinction of the persons and their divine ordering: the Father Almighty; the one Lord Jesus Christ who is begotten of the Father; and the Holy Spirit who proceeds, the Lord and giver of life.

This creed simply asserts that the unity is upheld by God being of 'one substance' and therefore the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit together are to be worshiped and glorified. The Trinitarian order is distinct, clear, unmistakable and without confounding the persons. Contrast this with Keller's portrayal of the three persons in a pulsating dance of voluntary orbits where it is impossible to distinguish 'who is who' among them. It is baffling to imagine how the 'divine dance' teaching could be encapsulated in a creedal statement. Lacking any reference to a divine substance, or anything that might distinguish one person from another, it would certainly be brief; but would it convey the balanced presentation of the Trinity that is found in the Nicene Creed?

Problem 4: the 'divine dance' undermines the divine order between the persons of the Godhead

The fourth problematic implication of the 'divine dance' is that it fails to make clear that there is an ordering of the persons within the Godhead. When theologians teach the Trinity, they refer to certain elements that explicate the orthodox doctrine.⁴⁷ One of these elements is 'taxis' or ontological ordering. The Westminster Confession affirms this element in the very first mention of the three persons: 'The Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son' (WCF 2:3). The Confession cannot simply speak of equal persons without immediately explaining their differences in terms of their peculiar relations. The Father alone 'is of none', the Son is 'eternally begotten of the Father' and the Spirit eternally proceeds from both 'the Father and the Son'.

This ordering of the persons of the Triune God can only be upon the basis of their 'personal properties' that distinguish the three persons, and this is glaringly absent from Keller's 'divine dance' teaching. This is unacceptable. The begetting of God in the act of eternal generation by the Father is the only sustainable idea that we can employ to explain the concept of a Father–Son relationship 'in God' in its greatest and most meaningful sense. This is richly communicated in the Nicene Creed, in that the Lord Jesus Christ is: 'The Son of God, the Only-begotten, Begotten by his Father before all ages, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made; of one essence with the Father.'

Without this ordering of the persons, all you have are three interchangeable persons having names that mean nothing. The 'divine dance' teaching that lacks the doctrines of the eternal generation of the Son and the distinguishing relational properties of the persons of the Trinity thereby introduces theological weakness into the doctrine of the Trinity, with implications for Christology. This metaphor then, does not serve to enhance our appreciation for the doctrine of God, it undermines it.

Unfortunately, however, that would seem to be where this teaching lands us. Again, Keller's description of the Trinity is that 'Each of the divine persons centres upon the others. None demands that the others revolve around him. Each voluntarily circles the other two ...'⁴⁸ Whether Keller realizes it or not, this account of the divine being constitutes a denial of ordering within the Godhead.⁴⁹ What is to distinguish these three persons from one another?

What would enable us to decide which one of these three persons to call the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit? Unfortunately, there is nothing in Keller's elaborations of the 'divine dance' that would allow anyone to uphold this vital aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity. All that the 'divine dance' can conjure up for us are three interchangeable individuals, to whom we arbitrarily assign names that mean nothing in particular.

Problem 5: the 'divine dance' has the danger of tritheism

A related problem is with one of Keller's primary sources for his 'divine dance', which is Cornelius Plantinga's social Trinitarianism, a school of thought in which 'threeness is very much to the fore. Each divine person is thought of as a centre of consciousness. Here the danger is tritheism.'⁵⁰ This admission of the danger of tritheism in social Trinitarianism by Kevin Giles, who is himself a friend of the school, is interesting. However, Giles still wants to reassure us that 'Among evangelical scholars the "social" model of the Trinity is advocated and defended by Cornelius Plantinga Jr., Millard Erickson, and J. Scott Horrell, each of whom wants to exclude any suggestion of tritheism.'⁵¹

Such assurances aside, a tendency towards tritheism is nonetheless a real problem in social Trinitarianism. Each of these theologians draws a direct parallel between the way individual human creatures exist in relationships and the way the three persons of God supposedly exist. Keller is aware of such tendencies and is rightly critical of them.⁵² Sadly, however, he does not seem to recognize just how close the divine dance proposal sits to the social doctrine of the Trinity. Therefore, tritheism becomes a real danger here as well.

