

Trinitarian Theology:

*Human Unity &
Relationships*

PASTORS' SCHOOL 1991

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STUDY ONE

Introduction to the Theme

(by Geoffrey Bingham)

THE FACT OF THE TRINITY

In one of his poems John Donne said, ‘Thou three-personned God’. He said this in the face of the heresies of Tritheism and Sabellianism. He also said it without defining his terms, i.e. ‘God’ and ‘three-personned’. Ian Pennicook will give us studies in the history of the Trinity, i.e. its development biblically and historically, historically being what happened as the doctrine developed, and with it the findings of historical theology. All our studies presuppose the fact of the Trinity and our belief in it. As we look at the various elements of Trinitarian action and relationship we should be more enlightened and confirmed in the reality of the Godhead.

THE OVERALL SIGNIFICANCE OF TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

We find in the church today various groups who give primacy to one Person of the Trinity to the neglect—great or small—of the others. This imbalance has its immediate effects in personal and congregational life. In some way they relate to the ‘I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas’ syndrome in I Corinthians 1:10–13, and should be understood and treated accordingly. We mean that they see in one Person the most benefit and wisdom for them, and so do not really understand any of the Persons.¹

Our general studies will show the work of the Triune God in creation, covenant, redemption, and the *eschaton-telos* when there will be the regeneration of all things, including glorification and the universal inheritance. Ignorance of this Trinitarian work in history—explicit in the New Testament and implicit in the Old Testament—will have unhelpful effects. Theologically we should understand that Pateriology, Christology and Pneumatology are of the one piece. They must not be studied separately and atomistically, but as a whole, together. That is, Pateriology should be both Christological and Pneumatological—and so on. Our whole theology will then be Trinitarian.

THE VALUE OF TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY FOR HUMAN UNITY AND RELATIONSHIPS

Man being created in the image of God means that as God has a plurality of Persons and so an internal sociality, so Man as a race will also have such plural elements. As

¹ We note that for certain historical reasons one or other of the Persons seems to figure largely in the theological thinking of different eras, e.g. the emphasis on Christ as Son of God and equal with the Father at the time of the early Christological controversies.

INTRODUCTION to the Theme

God is One, and His unity is ontological, so Man will be one and reflect that ontological unity in relationships. The differentiations in the Godhead are essential to its unity, and the differentiations within human society are likewise essential to its true unity. The very doctrine of creation—as Martin Bleby’s first study will show—is dependent upon the unity of the Godhead, or the resultant creation could not be a unity, especially as it has its differentiations.

‘God is One’, ‘God is love’ are not mere theological statements which are clichés. As we study the relationships of the Triune God—both internal and external—then we will see how disastrous it is to concentrate on any one of the Persons to the neglect of the others. At the same time we are not called upon to effect a synthesis of their Persons. They relate as the One and we must receive this truth and act accordingly.

Creation, redemption, the making of covenant and the people of God, the redemption that comes in Christ, and the regeneration of the person and the creation are all Trinitarian works, leading to the reconciliation of all things—the ultimate and perfect unity. Meanwhile in the people of God—formerly in Israel and latterly in the church—this unity is worked out in true relationships, themselves being the present reflections of the Divine unity and action.

HABITATION AND CONSUMMATION

Our studies will show that unity within redeemed humanity obtains from the fact that the Triune God indwells each person and the community of Christ, and each person and the community of Christ dwells in the Triune Godhead. This marvellous living will be finally consummated when the matured and glorified children of God will be admitted into full fellowship with the Triune God, i.e. become full partakers of the Divine nature, even though they will not attain Deity. This is what we call ‘the glory of the liberty of the children of God’.

CONCLUSION

If we lack this understanding of the Trinitarian nature and works of God, then our congregations will be deficient, not simply in theology, but in the proper knowledge and experience of the present work of the Triune God. Their unity will be deficient, their hope will be truncated, and their constraint to obedience, holiness and proper works will be inhibited

Study Two

The Dynamics of Divine & Human Perichoresis—I

(by Deane Meatheringham)

INTRODUCTION

The term *perichoresis* is a theological description of the inter-penetration and the mutual giving and receiving of the three Persons of the Triune Godhead. *Perichoresis* is the Greek word depicting what makes the Divine Persons what they are in their relations with each other, while the Latin equivalent *circumincessio* describes the circular nature of giving and receiving of the three Persons of the Trinity.

What I shall attempt to do in these two studies will be to set out the reality of the Divine *Perichoresis*. In the first study I will briefly show some implications of this for our life together. In the second study I will set out the reality of our participation in the Divine *Perichoresis* and in particular as this relates to the family of God and ministry to the world.

I hope that what we will see is that in an age in conflict, with the tyrannies of individualism and an impersonal mass, that human personhood is realizable in the communion of relationships which are in communion with the Triune Godhead.

THE GOD WHOM WE WORSHIP IS ONE GOD

To be related to God is to know him as those who worship him. Our worship does not originate in ourselves. Jesus the Son of God is sent from the Father to bring us into the Father's presence. The Father and the Son have sent the Holy Spirit into us so that through the Spirit the Father, Son and Spirit dwell in us. Our worship is the gift of participating through the Spirit in the Son's communion with the Father. Whatever else it is, worship is a relationship of communion in the unity of the Godhead.

The unity of the Godhead is confessed in the following passages: Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; 6:4; cf. Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:29f.; Luke 10:27; Isaiah 46:5, 9; Exodus 3:14; 34:6–7; I Corinthians 8:5f. That God is One is one of the constantly reiterated and emphasized truths in the Scriptures, but God's ineffable oneness is not reducible to mathematic formula, a single monad, or an impersonal absolute.

'God is love' and the God whom we worship is a unity, a fellowship, a society, a community of love. The Godhead is a oneness which personally relates in a threeness. It is not that the unity should dominate our thinking, for if that were the case then God's threeness would have little to tell us what God is really like, and we would be cut out of any intimacy with God through our being 'almost monotheist'. It is not that threeness should dominate our thinking, for that would only land us in 'tritheism' and divisiveness. If we worship the three 'individually' then we will not realize the unity

and communion of love in God or in the family of God.

The implications of these things are enormous. Some would say that here we face the basic philosophic question which was formulated by the Greeks, but could be asked like this: 'Is unity of plurality, the one or the many, the basic fact of life, the ultimate truth of being?'.

GOD IS A COMMUNITY OF UNBROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

The Divine Family is a relationship where each member has his discrete personhood or mode of being, but only in relationship to the other members. The Divine love is the constraint for this union.

John 14:10ff. is a key to understanding the interpersonal relationships between the Father and the Son (cf. John 10:38; 17:20–23; Matt. 11:27). When we add to this our consideration of the Holy Spirit, then we see that the Spirit is always the Spirit *of* the Father and the Spirit *of* the Son, etc. (Matt. 10:20; 12:28; Rom. 8:9–11; etc.).

every divine Person exists in the light of the other and in the other. By virtue of the love they have for one another they ex-ist totally in the other: the Father ex-ists by virtue of his love, as himself entirely in the Son; the Son, by virtue of his self-surrender, ex-ists as himself totally in the Father; and so on (J. Moltmann).

What this enables us to see is that relationships are the essence of life. Where technique, reductionism, monism and profiteering bring depersonalization, and when our social order threatens the uniqueness of persons and their relationships with each other, the Divine Community tells us that relationships are like eternal relationships, forming the essence of reality (John 10:10; 17:3; I John 5:11f.).

THE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE GODHEAD ARE CONCENTRED

We can begin this point by saying that within the threeness of the unity of God, each Person is 'other person centred' (John 3:35; 5:19, 20; 8:28f.; 14:31).

But we have seen that the relationships within the Trinity are a personal union of mutual inter-dwelling. This means that the relationships are other person *con-centred*. They are involved *in* the other person (John 17:20–23).

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct, but exist only in the *perichoresis*, the interanimation which is the circle of mutual giving and receiving in the communion of love.

