

Toward a Trinitarian Theology

There are far too many books on the shelves which crowd this friar's cell. Among those books is one whose name many may find peculiar: *Pentecostarion*. Within this book can be found the prayers of our Church for this Paschal season. The fifty days of the title are bracketed, as it were, by two bookends - by two great feasts. These days, we are reminded of the first of these in all of our prayer with the constant repetition: Christ is risen from the dead, trampling death by death, and to those in the tombs He granted life. The second feast, of course, comes at the end of the fifty days. It is upon this second feast of Pentecost that I shall focus.

We can consider Pentecost from many different vantage points. This Dominican - as a member of the Order of Preachers - is strongly tempted to point out that Pentecost commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the cowering apostles, as a result of which those fearful men morphed into fearless preachers. Others might choose to focus on a more «popular» image, seeing this feast as the «birthday» of the Church. In this case, however, I choose to focus on the definitive revelation of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity.

Because we Byzantine Christians are so strongly Trinitarian, we find it incongruous to focus on One Person of the Trinity to the exclusion of the Others. In the case of Pentecost, we realize that where the Holy Spirit is, the Father and the Son are there as well. This strong Trinitarian faith is found in our liturgical prayer - such as the proclamation with which we begin every Divine Liturgy: Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and forever and ever. So strong is this Trinitarian sentiment that even the Our Father's, obviously directed only at the Father, is completed by the priest with a Trinitarian formula: For the Kingdom, the power, and glory are Yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever and ever. •

Theologians seemingly do not tire of trying to unpack the mystery of the Trinity. How can One be Three and Three One? How do the distinct Persons of the Trinity work together to bring about the one divine will? Often theologians resort to images to help people to glimpse this mystery which is beyond human understanding. One such image is presented to us by St. Irenaeus of Lyon - a Greek who lived in France in the 2nd century. Irenaeus saw the Son and the Spirit as the two hands of the Father, working together to do His will - which, ultimately, is to bring all people to Him. Another Trinitarian image which I like is that of fire: the flame itself is like the Father, the light is like the Son, and the warmth is like the Spirit. These three aspects are united in the fire, but yet we can talk about them separately. Can't this be said of the persons of the Trinity as well, Who are united in the Godhead while yet remaining distinct?

I do not claim to be a great theologian. I merely look for images which seem to convey one aspect of the multi-faceted truth, and which seem to do so in a way which allows the mysterious to be grasped and appreciated. I have indeed come up with another image to explain the way in which the Persons of the

Trinity work together to bring about our salvation - and what is salvation if not the very sharing in the life of the Trinity?

From the roof of the priory where I live, I can see an old power plant where electricity was long generated. The electricity eventually made its way to the electrical socket in my room, just waiting to be tapped. By plugging my computer into that socket, I am able to tap into that power, which in turn allows me to write this article. This dynamic system reminds me of the working of the Trinity. The Father, the source of all things, visible and invisible• can be compared to the power plant. As the electricity proceeds forth from the generator, so does the invisible, energizing Spirit proceed from the Father. As the electricity powers my computer, so does the Holy Spirit provide the power for God's work on earth: at the creation, the Spirit hovered over the waters and brought order out of chaos; today, the power of the Spirit transforms the gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. People are also worked on by the Spirit: remember the transformation of the apostles on the first Pentecost? If we are to have access to this «energy», we have to «plug in»• - which is where Christ comes in: Christ, «God with us»• is like the electrical outlet which brings the power to us wherever we are, thus providing us access - if we so choose. Remember: Divine energy• is always available to transform us - provided, of course, that we plug in•; we plug in• by embracing Christ and the salvation which comes to us in Him.

Some people shudder at the very thought of theology; they find it complicated - and full of long, unpronounceable words! Worse, they think it has no relevance to their lives. I disagree with at least the last assertion: theology is absolutely vital because it opens us to the God in Whom we live and move and have our being•. People were able to live well enough before anything was known about biology or chemistry, but a knowledge of these subjects has helped us to live better - especially those of us who rely on a fistful of pills just to stay alive. It is likewise possible to live without a knowledge of the Trinity - at least physically; however, I maintain that such a knowledge can only make our lives better. After all, there is so much more than physical life: God has created us to share in His own Divine life, which goes far beyond the wildest imaginings of anyone whose vision is limited to what is merely material or historical.

Ecclesiastes says that God has placed within us a spark of the eternal•; are you willing to let that spar• be kindled in you? If so, you too can begin to glow with the light of Christ, and to radiate the warmth of the Spirit, thus attracting others to join you as you journey to the Father of life. Is not that what it means to be Church?

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