Of course, Plantinga would flatly deny tritheism, as would Moltmann and Volf.⁵³ However, some mainstream theologians remain unconvinced that those who employ the social model can escape this critique.⁵⁴ In response to Moltmann's assertion that 'there has never been a Christian tritheist', George Hunsinger writes: 'If this is true then one can only conclude that Moltmann is vying to be the first.'⁵⁵ I have evaluated social Trinitarian thinking elsewhere, concluding that:

Volf and Moltmann's social doctrine of the Trinity exhibits a departure from both Eastern and Western conceptions of the Trinity, the Reformers, historic creeds and the church fathers. The consequent result is that Volf's newly conceived doctrine of the Trinity remains remarkably isolated from the majority of Christendom, and it is still far from being compatible with the broader scholarly consensus.⁵⁶

Although I wrote these words concerning Volf and Moltmann, they apply equally well to fellow social Trinitarian Cornelius Plantinga. We would thus question whether Keller ought to be using such a figure to explain the doctrine of the Trinity in two of his popular books.

Problem 6: the 'divine dance' undermines the authority structure that is directly related to redemption

A number of omissions from Keller's 'divine dance' ideas for the Trinity have already been raised. A changed theology leads to theological implications in other parts of our doctrine, and

neglecting to teach the ordering of the persons of the Trinity has real consequences for our understanding of Christ as the mediator, his obedience to the Father as the God-man, and redemption. Perhaps this is why Keller rolls out the 'dance of love' upon his story-line of salvation. However, there is an authority-submission structure within the Godhead.

The notion of an order ('taxis'⁵⁷) requires some clarification because within this Trinitarian context it does not imply an idea of rank or hierarchy within the Triune God but rather an ordered constitution. The clear pattern of order is: from the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit; and this order pervades everything. To cite Calvin again: 'To the Father is attributed the beginning of activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things; to the Son, wisdom, counsel, and the ordered disposition of all things; but to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of that activity.'⁵⁸

The Bible affirms that Christ in his incarnation submitted to the will of the Father and not the other way around: see, for instance, Christ's prayer in Gethsemane (Luke 22:42; Mark 14:36). That Christ would offer this kind of submissive prayer is further explained in the Gospel of John: 'For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me' and 'The Father has not left me alone, for I always do those things that please him' (John 6:38; 8:28–29). 1 Corinthians 15:28 clarifies this point: 'Now when all things are made subject to him, then the Son himself will also be subject to him who put all things under him, that God may be all in all.'

Finally, the third person of the Trinity also takes his place in this authority relationship in submission to both Father and Son (John 14:26; 15:26). In sum, the Father has authority over the Son and the Spirit, the Son submits to the Father but sends the Spirit, and the Spirit is sent by both Father and Son, as reflected in the Standards (WCF 8:1; WLC 54, 71).

However, just as Keller makes no mention of order within the Godhead but rather undermines it by what he says, so he makes no mention of authority structures in the Godhead but rather undermines those also. Consider one of the main statements on the 'divine dance' in King's Cross:

Theologian Cornelius Plantinga develops this further, noting that the Bible says the Father, the Son, and the Spirit glorify one another: 'the persons within God exalt each other, commune with each other, and defer to one another ...'⁵⁹

Notice the statement that 'the persons within God exalt each other, commune with each other, and defer to one another'. It is possible that Keller was attracted by other aspects of this quotation and did not notice the problem, but he has ended up commending to the church an explicit denial of authority. Keller goes on to say in his own words: 'No person in the Trinity insists that the others revolve around him; rather each of them voluntarily circles and orbits around the others.'⁶⁰

Rather than a Triune God of three eternally-equal persons existing in relations characterized by a divine ordering of the persons with an authority-submission structure, the persons in the 'divine dance' teaching exist and relate purely interchangeably in mutual deference. The notion that the Trinitarian persons 'defer to one another' is inadequate to handle the teaching that Christ is sent by the Father, and that the Son, as mediator, obeys the Father: Christ does not 'defer to' the Father.