Thus with each person of the Godhead inter-dwelling the other, each gives to the other, honours the other, serves the other, and receives love, honour and service from the other (Eph. 1:17; John 5:22, 26–27; 13:3; 14:13; 17:1–5, 22, 24; 18:37; I Pet. 4:14; II Pet. 1:16–19; Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15).

In John 17:20–26 we see the community of the Godhead. There is the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son. For people to share in the Divine unity they must dwell in the Father and the Son, as the Father and the Son dwell in them. The Father in love gave his glory to the Son, who in turn gives it to his people. Jesus desires that his people will see his glory so that they may realize its source in the Father.

Each person of the Divine Communion give himself entirely to the other to find himself in the other most of all.

As Persons they are discrete, and have their own personal characteristics, but as the Triune God they are one, yet in the circulation of the Divine life they give to one another so that their unity is out of the differentiations and not in spite of them. It means that whilst they retain their own discreteness they cannot be other than the One together, and so the Spirit must be as much in the Father and the Son as each of them in him—the Spirit (G. Bingham, Thesis, p. 21).

For human beings to participate in this *perichoresis* of the Godhead is the life of relationships realized. The famous slogan of the French Revolution, ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity’, is a denial of genuine relationships as is the compensating quest for self-fulfillment, etc. It is not that the Trinity is a model for our relationships, to live by, but rather the love of God for us and to us is the love which flows through us in the Divine–human *perichoresis–circumincessio*.

Study Three

The History of the Trinity—I

(by Ian Pennicook)

(These notes are substantially comprised of quotations from other writers. The reason for this lies in the nature of the topic with which we are dealing. “The History of the Trinity” is the history of the church attempting to refine the way it proclaims the truth of God as Trinity. This refining has been done both in the cut and thrust of controversy and the dangers posed by heresy, as well as in the more rarefied realms of theological speculation. But what we know of the process we know from the writings of those who were immediately involved and of those who have given much time to study and reflection on the issues. I have thought it better to allow them to express themselves than to attempt to rephrase their words, generally in the light of my substantially deficient understanding of the matters they are discussing.)

It is readily acknowledged that the word “Trinity” and the associated terms used to explicate the doctrine are not found in the Scriptures, at least not in that context¹, and yet we must recognize that the study of the doctrine of the Trinity has occupied some of the greatest minds of the church for significant periods and has often led to deep divisions and bitterness. To many, the issues involved are subjects for students of church history, but we ought to recognize that perhaps *the* crucial issue facing the church today is, what some have called, “the battle for the Trinity”.

Calvin, in his superb exposition of the doctrine approaches the subject of the use of particular words in this way:

However, the novelty of words of this sort [i.e. *Trinity* and *Person*] (if such it must be called) becomes especially useful when the truth is to be asserted against false accusers, who evade it by their shifts. Of this today we have abundant experience in our great efforts to rout the enemies of pure and wholesome doctrine. With such crooked and sinuous twisting these slippery snakes glide away unless they are boldly pursued, caught and crushed. Thus men of old, stirred up by various struggles over depraved dogmas, were compelled to set forth with consummate clarity what they felt, lest they leave any devious shift to the impious, who cloaked their errors in layers of verbiage.²

Calvin recognizes that, although the Scriptures are overwhelming in their assertions “that Father and Son and Spirit are one God, Yet the Son is not the Father, nor the Spirit the Son, but that they are differentiated by a peculiar quality”, and therefore wishes that the words which cause so much debate could be “buried”³, but still he

¹ Although *υποασπισι*, which occurs five times in the New Testament (see 2 Cor. 9:4; 11:17 and Heb. 3:14 where it is translated “confidence”, and Heb. 11:3 where the translators have generally chosen “assurance” over “substance” except in the AV, NEB and NASB mg), it does come close to its Trinitarian meaning in Heb.1:3. *Ουσσια* occurs twice in the New Testament, in Luke 15:12, 13 where it carries the meaning of *material* substance.

² *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Library of Christian Classics, S.C.M. London, 1960, Vol. I, p. 124f.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 125.

recognizes that we cannot really do without them. At the same time, he points out that even

the ancients, who otherwise speak very reverently concerning these matters, agree neither among themselves nor even at times individually at times with themselves. What now are the formulas employed by the councils and excused by Hilary? With what great freedom does Augustine sometimes burst forth? How unlike are the Greeks and the Latins?⁴

It was Augustine, he argues, who pointed out that “on account of the poverty of human speech in so great a matter, the word ‘hypostasis’ had been forced upon us by necessity, not to express what it is, but only not to be silent on how Father, Son, and Spirit are three”.⁵

What we must observe, however, is that Calvin was as much an heir of the labours of others as we are. Our own understanding of the Trinity comes from the Scriptures, but to a large extent it is as those Scriptures have been understood and expounded by earlier generations. So, while the issues may appear to us as extremely complex, we are, nonetheless, heirs of the fathers.

THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS

Outside of the New Testament, one of the earliest reference to things “Trinitarian” is from Clement of Rome (c. 30–c. 100) who said, “As God liveth, and the Lord Jesus Christ liveth, and the Holy Ghost, who are the faith and hope of the elect”.⁶ In the letter known as 2 Clement⁷, the author of which advises his readers “to think of Jesus Christ as of God, as of the judge of living and dead”.⁸ Although this seems reasonable to us, later comments in the same letter demonstrate that “Clement’s” understanding of the relationship of Jesus to the Father was more complex. For example, he said that “being first of all spirit, Christ the Lord, who saved us, became flesh and so called us”.⁹ He was not, as appears, identifying the Holy Spirit with Jesus, for elsewhere he identified the Holy Spirit with the pre-existent, spiritual church.¹⁰ “Barnabas”, too, seems to have had a two-level understanding of “spirit”, although he gives prominence to the pre-existence of Christ in his theology.

Ignatius (d. 117) was clearly Trinitarian in his view of God, especially as regards the relationship of the Father and the Son, although he did apparently indicate at one point that Christ’s divine sonship dates from the incarnation.¹¹ However, “the only hint he gives of the nature of this distinction within the unity of the divine spirit (πνεῦμα) is that Christ is the Father’s ‘thought’ (γνώμη).”¹²

Hermas, who makes no mention of the name of Jesus, only mentions him as Son

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Op. cit.* p. 127, quoting Augustine, *On the Trinity*, VII. iv. 7, 9.

⁶ Quoted in E. C. S. Gibson, *The Thirty-Nine Articles*, Methuen, London, 1928, p. 104. Gibson cites 1 Clem. ch. lviii as the source, although this is not so in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* edition of 1 Clement.

⁷ Datings for this work vary from “towards the end of the first century” (G. Bingham, *The Gory of God and Human Relationships*, Ch. 4. n. 5) to c. 160–170 AD (W. Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1959, p. 37).

⁸ 1:1.

⁹ 9:5.

¹⁰ 14:3.

¹¹ This is the observation of J. N. D. Kelly, (*Early Christian Doctrines*, A & C Black, London, 1977, p. 92), although the text to which he refers, *Smyrna 1:1*, reads only, “with respect to our Lord Jesus Christ . . . He was the Son of God, ‘the first-born of every creature’, God the Word, the only begotten Son, and was of the seed of David, by the virgin Mary.” (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1987, p. 86).