The Father chose and ordained the Son as mediator.⁶¹ The Father called the Son to this office; the Son does not take this office upon himself. Indeed, the Father commanded the Son to carry out this work. Now if we were to join with Plantinga and say that each person 'encircle[s] one another' and 'defer[s] to one another', in what sense could we affirm that Christ was specifically ordained by the Father? In what sense can we say that the Father 'gave him commandment to execute' this office? Three times in 1 John 4 this crucial element of the incarnation is affirmed:

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent his only begotten Son into the world [...] In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. [...] And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world (1 John 4:9–10, 14).

However, it would seem that persons who forever 'defer' to one another neither send nor are sent. They simply 'defer'. Consider the statement in the Westminster Confession:

The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him (WCF 8:5).

If, in fact, the persons simply 'defer' to one another, then in what sense did Christ obey the Father, as when he says in Gethsemane, 'And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what you will"' (Mark 14:36). Now if it were true that the Father actually 'defers' to the Son in the exact same way that the Son 'defers' to him, what would have happened in such a situation? The reason that Christ cites for getting up from his place and proceeding to the Garden, to the cross, and into the grave was that he would demonstrate his love for the Father by perfect obedience to his authority. The 'divine dance' explication of the Trinity would, at best, seem to obscure these things.

The theological conclusion

The aim of this essay has not been to deconstruct Keller's doctrine of the Trinity unnecessarily. At each point we have sought to allow Keller to speak for himself and then to evaluate the strength of his arguments accordingly. We have summarized that the 'divine dance' explanation of the Trinity has no biblical warrant: its appeals to perichoresis, historical theology and etymology have actually undermined Keller's presentation, rather than upheld it. While Keller

constantly affirms his intention to teach the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, the six problematic implications of the 'divine dance' idea have led us to conclude that this metaphor undermines the orthodox belief in the Trinity. Our aim is to promote the recovery of the Reformed orthodox understanding of the Trinity. The remaining section of this essay seeks to do that.

IV. Learning from the Dance

Our ultimate goal in this essay is to promote an understanding of the Trinity from a Reformed perspective, even though we engage in a critical evaluation of Keller. We share with him the confessional document for the Reformed tradition in the English-speaking world, the Westminster Confession of Faith. However, in considering the Trinity we can never dismiss the universally-agreed and settled statement of the Nicene Creed. It is critical to point out that the Reformed movement has never operated independently of tradition or without reference to patristic sources. A. N. S. Lane demonstrates that this was the case for Calvin,⁶² and Letham contends that the members of the Westminster Assembly were constantly referring to the church fathers in their theological discussions.⁶³ This means that any attempt to articulate the Trinity should confer with historic theological documents while upholding the supremacy of Scripture.

With this in mind, we consider seven elements of the doctrine of the holy Trinity that are to be found in the creeds and patristic writings. These are: (1) one being—three persons; (2) one essence (*homoousios*); (3) three distinct persons (*hypostases*); (4) mutually indwelling persons (*perichoresis*); (5) order among the persons (*monarchia, autotheos, taxis*); (6) three-personal communion (*koinonia*); (7) knowable and yet unknowable persons. Arguably, all seven of these facets of the Trinity need to be held with equal ultimacy to avoid a slide into error.

Keller's 'divine dance' teaching provides a number of learning points which may hopefully ensure that future doctrinal developments in this area are enhanced. First of all, it should be apparent that many of these elements are inconsistent with any direct comparison with us as human beings.⁶⁴ To put it plainly, we are just not that much like the Trinity. So when Keller follows Plantinga and others in projecting an anthropological metaphor onto the being of God, we might predict that there will be things that fall short of the biblical pattern. Sure enough, the 'divine dance' imagery would appear to be able to uphold only three of the elements: three distinct persons, mutually indwelling persons, and three-personal communion. Those who get their understanding of the Triune God from Keller's writing will be very strong on the fact that there are three distinct persons, that they mutually indwell one another, and that they have communion. However, they would probably be weak on the one being and one essence of God and they would simply not know what to do with the idea that there is an ontological ordering (*taxis*) among the Trinitarian persons.⁶⁵

Any attempt to articulate a doctrine of the Trinity must not lose sight of the unity of the three persons. The one being of God is wholly undivided and Owen concluded that 'all the works of the Trinity *ad extra* are indivisible'.⁶⁶ The unity of God means that all Trinitarian attributes and

actions are equally ultimate and mutually interconnected and the value of rightly using perichoresis cannot be overestimated. All three persons participate fully and exhaustively in all the ways and works of the Triune God, while at the same time each of these works is predicated especially of one of the persons.

The mutual indwelling of the three means there is an undivided communion of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in undivided union. Gregory of Nazianzus, in his Oration on the Holy Spirit, is helpful, capturing this understanding of the indivisibility of persons who are equally ultimate:

To us there is One God, for the Godhead is One, and all that proceeds from him is referred to One, though we believe in three persons. For One is not more and another less God; nor is One before and another after; nor are they divided in will or parted in power; nor can you find here any of the qualities of divisible things; but the Godhead is, to speak concisely, undivided in separate persons; and there is one mingling of Light, as it were of three suns joined to each other.⁶⁷

Gregory's concerns must not merely be acknowledged in theory, but be fully integrated and manifested in our teaching on the Trinity.

Finally, we need to keep in mind that the Triune God is ultimately an ineffable mystery who is to be rightly worshiped, glorified and enjoyed by his creation. Any attempt to explain the Trinity without also confessing the incomprehensibility of God will end up making things too easy, overestimating what can be fully grasped by finite human thought and falling short. Calvin believed the Trinity to be a mystery, 'more to be adored than investigated';⁶⁸ and Owen similarly expressed the view that 'the utmost of the best of our thoughts of the being of God is, that we can have no thoughts of it. The perfection of our understanding is, not to understand and to rest there. To believe and to admire is all that we can reach.'⁶⁹

Having examined the 'divine dance' teaching under the theological microscope, we can conclude that it would not be safe to endorse it. However, we certainly concur with Keller's pursuit of a Trinitarian motif for the Reformed churches. There is much scope for theological advance in this area because, as Letham points out, 'In the West, the Trinity has in practice been relegated to such an extent that most Christians are little more than practical modalists.'⁷⁰ He further adds that many people regard an appreciation of the Trinity to be 'of no real consequence for daily living'.⁷¹ Could a fresh focus on the Trinity as taught in the Nicene Creed, reinvigorate our theology, ecclesiology, worship, and mission?

V. Conclusion

Inaccurate charts or imprecise compass directions may seem harmless at the start of a voyage; but eventually the ship may end up a long way from its intended destination. Prudent captains have therefore always insisted upon the best charts (and the ablest navigators) available. The church must have the same rigorous insistence upon accurate, time-tested charts and skillful

navigation by its leaders. Our aim has been to examine the theological charts of Keller in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity. We commend his desire to recover this doctrine in the church. However, based upon the supreme standard of Scripture and the subordinate helps that have informed our historic Reformed understanding of the Trinity, we must warn that the ‘divine dance’ imagery is not an accurate chart and it masks hidden reefs.

As a concluding thought, we might also suggest that if Keller had more fully appropriated another of his favorite teachers—Jonathan Edwards—rather than C. S. Lewis or Cornelius Plantinga, he would doubtless have produced far better Trinitarian teaching. For instance, Edwards has a short essay on the Trinity that could amend a range of mistakes discussed above.⁷² In place of appropriating lesser sources, it would be delightful to see Keller consistently making use of the very best Trinitarian theology our orthodox Reformed tradition has to offer. We look forward to see whether he will embrace this challenge in future writings.