¹² Kelly, p. 93. He does not identify his source for this comment.

on two occasions. In the first he tells the story of a land owner who entrusted his property to a slave who performed his task so well that he was elevated to being joint-heir with the owner's son. His explanation of this story is that the owner is the Creator, the field is this world "and the son is the Holy Spirit and the slave is the Son of God".¹³ In the following section he qualifies the statement about the slave being the Son, by adding "the Son of God is not in the form of a slave, but in great power and might".¹⁴ Hermas then continues to expound the work of Christ, although again, in a passage which differs in all the MSS, he does say:

And why the Lord took His Son as councillor, and the glorious angels, regarding the heirship of the slave, listen. The holy, pre-existent Spirit, that created every creature, God made to dwell in flesh which He chose. This flesh, accordingly, in which the Holy Spirit dwelt, was nobly subject to that Spirit, walking religiously and chastely, in no respect defiling the Spirit; and accordingly, after living excellently and purely, and after labouring and co-operating with the Spirit, and having in everything acted vigorously and courageously along with the Holy Spirit, He assumed it as a partner with it.¹⁵

What is observable is that the Apostolic Fathers, while having a Trinitarian base, which means that, if nothing else, they were fully aware of the Trinitarian language of Matthew 28:19, and no doubt had other concerns than an exposition of the later doctrine, were unclear as to the relationships which existed between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Keeping in mind the effect such unclear teaching would have on the church, we are not surprised at the amount of clarifying which was required in later times.

THE APOLOGISTS

Kelly says that it fell to the second century Apologists to attempt the first

intellectually satisfying explanation of the relationship of Christ to God the Father. They were all . . . ardent monotheists, determined at all costs not to compromise this fundamental truth. The solution they proposed, reduced to essentials, was that, as pre-existent, Christ was the Father's thought or mind, and that, as manifested in creation and revelation, He was its extrapolation or expression. In expounding this doctrine they had recourse to the imagery of the divine Logos, or Word, which had been familiar to later Judaism as well as to Stoicism, and which had become a fashionable cliché through the influence of Philo. Others had, of course, anticipated them . . . The Apologists' originality lay in drawing out the further implications of the Logos idea in order to make plausible the twofold fact of Christ's pre-temporal oneness with the Father and His manifestation in space and time.¹⁶

The clearest of the Apologists was Justin (c. 100–165), who argued that the Logos

had now "assumed shape and become a man" in Jesus Christ; He had become incarnate in His entirety in Him. The Logos is here conceived of as the Father's intelligence or rational thought; but Justin argued that he was not only in name distinct from the Father, as the light is from the sun, but was "numerically distinct too" (καὶ ἀριθμῶ ἕτερον).¹⁷

Kelly's point is that Justin was here concerned to put his point against *Jewish* monotheism. In developing this, he had to identify the special features of the Logos.

¹³ *The Shepherd of Hermas*, Similitude 5, 5, quoted in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2, p. 35. The reference to the Holy Spirit as the Son of the story occurs only in one MS.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.* 5:6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Op. cit.* p.95f.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.* p. 96.

As regards His nature, while other beings are “things made” (ποιήματα) or “creatures” (κτίσματα), the Logos is God’s “offspring” (γέννημα), His “child” (τέκνον) and “unique Son” (ὁ μονογενής): “before all creatures God begat, in the beginning, a rational power out of himself”. By this generation Justin means, not the ultimate origin of the Father’s Logos or reason (this he does not discuss), but His putting forth or emission for the purposes of creation or revelation; and it is conditioned by, and is the result of, an act of the Father’s will . . . His numerical distinction from the Father does not involve any partition of the latter’s essence.¹⁸

The other Apologists argued along much the same lines. Tatian (110–172), a pupil of Justin who later became involved in Gnosticism,

threw into sharper relief than Justin the contrast between the two successive states of the Logos. Before creation, God was alone, the Logos being immanent in Him as His potentiality for creating all things; but at the moment of creation He leaped forth from the Father as His “primordial work” (ἔργον πρωτότοκον). Once born, being “spirit derived from spirit, rationality from rational power”, He served as the Father’s instrument in creating and governing the universe, in particular making men in the divine image.¹⁹

Using the technical language of the Stoics, Theophilus of Antioch (d. 181) taught that

God . . . having His Word immanent (ἐνδιόθετον) in his bowels, engendered Him along with His wisdom, emitting Him before the universe. He used this Word as His assistant in His creative work, and by Him He has made all things. This Word is called First Principle because he is the Principle and Lord of all things.²⁰

Theophilus argued that it was the function of the Word to represent in space and time God, who cannot be contained in space and time.

Two points in the Apologists’ teaching must be stressed: (i) the title “God the Father” referred not to the first person of the Trinity but to the one Godhead as author of whatever exists, and (ii) the generation of the Logos and his eligibility for the title “Son” is to be dated from His being put forth for the purpose of creation and revelation. Compared to the post-Nicene teaching, the Apologists were clearly deficient in this area. Yet their thoughts about the status and role of the Holy Spirit were even more vague. While they used Biblical language and concepts, they had not worked through the subject so as to formulate a coherent scheme. At the same time there was a discernible Trinitarian base to their thinking. Thus Athenagoras, refuting the charge that Christians are atheists, said,

. . . the Son of God is the Logos of the Father, in idea and in operation; for after the pattern of Him and by Him were all things made, the Father and the Son being one. And, the Son being in the Father and the Father in the Son, in oneness and power of spirit, the understanding and reason (νοῦ καὶ λόγος) of the Father is the Son of God . . . He is the first product of the Father, not as having been brought into existence, (for from the beginning, God, who is the eternal mind [νοῦ], had the Logos in himself, being from eternity instinct with Logos [λογικός]); but inasmuch as He came forth to be the idea and energising power of all material things . . . The prophetic Spirit also agrees with our statements. “The Lord”, it says, “made me, the beginning of His ways to His works”. The Holy Spirit Himself also, which operates in the prophets, we assert to be an effluence from God, flowing from Him, and returning back again like a beam of the sun. Who, then, would not be astonished to hear men who speak of God the Father, and of God the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and who declare both their power in union and their distinction in order, called atheists?²¹

¹⁸ *Op. cit.* p. 97f.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.* p. 98f.

²⁰ *Op. cit.* p. 99.

²¹ *A Plea for the Christians, in Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 2, p. 133.*

THE SECOND AND THIRD CENTURY FATHERS

Irenaeus²² was deeply influenced by the Apologists and continued in the stream of their thought, although he was a far more dominant theologian than they.

... he approached God from two directions, envisaging Him both as He exists in His intrinsic being, and also as He manifests himself in the “economy”, ie. the ordered process of His self-disclosure. From the former point of view God is the Father of all things, ineffably one, and yet containing in Himself from all eternity His Word and His Wisdom. In making himself known, however, or in exerting Himself for creation and redemption, God extrapolates or manifests these; as the Son and the Spirit, They are His “hands”, the vehicles or forms of His self-revelation. Thus Irenaeus could claim that “by the very essence and nature of His being there is but one God”, while at the same time “according to the economy of our redemption there are both Father and Son”—and, he might easily have added, Spirit. Where he was in advance of the Apologists, from whom he also diverged in his deliberated avoidance of philosophical jargon, was (a) in his firmer grasp and more explicit statement of this notion of “the economy”, and (b) in the much fuller recognition which he gave to the place of the Spirit in the triadic scheme.²³

Irenaeus also insisted that the analogy between God’s utterance of His word and human speech was inadequate since God is identical with his Word; he therefore rejected attempts to explore the process of the begetting of the Word. On the contrary, he laid more stress on the eternal co-existence of the Word with the Father. It seems unlikely, however, that he held to the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son.

Irenaeus regarded the Son as fully divine; he taught that “the Father is God, and the Son is God, for whatever is begotten of God is God”.²⁴ He also held that the Spirit is not a creature, but “is eternal”.²⁵ But the essential thrust of his teaching was not that of three co-equal persons in the Trinity; rather that of a single person, the Father, who is the Godhead himself, with his mind, or rationality, and his wisdom. This thrust was motivated by an intense concern to maintain fundamental monotheism, yet the unavoidable consequence was the obscuring of the “persons” of the Son and the Spirit in the Godhead prior to creation and revelation.