Endnotes

1. Augustine, ‘On the Trinity’ in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), 1:3:5, p. 19.
2. *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road; The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism; The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith; Counterfeit Gods: When the Empty Promises of Love, Money and Power Let you Down; Generous Justice: How God’s Grace Makes Us Just; King’s Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus*.
3. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), vol. 1, 1:13:21, p. 146.
4. *Reason for God*, pp. 216–223.
5. See also K. Scott Oliphint, *God with Us: Divine Condescension and the Attributes of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011).
6. Of course, Scripture makes it clear that ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:8). However, in our theology, we should be careful to say that God is defined as one God in three persons, whose inter-Trinitarian relationships are characterized by the attribute of holy love. This definition of God’s being is wholly consistent with a relationship with unrepentant sinners that is characterized by the attribute of holy wrath.
7. *Reason for God*, pp. 213–226 and *King’s Cross*, pp. 3–13.
8. *Reason for God*, p. 214.
9. *Reason for God*, pp. 214–15.
10. *Reason for God*, the second paragraph of the section ‘The Divine Dance’, p. 214.
11. See *Reason for God*, pp. 214–217; the reference to Mark 8:35 is on pp. 216–217.
12. *King’s Cross*, p. 6.
13. *Reason for God*, pp. 214–217; *King’s Cross*, pp. 4–10.
14. See *King’s Cross*, pp. 4–10.
15. *Reason for God*, pp. 216–217.
16. Kevin J. Bidwell, “The Church as the Image of the Trinity”: A Critical Evaluation of Miroslav Volf’s Ecclesial Model (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2011), pp. 210–212.
17. *Reason for God*, pp. 214–15.
18. *Reason for God*, p. 215.

19. Many credit John of Damascus, 'Exposition of the Orthodox Faith', with coining the term *perichoresis* ('co-inherence')—a term that had already been used in Christology—in relation to the Trinity (John of Damascus, 'Exposition of the Orthodox Faith', in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace [eds], *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004], vol. 9, 1:8, 11). However, John of Damascus's purpose for developing this concept was to preserve the unity of God. Keller's handling of *perichoresis* would probably mystify John, who belonged to a Nicene tradition that emphasized great care to avoid the introduction of novel language to describe God's essence. Indeed, I think we would all benefit from John of Damascus's conservative approach to theology: 'His aim was, not to strike out views of his own or anything novel, but rather to collect into one single theological work the opinions of the ancients' (S. D. F. Salmond, 'Prologue to the Exposition of the Orthodox Faith', *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 9, p. vii).
20. Letham, *The Holy Trinity: in Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2004), pp. 183, 240–41.
21. *Reason for God*, p. 280 n. 1.
22. *Reason for God*, p. 280 n. 1.
23. Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, 3:1, 62.
24. *Reason for God*, p. 280 n. 1.
25. Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, p. 365.
26. As with Karl Barth, Torrance is orthodox on the doctrine of the Trinity; however, in many other respects his theology is in error and would not be recommended in general terms.
27. Torrance defines *perichoresis* as a concept that 'serves to hold powerfully together in the doctrine of the Trinity the identity of the divine Being and the intrinsic unity of the three divine persons' (T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* [London: T & T Clark, 1996], p. 102).
28. A wilful sloppiness regarding the etymology of *perichoresis* has become commonplace. Jürgen Moltmann's statement on the matter is telling: 'We arrive at the same result if we use the Greek verbs *perichoreo* and *perichoreuo*. Then the words describe the mutual resting in each other, and a round-dance with one another. Grammatically, however, *perichoresis* derives from *perichoreo*, not from *perichoreuo*. But as an apt description of the shifting round dance of three persons it can quite well be used' (Jürgen Moltmann, *Sun of Righteousness Arise!: God's Future for Humanity and the Earth*, tr. Margaret Kohl [St Mary's: SCM, 2010], pp. 154–155). In other words, Moltmann has to admit that *perichoresis* has no actual historical or grammatical connection with 'dancing' at all. However, since a very similar and easily confused word has the desired meaning, why not use it anyway?
29. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), pp. 271–272; Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Faith, Feminism and the Christ* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishing, 1984), pp. 123–133.
30. Again, notice the distinction between the words *perichoreo* (from which the word *perichoresis* was derived) and the word *perichoreuo* (Moltmann, *Sun of Righteousness Arise!*, pp. 154–155).
31. *Reason for God*, p. 215; Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 20–21; C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Harper Collins, 2002), pp. 175–176.

32. *Reason for God*, p.215; Plantinga, *Engaging God's World*, pp. 20–21.
33. The Council for Biblical Equality, found online at <http://www.cbeinternational.org/files/u1/smwbe/english.pdf> (accessed 15 May 2013); emphasis added.
34. Keller mentions that Lewis is his favorite author (*King's Cross*, p. 6).
35. *King's Cross*, p.6 and *Reason for God*, p. 215. This doctrinal outline is also reiterated by Keller in a sermon given at Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit', Mark 1:9–13, Sunday, 15 January 2006; <http://sermons2.redeemer.com/sermons/father-son-and-holy-spirit> (accessed 15 May 2013).
36. *Reason for God*, p. 215; Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pp. 175–176.
37. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 6.
38. 'In a rounded doctrine of the Trinity, there should be equal stress on the one being and the three persons' (Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, p. 373).
39. *King's Cross*, p. 6.
40. *Reason for God*, p.216; *King's Cross*, p. 8.
41. *King's Cross*, p. 8.
42. Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, 1:13:1, p. 120.
43. Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, 1:13:18, 20, 23, pp. 142–144, 149.
44. John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965, repr. 2004), p. 381.
45. Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, p. 180.
46. John Owen, 'Communion with God' in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 2. The full title of his treatise is 'Of Communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Each Person Distinctly, in Love, Grace and Consolation; or The Saints' Fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Ghost Unfolded'.
47. See, for instance, Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, 1:13.
48. *Reason for God*, p. 215.
49. The editor raised this issue with Keller after *Reason for God* was published, and he specifically affirmed order within the Godhead: 'I do not subscribe to an egalitarian view of the Trinity at all. [...] From all eternity the Father sends the Son and the Spirit proceeds from them—the Father doesn't proceed from the Spirit, etc. Therefore there is an order within the Trinity' (Keller, electronic correspondence with William M. Schweitzer, September, 2008). Yet years after this exchange, Keller endorses the very same language in *King's Cross*. This may indicate that that he simply does not realize the incompatibility here.
50. Kevin Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), p. 81.
51. Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, p. 82.
52. 'Another premise is a belief in the social Trinity, a view that puts much more emphasis on the three-ness of God than his unity and stresses God as a nonhierarchical, loving community rather than emphasizing his holiness.' (Keller, *Center Church*, p. 268)
53. It goes without saying that Tim Keller would deny tritheism; a balanced doctrine of the Trinity is his clearly-stated intention (*King's Cross*, pp. 5–6).
54. Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity* (London: T & T Clark, 2002), p. 201 n. 23.

55. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 144, 144 n. 43; George Hunsinger, 'Review of Jürgen Moltmann: The Trinity and the Kingdom of God', *Thomist*, 47, 1983, pp. 129–139, 131.
56. Bidwell, *The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, p. 159.
57. Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, p. 179, n. 29. This explains the variety of meanings of the Greek word *taxis*.
58. John Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, 1:13:18, pp. 142–143.
59. *King's Cross*, p. 6. Keller quotes from C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), p.151; and Cornelius Plantinga, *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 20–23.
60. *King's Cross*, p. 8.
61. The Westminster Confession of Faith teaches: 'It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man ... (WCF 8:1).' 'Which office [of Mediator] he took not unto himself, but was thereunto called by his Father; who put all power and judgment into his hand, and gave him commandment to execute the same (WCF 8:3).'
62. A. N. S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999); A. N. S. Lane, 'Scripture, Tradition and Church: An Historical Survey', *Vox Evangelica*, 9, 1975, pp. 37–55.
63. Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2009); Robert Letham, *Through Western Eyes: Eastern Orthodoxy; A Reformed Perspective* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2007), pp. 94–98.
64. See Colin E. Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Essays Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), pp. 21–25. The whole essay by Gunton, 'The God of Jesus Christ', is helpful and pp. 21–25 especially uphold the need for an ontological Trinity to serve as 'a foundation for the relative independence and so integrity of worldly reality also, and thus for human freedom' (p. 24).
65. See Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, & Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, & Relevance* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005).
66. Owen, *Works*, vol. 2, p. 269.
67. Gregory of Nazianzus, 'Fifth Theological Oration: On the Holy Spirit' in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol.3, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), pp. 14, 322.
68. Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, 1:5:9, 62.
69. John Owen, *Works*, vol. 6, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965. repr. 2004), p. 66.
70. Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, p. 407.
71. Letham, *Through Western Eyes*, pp. 271–272.
72. Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise on Grace and Observations on the Trinity* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1971).