It was Tertullian (c. 160–c. 220)²⁶ who, faced with the arguments of Modalistic Monarchianism (Sabellianism)²⁷, “exerted himself to show that the threeness revealed in the economy was in no way incompatible with God’s essential unity”.²⁸ Where Tertullian (along with Hippolytus) made advances on his predecessors was in his attempt to define more clearly the nature of the oneness of which the three were expressions or forms and in the recognition of the three as “Persons” (προσωπα). This latter term was still reserved for the economic Trinity. He did use the term “one substance” to describe the unity of the divine nature.

He says,

... this heresy [thinks] that one cannot believe on One Only God in any other way than by saying that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are the selfsame Person. As if in this way also one were not All, in that All are of One, by unity (that is) of substance; while the mystery of the dispensation²⁹ is still guarded which distributes the Unity into a Trinity,

²² The date of Irenaeus’ birth is uncertain, having been placed anywhere between 115 and 143 A.D. He died c. 200.

²³ Kelly, *Op. cit.* p. 104f.

²⁴ Quoted by Kelly, *Op. cit.* p. 107.

²⁵ *Against Heresies*, 5.12.2.

²⁶ Cf. J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, S.C.M. London 1981, pp. 137–139.

²⁷ See Kelly, *Op. cit.* pp. 119–123.

²⁸ Kelly, *Op. cit.* p. 113.

²⁹ οἰκονομία.

placing in their order the three *Persons*—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: three, however, not in condition, but in degree; not in substance, but in form; not in power, but in aspect; yet of one substance, and of one condition, and of one power, inasmuch as He is one God, from whom these degrees and forms and aspects are reckoned, under the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. How they are susceptible of number without division, will be shown as our treatise proceeds.³⁰

A younger contemporary of Tertullian was Origen (c. 185–254).³¹ Origen’s reinterpretation of the Trinity was strongly in terms of what is known as “middle Platonism”. One of the chief characteristics of his doctrine was that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are “three Persons” (ὑποστάσεις), and that each of the three is a distinct hypostasis from all eternity and not merely in the economy. Yet Origen still calls the Father “the fountain-head of deity” (πηγή τῆς θεότητος). He adds,

But the Son and the Spirit are also in their degrees divine, possessing, though derivatively, all the characteristics of deity; distinct from the world of creatures, they cooperate with the Father and mediate the divine life flowing from Him.³²

Flowing from his middle Platonism is a thoroughgoing subordinationism³³ which was integral to Origen’s Trinitarian thought. The Son is simply θεός and not ὁ θεός in John 1:1; in relation to the God of the universe, he merits only a secondary degree of honour.

Two very influential streams flowed from Origen’s teaching: the first stressed his emphasis on the Son’s eternal kinship with the Father and the second his subordination. A good illustration of the first is Gregory Thaumaturgis (d. c. 270) who, although willing on occasions to speak of the Son as “a creature or a thing made”, nonetheless in his creed declared

There is one God, Father of the living Word . . . perfect begetter of the perfect begotten . . . There is one Lord, unique out of unique, God out of God, impress and image of Godhead, effective Word . . . And there is one Holy Spirit, having His subsistence from God and being made manifest by the Son . . . in Whom is manifested God the Father Who is above all and in all, and God the Son, Who is through all. So there is a perfect Triad . . . in the Triad there is nothing either created or servile, not anything brought in, as if it formerly did not exist and was subsequently introduced. Thus neither was the Son ever wanting to the Father, nor the Spirit to the Son.³⁴

In opposition to the Sabellians (who denied the distinctions of Persons while maintaining monotheism), some of Origen’s successors, for example, his pupil, Dionysius bishop of Alexandria, stressed the plurality of the Persons. However, some over-reacted and made so much of the subordinationism that they only provided more ammunition for their opponents.

THE NICENE FATHERS

The two sides of Origen’s thought became prominent in the dispute between Alexander, bishop of Alexandria from 312-328 AD and Arius (d. 335), a local presbyter. Arius

³⁰ *Against Praxeas*, Ch. 2, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3, p. 598.

³¹ Origen was “Eastern”, i.e. Greek speaking, from Alexandria, whereas Tertullian, the son of a Roman officer, was “Western” and wrote in Latin. Tertullian has been called the founder of Latin Christianity.

³² Quoted in Kelly, *Op. cit.* p. 131.

³³ It should be observed that this “subordinationism”, which implies some lesser degree of deity, and so of honour, is distinct from the idea of “functional subordination” which we are happy to have alongside the absolute equality of essence and honour as expounded by the Nicene fathers.

³⁴ Quoted in Kelly, *Op. cit.* p. 133.

taught an extreme form of subordinationism, flowing from a monarchian base. In other words, stressing the unity and self-contained existence of God, he argued that Christ was a created being, that he was not of the “substance” (οὐσία) of God but was, like other creatures made out of nothing. As the first-born of the creatures, and the agent of the remainder of creation, he was not eternal.

“The Son has a beginning, but . . . God is without beginning” Christ was, indeed, God in a certain sense to Arius, but a lower God, in no way one with the father in essence or eternity. In the incarnation, this Logos entered a human body, taking the place of the human reasoning spirit. To Arius’s thinking, Christ was neither fully God nor fully man, but a *tertium quid* between.³⁵

Athanasius

Without entering into the politics which were associated with the response to Arius’ teaching, we must observe that from it came the explication of the Trinity by Athanasius (295–373, who stood over against two groups, those associated with Arius, led by Eusebius of Nicomedia and a middle group led by Eusebius of Caesarea who were generally uncertain of the issues involved and whom one writer later described as “simpletons”).³⁶

One result of the Nicene Council of 325 was the production of a creed, as follows:³⁷

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things, visible and invisible;
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, begotten from the Father, only begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς), God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance (ὁμοούσιον) with the Father, through Whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth, Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead;
And in the Holy Spirit.
But as for those who say, There was when he was not, and, Before being born He was not, and that He came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is from a different hypostasis or substance (ὑποστάσεως ἢ οὐσίας), or is created, or is subject to alteration or change—these the Catholic Church anathematizes.

The interpretation of the language of this creed was fraught with difficulties. Saying that the Son was ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς was taken to mean no more than that the Son is “from the Father”, which said little since it was universally recognized that all things come from God. Likewise, saying that the Son was not of any other ὑποστάσεως ἢ οὐσίας was only taken to say that the Son bore no resemblance to creatures.³⁸

A distinct ambiguity attached to the famous word ὁμοούσιος. To the Arians the word was totally unacceptable; to the large middle group it seemed Sabellian. But to those who accepted it, it was open to two possible meanings:

. . . are we to understand “of the same nature” in the “generic” sense in which Origen was alleged to have employed ὁμοούσιος, or are we to take it as having the meaning accepted by later Catholic theology, viz. numerical identity of substance. The root word οὐσία could

³⁵ Walker, *Op. cit.* p. 107. Cf. Kelly, *Op. cit.* pp. 226–231 for a more detailed outline of Arius's teaching.

³⁶ Quoted in Walker, *Op. cit.* p. 108.

³⁷ For the full Greek text see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, Longmans, London, 1960, p. 215f.

³⁸ See Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 23.

signify the kind of substance or stuff common to several individuals of a class, or it could connote an individual thing as such.³⁹

In spite of our choice of the “numeric” meaning, it does seem that the use of the word originally meant no more than that the Son was generically of the same nature as the Father.⁴⁰ If this is so, it would have made acceptance of the creed easier for some.

In the aftermath of the Council, it was Athanasius who provided the most complete analysis of the relationship of the Father to the Son. The issue was, and is, significant. T. F. Torrance summarizes the question as, “Where was the line of demarcation between God and the creature to be drawn, between God the Father and Jesus Christ, or between Jesus Christ the incarnate Son of God and the world?”⁴¹ On the answer to this question hangs the whole certainty of salvation.

With reference to Jesus’ words in John 10:30, “I and the Father are one” and “I am in the Father and the Father in me” (John 14:11), Athanasius declared that,

they show the identity of the Godhead and the oneness of the being (τὴν ταυτότητα τὴν δὲ ἐνότητα τῆς οὐσίας, δείξῃ). They are two, for the Father is Father and is not also Son, and the Son is Son and is not also Father; but the nature is one and all that is the Father’s is the Son’s . . . The Son and the Father are one in propriety and peculiarity of nature and in the identity of the one Godhead (ἐν εἰσὶν αὐτὸς καὶ ὁ Πατὴρ τῇ ιδιότητι καὶ οἰκειότητι τῆς φύσεως, καὶ τῇ ταυτότητι τῆς μιᾶς Θεότητος). The Godhead of the Son’s is the Father’s; whence also it is indivisible; and thus there is one God and none other but he. And so since they are one, and the Godhead himself is one, the same things are said of the Son as are said of the Father, except his being said to be “Father”.⁴²

It was Athanasius’ argument that the union between Father and Son was economic *because* it was ontological. That is why

. . . having fulfilled his human economy, the incarnate Son now sits at the right hand of the Father, “being in the Father and the Father in him, as always was and is forever”.⁴³

We should note that the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son was not given the same prominence by any of the major writers to this point as was the relationship of the Father to the Son. The subject was not ignored, however.⁴⁴ Torrance describes Athanasius’ position thus:

On the one hand, [Athanasius] emphasised that there is an inseparable ontological relationship between the Spirit and the Son, in virtue of which the Son imparts the Spirit out of himself, while the Spirit at the same time receives from the Son. On the other hand, he emphasised that since everything that is the Son’s belongs to the Father, the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of the Son belongs to the Father and is of one being with him. Thus while it is ultimately from the Father that the Holy Spirit proceeds, “because of his proper relation to the Son he is given *from* him to all (διὰ τὴν πρὸς τὸν Υἱὸν ιδιότητα αὐτοῦ, καὶ ὅτι ἐξ αὐτοῦ δίδοται πᾶσι). This teaching was further reinforced by showing that the Son and the Spirit, while distinct from one another, inhere in one another in God, so that there is only one divine activity.⁴⁵

This Trinitarian theology meant that Athanasius had to be far more precise in his use of οὐσία and ὑπόστασις than previously:

³⁹ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 234.

⁴⁰ See Kelly’s argument in *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 234–237.

⁴¹ *The Trinitarian Faith*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1988, p. 2, cf. p. 306: “Prompting Athanasius’ argumentation was the soteriological insight that, unless in the Holy Spirit we have a divine and not a creaturely relation to God, the substance drops out of the Gospel, just as it would if the Son were not of one being and agency with God the Father”.

⁴² Torrance, *Op. cit.* p. 304.

⁴³ Torrance, *Op. cit.* p. 308.

⁴⁴ See note 40 above.

⁴⁵ *Op. cit.* p. 309.

In some contexts, when speaking of the being of God, Athanasius used the term οὐσία in its simplest sense as that which is and subsists by itself, and as more or less equivalent to ὑπόστασις in its simplest sense. That had to be changed and deepened, however, in the light of God's self-revelation as the Creator who is beyond all created being or οὐσία, and who alone is οὐσία in the strict sense, for he is the one who really and truly *is* . . . Thus when associated with God's self-revelation in three distinct objective ὑποστάσεις as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, οὐσία signifies the one eternal being of God in the indivisible reality and fullness of his intrinsic personal relations as the Holy Trinity.⁴⁶

The Cappadocian Fathers

If the stress of Athanasius was on the ὁμοούσιος of the three Persons, it remained for the three “Cappadocian Fathers”, Basil the Great (Basil of Caesarea, c. 329–279), his brother Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–395) and Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329–390), to refine the distinction between οὐσία and ὑπόστασις more precisely. This was necessary because the two words could still be used interchangeably and by various heretical groups. Their attempts were not completely successful for they laid themselves open to the charge of “tritheism”.⁴⁷ This was because they (Basil) tended to return to the idea of οὐσία as a generic term at the expense of the more personal concrete understanding of οὐσία taught by Athanasius.⁴⁸

. . . this interpretation of μία οὐσία and τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις had the effect both of shifting the weight of emphasis from identity of being to equality between the Persons, and of transferring the element of concreteness in the doctrine of God almost entirely on to the differentiating particularities of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁴⁹

Gregory of Nazianzus was concerned, too,

about the element of Origenist subordinationism that had cropped up in the Cappadocian doctrine of the Holy Trinity in which he shared with the others in speaking of the Father as “greater” than the Son and the Spirit, while nevertheless trying to do justice to the unity and equality of the divine Persons . . . His answer to the difficulties . . . was that Father, Son and Holy Spirit must be thought of as relations or *στέχεις* eternally and substantially subsisting in God which are strictly beyond all time (*ἀχρόνως*), beyond all origin (*ἀν οὐσίαρχως*) and beyond all cause (*ἀνατίως*) . . . as he understood them the relations between the divine Persons are not just modes of existence but substantial relations which belong intrinsically to what Father, Son and Holy Spirit are in themselves as distinctive hypostatic realities as well as in their reciprocal relations with one another. The relations between them are just as substantial as what they unchangeably are in themselves and by themselves. Thus the father *is* Father precisely in his individual ontic relation to the Son and Spirit, and the Son and the Spirit *are* what they are as Son and Spirit precisely in their indivisible ontic relations to the Father and to one another.

It may well be claimed that Gregory's understanding of the Holy Trinity registered a significant deepening of the Athanasian conception of the divine οὐσία as being considered in its internal relations, for it was cast in a more dynamic form. In the Godhead all subsistent relations are dynamic, mutually interpenetrating, unitary and without opposition in their reference to one another.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Torrance, *Op. cit.* pg. 310f.

⁴⁷ Torrance observes that “when the Cappadocians argued for this doctrine of one Being, three Persons, μία οὐσία, τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις, on the principle that the οὐσία has the same relation to the ὑπόστασις as the common to the particular, they were tempted to account for the oneness and threeness of God through the dangerous analogy of three different people having a common nature. Understandably this laid them rather open to the suspicion of advocating some form of tritheism—three gods with a common nature—which they strongly rejected.” (*Op cit.* p. 237).

⁴⁸ Kelly, *Op. cit.* p. 267 doubts that they did take οὐσία in this way but acknowledges the charge of incipient tritheism.

⁴⁹ Torrance, *Op. cit.* p. 317

⁵⁰ Torrance, *Op. cit.* p. 320, 321.

Study Four

The Trinity and Creation

(by Martin Bleby)

Genesis 1:1–3. God, the Spirit, and the Word. So also Psalm 33:6.

This is not a ‘proof-text’ exercise. The New Testament writers saw deeply into the dynamic of these words. See John 1:1–5; Colossians 1:15–17; Hebrews 1:1–2; 11:3 (N.B. these cannot be separated from John 1:14; Col. 1:18–20; Heb. 1:3–4; the redemptive purpose of glory—see Heb. 2:10). See also I Corinthians 8:6.

Nor are we to divide the unity (‘neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance’—Athanasian Creed). The ‘word’ is of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (See *Bright Bird and Shining Sails*, Geoffrey C. Bingham, p. 8.)

We see this reflected in that which was made: Acts 17:26 ‘from one’. To be one: Genesis 2:18, 21–24. Unity in differentiation—see Ecclesiastes 4:9–11. With a view to the unity of all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10, 22; 5:31–32; I Cor. 15:28; Rev. 21:22).

Not forgetting the Spirit in all of this. John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God*, page 26. Also Christ as the Wisdom of God (N.B. known only through the Cross—I Cor. 1:23–24, 30). So Proverbs 8:22–31. Note Proverbs 3:19–20, Wisdom of Solomon 9:1–2, cf. the unitary view, of God in David Kossoff, *Bible Stories*, page 9.

So to the purpose of the Trinity in Creation. See Geoffrey Bingham, *The Day of the Spirit*, pages 11–14—a helpful setting out of nine elements of the intention of God ‘before the foundation of the world’. Creation is with a view to the new creation.

Genesis 2:2—There is a completeness about the work of creation. God is not ceaseless, restless energy—He accomplishes what He sets out to do. He is also at rest—complete, pure, fulfilled—within the love-dynamism of the Trinity. This is the rest in which the creation will culminate, in which we shall share (Heb. 3:7–4:13), which we anticipate now in the sabbath.

To bring us to that, ‘My Father is working still, and I am working’ (John 5:17; Heb. 1:3; I Cor. 15:25, 27). So is the Holy Spirit (Ps. 104:27–30; Isa. 63:10–14; Rom. 8:26–27, II Cor. 3:18)—in providence, redemption, glorification.

Study Five

Internal Relations of the Trinity

(by Geoffrey Bingham)

THE NATURE OF INTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS

Our two studies in relationships of the Trinity¹ are what we call in extra and ad extra, i.e. internal and external. We speak of God as being subsistent—the ontological Trinity—and being active from Himself—the economic Trinity. If we divide the two we strike confusion. If we think of three Persons each having a centre of consciousness, then we are into Tritheism, and if one centre of consciousness with three modes of being we are into Sabellianism or Modalism. We have then to think of three Persons having one centre of consciousness yet authentic being as three persons. We must think of each Person being ‘other Person/s centred’, and so much so that without coalescing the Persons they are utterly One; which must mean God is love. If we develop ‘other Person/s centred’ into ‘other Person/s concentred’ then we are on the way to understanding the internal relationships of the Trinity.

Jürgen Moltmann in his *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* has given an excellent history of the development of ideas regarding the unity of the Trinity. Under ‘2. The Life of the Trinity’, pp. 171–176 he traces the *hypostatic* union posited by Bothius, who spoke of nature being composed of substance and accident; the *relational* understanding of the unity introduced by Augustine—‘There are three relations in the Trinity; fatherhood, sonship, the breathing of the Spirit (*paternitas, filatio, spiratio*). The inner being of the Persons is moulded by these relationships in accordance with the relational difference.’ He then describes the doctrine of the Trinity of love which has obtained from the time of Augustine to the present, and propounded by Richard of St. Victor that ‘being a person does not merely mean subsisting; nor does it mean subsisting-in-relation. It means *existing*.’ St. Victor says, ‘A divine Person is a non-interchangeable existence of the divine nature’ so that (Moltmann concludes) ‘every divine Person *exists* in the light of the other and in the other. By virtue of the love they have for one another they *exist* totally in the other: the Father *exists* by virtue of his love, as himself entirely in the Son; the Son, by virtue of his self-surrender, *ex-ists* as himself totally in the Father; and so on’. Moltmann shows that Hegel further developed this idea, ‘It is the nature of the person to give himself entirely to a counterpart, and to find himself in the other most of all. The person only comes to himself by expressing and expending himself in others.’ Finally Moltmann describes the nature of the eternal *perichoresis* or *circumincessio* with which we deal in this series.

¹ For this study see Monday Morning Pastors’ Studies 4/6/90, 2/7/90, 6/8/90, 3/9/90 and 3/3/91 which cover the study widely. See also my (as yet unpublished) *The Glory of God and Human Relationships* (1990).

OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE INTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS

As always we can only have true knowledge by revelation, and the only revelation we have is the Scriptures. When we see God we see Him primarily by what He does. These are called His *ad extra* works, but even so He gives us revelations of Himself (e.g. Exod. 34:6–7). We can only know the internal relationships as they are revealed in the Incarnation, i.e. the relationship the Son has—as man—in this world. Jesus’ statement, ‘I am in the Father and the Father in me’ (John 14:10), gives us the key to all true relationships, i.e. mutual indwelling, or, if we may coin a phrase, ‘the mutual inter-dwelling’, i.e. the interpersonal concentratedness. In John 10:38 likewise he said, ‘the Father is in me and I am in the Father.’ This is the equivalent of John 10:30, ‘I and the Father are one.’ The *locus classicus* of indwelling is, of course, John 17:20–23, and we must ponder this fully. Is there, then, a mutual inter-dwelling of the Father and the Spirit, and the Son and the Spirit? The answer to this lies in the fact that the Spirit is always ‘the Spirit of . . .’, i.e. the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Father, the Spirit of the Son, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Jesus, and even the Spirit of holiness, the Spirit of love, and so on.

When we ask what ‘mutual indwelling’ is, then we must answer in terms of personal union—persons in union—but to some extent we are limited in knowing what this is since true, pure love—i.e. Divine love—is the constraint for such union and indeed the very essence of it. We have a partial analogy of it in marriage where the *two* become *one* flesh, one being. All mutual indwelling—or ‘inter-dwelling’—*depends on the wills of the partners*, and their operations depend upon the states of the persons before God. With the Persons of the Trinity unity lies in the concerted will of God.

Knowledge of the Divine Relationships by Their Interserving

Since the three Persons inter-dwell (cf. John 17:20ff.) they naturally do three things which mark all Divine relationships, and should be part of human relationships—they serve one another, glorify one another and give to one another. The source of glory is the Father—‘the father of glory’ (Eph. 1:17), whilst the Son glorifies the Father (John 17:1–5), and the Holy Spirit is ‘the Spirit of glory’ (I Pet. 4:14) and glorifies both Father and Son. This mutual glorification one of the other is the expression of the Divine love. Glorification is simply asserting what is true, and not amplifying it. It is revelation and attestation.

- (a) *For the glorification of the Son by the Father* see John 3:35; 5:26–27; 13:3; 17:2, 5, 6–8, 11–12; Matthew 11:27; II Peter 1:16–19.
- (b) *For the glorification of the Father by the Son* see John 1:14; 11:4, 40; 13:31–32; 14:13; 17:2.
- (c) *For the glorification of the Father and Son by the Spirit* see John 16:14–15, but let us recognize that the work of the Spirit was always in serving the Father and the Son. The Son did nothing but by the Spirit (Matt. 12:28).
- (d) *For the Father and the Son glorifying the Spirit* see the ways in which the Spirit is portrayed as ‘the Lord and giver of life’ (Rom. 8:2; II Cor. 3:6) as the one against whom blasphemy is not forgiven (Matt. 12:31–32; Heb. 10:29). It is wrong to vex the Spirit of God (Isa. 63:10; Eph. 4:30; I Thess. 5:19).

We have said that the relationships of the three Persons are expressed in three elements—their mutual glorification, giving and serving. We note in John 17 that seventeen times the verb ‘to give’ is used, sixteen of them referring to the Father’s giving. Throughout John’s Gospel, Jesus mentions eleven more times things which the Father has given him, such as the Spirit, all things, judgement, authority, the elect sheep, and the cup of death. In Matthew 11:27—the equivalent of John 3:35—all things are delivered to the Son. In Matthew 28:18 all authority is given by the Father to the Son. The Son is not spoken of as giving anything to the Father, but in fact he does what is the will of the Father via the gifts given to him. In that sense he has given everything to the Father. Doubtless the giving of glory to the Father both by the Spirit and the Son is their *form* of giving, as it is also their form of serving.

Study Six

The History of the Trinity—II

(by Ian Pennicook)

We have observed the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, in particular in the East. With the Cappadocian fathers the basic “orthodox” position was finally formulated. That did not mean that the doctrine of the Trinity had reached a fixed form. Attempts to understand the Trinity continued, although it was mainly in the West that the effort was now concentrated.

AUGUSTINE

The chief figure in this was Augustine (345–430). In his major work *The Trinity*, written over a period of twenty years (399–419), he began a detailed work which “gave the Western tradition its mature and final expression”.¹

For the moment we shall follow Kelly’s analysis of Augustine’s thought.² Augustine

accepted without question the truth that there is one God Who is Trinity, and that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are at once distinct and co-essential, numerically one in substance . . . Characteristically, he nowhere attempts to prove it; it is a datum of revelation, which, in his view, Scripture proclaims on almost every page and which “the Catholic Faith” (*fides catholica*) hands on to believers. His immense theological effort is an attempt at comprehension, the supreme example of his principle that faith must precede understanding.³

In contrast with the traditional method of argument, which made the Father, the Fount of the Godhead, its starting point, Augustine commences with God himself, the “essence” which is Trinity.

The unity of the Trinity is thus set squarely in the foreground, subordinationism of every kind being rigorously excluded. Whatever is affirmed of God is affirmed equally of each of the three Persons. Since it is one and the same substance⁴ which constitutes each of Them, not only is the Father not greater than the Son in respect of divinity, but Father and Son together are not greater than the Holy Spirit, and no single Person of the Three is less than the Trinity itself.⁵

From this Augustine argues that

Father, Son and Spirit are not three separate individuals in the same way as three human

¹ Kelly, *op. cit.* p. 271. As we shall see later, others have not been so kind in their evaluation of Augustine’s teaching on the Trinity.

² *Op. cit.* p. 271–279.

³ *Op. cit.* p. 271f.

⁴ Earlier, Kelly explained that Augustine preferred the word “essence” to “substance” “for the latter suggests a subject with attributes, whereas God, for Augustine, is identical with His attributes” (*Op. cit.* p. 272). Cf. D. F. Wright, *Augustine*, “New Dictionary of Theology” Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1988, p. 60.

⁵ Kelly, *Op. cit.* p. 272.

beings who belong to one genus. Rather each of the divine Persons, from the point of view of substance, is identical with the others or with the divine substance itself. In this way God is not correctly described . . . as “threefold” (*triplex*: a word which suggested to Augustine the conjunction of three individuals), but as a Trinity, and the Persons can be said severally to indwell or coinhere with each other.

Secondly, whatever belongs to the divine nature as such should, in strictness of language, be expressed in the singular, since that nature is unique. As the later Athanasian creed, which is Augustinian through and through, puts it, while each of the Persons is increate, infinite, omnipotent, eternal, etc., there are not three increates, infinities, omnipotents, eternals, etc., but one.

Thirdly, the Trinity possesses a single, indivisible action and a single will; Its operation is “inseparable”. In relation to the contingent order the three Persons act as “one principle” (*unum principium*) and “as They are inseparable, so They operate inseparably . . . where there is no difference of natures, there is none of wills either.”⁶

This description seemed to question the particular roles of the three Persons. Augustine’s answer to this was in terms of “appropriation”; this means

that each Person possesses the divine nature in a particular manner, and in the *ad extra* works it is appropriate to attribute to each of the Persons the role which is appropriate to them in virtue of His origin, i.e. whether Father, Son or Holy Spirit. The Persons are identical as regards the divine essence, but have their distinctions as Persons within the mutual relations of the Godhead.⁷

This idea of “relations” being regarded as having a real existence was not difficult to Augustine, since he was well schooled in neo-Platonism. He recognized that the traditional language of “Persons” was necessary, not because he thought it was accurate, but because of the need to affirm the distinction of the Three against Modalism. He insisted that

the formula “three Persons” was employed, not so that that might be said, but so as to avoid having to say nothing at all.⁸

Generally, discussions concerning the Trinity paid more attention to the relationship between the Father and the Son than to the place of the Holy Spirit. We have seen that the original form of the Nicene creed merely stated, “And in the Holy Spirit”. It was not that the Holy Spirit was not regarded as significant; rather it was that most of the discussions had arisen from Christological heresies. Augustine was one who made significant contributions to the subject of the relationship of the Holy Spirit. He was

always puzzled to explain what the procession of the Spirit is, or wherein it differs from the Son’s generation. He was certain, however, that the Spirit is the mutual love of Father and Son . . . the consubstantial bond which unites Them. His consistent teaching, therefore, was that He is the Spirit of both alike; as he put it, “The Holy Spirit is not the Spirit of one of Them but of both . . . Thus in relation to the Holy Spirit the Father and the Son form a single principle: inevitably so, since the relation of both to Him is identical, and where there is no difference of relation Their operation is inseparable. Hence Augustine, more unequivocally than any of the Western fathers before him taught the doctrine of the double procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son (*filioque*).⁹

Augustine thus prepared the way for inclusion of the *filioque* clause into the “Nicene”

⁶ Kelly, *Op. cit.* p. 272f.

⁷ G. C. Bingham, *The Glory of God and Human Relationships*, Unpublished Th.D. thesis, Pacific College of Graduate Studies, 1990, ch. 4.

⁸ Kelly, *Op. cit.* p. 274.

⁹ Kelly, *Op. cit.* p. 275.

creed at the Third Council of Toledo in Spain in 589; it is this inclusion which has been a dividing issue between Eastern and Western churches since the Middle Ages.

It has been suggested that Augustine's most original contribution to Trinitarian theology is his use of analogies, not to prove that God is Trinity but "to deepen our understanding of the mystery of the absolute oneness and yet real distinction of the Three".¹⁰

It has often been assumed that Augustine's principal Trinitarian analogy in the *De trinitate* is that disclosed by his analysis of the idea of love (his starting point is the Johannine dictum that God is love) into the lover (*amans*), the object loved (*quod amatur*), and the love (*amor*) which unites, or strives to unite them. Yet while expounding this analogy, he himself reckons that it affords only an initial step towards our understanding of the Trinity . . . at best a momentary glimpse of it. His discussion of it is quite brief, and forms no more than a transition to what he considers his all-important analogy, based on the inner man, viz. the mind's activity as directed upon itself or, better still, upon God.

From Augustine's teaching, we can distinguish a real shift from the position of Athanasius and the Cappadocians. Geoffrey Bingham has the following valuable observation:

R. W. Jenson (p. 127) observes, ". . . now the 'inseparability' of God's works is identified with the mathematically equal abstract divinity of the triune persons. Creation is undifferentiably the work of the Trinity as one God or whatever person you like. And the 'sender' of each divine mission is the Trinity, or any of the persons, even including the one sent." He contrasts the Cappadocian and Augustinian views. Quoting Augustine (*De trinitate* 5.9)—"Whatever is . . . said of God himself is said at once triply of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and singly of the Trinity itself"—the consequence is that the three persons are not only equally related to the one substance, but are *identically* related, so that the differences between them, that is, the relations, are irrelevant to their being God. But the original trinitarian insight [i.e. the Cappadocian] is that the relations between the identities *are* their being God. When the Nicenes call the Trinity as such God, they so named him *because* of the triune relations and differences; when Augustine calls the Trinity as such God, it is *in spite of* them" (pp. 118–119). In his Essay "The Triune God" (*Church Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 141) Jenson points to the catastrophic outcome of Augustinian trinitarianism, ". . . the work of synthesis between Eastern thought and Western language and need was almost entirely the work of one man, Augustine, one of history's few history-shaping geniuses. Augustine's personal spiritual and intellectual experiences impressed themselves on Western theology in a way unparalleled in Christ's history. In much of theology, this has been a blessing, but it has blighted our trinitarianism, for Augustine's particular religious experience led him to understand the triune character of God as one thing, the history of salvation as another. Thus the trinitarian formulas completely lost their original function."

The insistence by Augustine on the timelessness of God, the corollary of which was that God could not change, has put the eternal generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit as eternal events, whilst the *opere ad extra* are events which are temporal, and have no bearing upon the timelessness of God. Thus the eternal generation of the Son and the "breathing" of the Holy Spirit happen in eternity, whilst the missions of the Son and the Spirit happen only in time. All of this leads in turn to a draining away of the meaning both of Persons and relations. Plantinga's statement regarding the Cappadocian "social" understanding of the Trinity does not apply to the Augustinian and later Western views, "The Cappadocian Fathers . . . fashioned a powerful theory of the Trinity which still reverberates in Eastern Orthodoxy and modern social trinitarianism." Jenson (p. 143) concludes, "That the saving works of God, the whole 'works *ad extra*', are works of the whole Trinity can no longer mean that each work is a joint work of Father, Son and Spirit, in which each identity plays a

¹⁰ Kelly, *Op. cit.* p. 276. The use of analogies is still current, as, e.g. in L. Hodgson, *How can God be both One and Three*, S.P.C.K. London, 1963.

¹¹ *Christian Dogmatics?*

distinct role, but that the saving works are *indifferently* the work of each person and all; the ‘inseparability’ of God’s work is now identified with a mathematically equal abstract divinity of the true persons.”¹²

POST-AUGUSTINE TRINITARIANISM

Geoffrey Bingham¹³ uses the title “Post-Augustine” rather than “Post-Augustinian” because Western Trinitarianism has been basically Augustinian, although elements of his teaching have been elaborated considerably. Boethius (c. 480–524) following Augustine defined *persona* as *persona est naturae rationalis individue substantia*—a person is an individual substance of a rational nature”.¹⁴

John of Damascus (c. 652–c. 750)

... held that God is transcendent in his being and immanent in his grace, i.e. his creative and redeeming acts through which are revealed respectively the divine attributes (eternity, immutability, majesty, etc) and the divine persons (the three *hypostaseis* of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit). Following the doctrine of the Greek fathers and especially of the Cappadocians, he began with the Trinity and moved to the unity of the Godhead which he expounded in terms of communion (*koino—nia*), while always retaining the priority of the Father who begets the Son and projects (*ekporeuein*) the Holy Spirit.¹⁵

John of Damascus’ understanding of “communion” was expressed in terms of

the eternal *περιχωρησιῶν* or *circumincessio* of the Trinitarian Persons . . . the circulatory character of the external divine life. An eternal life process takes place in the triune God through the exchange of energies. The Father exists in the Son, the Son in Father, and both of them in the Spirit, just as the Spirit exists in both the Father and the Son. By virtue of their eternal love they live in one another to such an extent, and dwell in one another to such an extent, that they are one. It is a process of most perfect and intense empathy. Precisely through the personal characteristics that distinguish them from one another, the Father, the Son and the Spirit dwell in one another and communicate eternal life to one another. In the perichoresis, the very thing that divides them becomes that which binds them together. The “circulation” of the eternal divine life becomes perfect through the fellowship and unity of the three Persons in the eternal love.¹⁶

Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173) developed Augustine’s analogy of love, arguing for a social Trinity in which the relationship of the Persons was paradigmatic of human society on earth.¹⁷

The most influential theologian of the Middle Ages was Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). He

accepted Boethius’ definition of *persona* but adds the caution that since all names used of God are used only in the higher sense, so with the names “person” and “hypostasis” for their use is limited by their subject matter. He also approves Richard’s new definition of Person (“an incommunicable existence of the Divine nature”) but disallows the social analogy suggested by him for the Trinity since it proceeds by an analogy with human society, where there can only be joyous possession in good fellowship. Since God has all good in Himself He needs no fellow. Like Augustine, Thomas stressed the incompleteness of every analogy and, like Augustine, used them, but then with care. His Trinitarian thinking accords to a great degree

¹² Bingham, *Op. cit.* ch. 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ G. D. Dragas, *John of Damascus*, “New Dictionary of Theology”, p. 354.

¹⁶ J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, p. 174f.

¹⁷ G. L. Bray, *Trinity*, “New Dictionary of Theology”, p. 693f.

with Augustine. He spoke of three subsistences or persons in God relationally distinguished according to the two movements of generation and procession, each person being identical with the whole divine essence for everything outside that essence is creaturely. We do not need to conclude, Thomas insisted, that the persons are not identical with one another because they are identical with the divine essence, for since one may think of himself so that the thinker and thought may be identical yet they are *relationally* distinct, since one is an active subject and the other a passive object. So it is with the Persons of the Trinity, whilst being of the one essence they are relationally distinct. Of course Thomas was a thinker who in many ways departed from Augustine, but so far as the Trinity was concerned he held to the basic monism of Augustine even though his doctrine is set in scholastic form.¹⁸

THE REFORMERS

“All the magisterial Reformers sat at Augustine’s feet . . . the kernel of Augustinianism was everywhere at the heart of the Protestant gospel.”¹⁹ This was certainly true of their doctrine of the Trinity. Their differences from the Mediaeval expressions lay in their dynamic views of the Godhead. While, to a certain extent, they were creatures of their own age, they rejected the neo-Platonic expressions of the past in their return to the authority of the Scriptures and their view of Christian experience as a basic factor, although it had to be in conformity with Scripture.

Martin Luther’s (1483–546) description of the Trinity, while orthodox in theology, was marked by a worshipful passion:

This article [of God as Trinity] is so far above the power of the human mind to grasp, that God, as the Father of his children, will pardon us when we stammer and lisp as best we can, if only our faith be pure and right. By this term, however, we would say that we believe the divine majesty to be three distinct persons in one essence.

This is the revelation and knowledge Christians have of God: they not only know Him as one true God, who is independent of and over all creatures, and that there can be no more than this one true God, but they know also what this one true God in his essential, inscrutable essence is.²⁰

He continues,

So the Creed confesses three persons as comprehended in one divine essence, each one, however, retaining his distinct personality; and in order that the simple Christian may recognise that there is one divine essence and one God, which is tri-personal, a special work peculiar to himself, is ascribed to each person. And such acts, peculiar to each person are mentioned for the reason that thus a confusion of the persons is avoided. To the Father we ascribe the work of creation; to the Son the work of redemption; to the Holy Spirit the power to forgive sins, to gladden, to strengthen, to transport from death to life eternal.²¹

It is plain that Luther’s primary concern was to bring the truth of the economic Trinity to the “common people”, especially as that truth related to the experience of justification. Geoffrey Bingham describes how “Luther called speculative theology on God’s essence *theologia gloriae* and cared nothing for it.”²²

The major theologian of the Reformation was John Calvin and we have already referred to some of his statements concerning the Trinity. Chapter Thirteen of Book One of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is given over to his exposition of the doctrine.

¹⁸ Bingham, *op. cit.* ch. 4.

¹⁹ D. F. Wright, *Augustinianism*, “New Dictionary of Theology”, p. 62.

²⁰ *Epistle Sermon for Trinity Sunday*, quoted in Bingham, *op. cit.* ch. 4.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

When dealing with the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Calvin said that

The whole fifth book of Augustine *On the Trinity* is concerned with explaining this matter. Indeed, it is far safer to stop with that relation which Augustine sets forth than, by too subtly penetrating into the sublime mystery, to wander through many evanescent²³ speculations.²⁴

François Wendel comments that

... in Calvin's eyes, to admit the unity at the same time as the trinity of God involved important consequences for the Person of Christ as well as for the faith of his followers. The essence of God is one; and since this essence has been revealed in the flesh, it is therefore the entire divinity who gave himself to us in the person of Christ. "We must conclude, then, that the essence of God is common to the Son and the Spirit in its entirety. But if that be true one cannot, in regard to the same, distinguish the Father from the Son, seeing that they are but one." On the other hand, seeing that his divinity is identical with the God of the Old Testament, we can apply the name of Yahveh to the Christ, and attribute to him all that said about Yahveh in the books of the Old Covenant. And as for the believers, it follows from the unity of the divine essence and its indivisibility that they, being now one with Christ, receive the divinity in his plenitude, so that "the believing soul recognizes the presence of God indubitably and, as one may say, touches him with his hand".

The unity of the divine essence so strongly insisted upon by Calvin does not, however, in the least detract from the real distinction that must be made between the Three persons of the Trinity.²⁵

G. L. Bray takes up the point of "important consequences for the Person of Christ" by adding,

At the Reformation, the traditional Western doctrine was reaffirmed, but John Calvin began a new development of thought in the work of the different persons. The Cappadocians had stated that the works of the Trinity outside the Godhead (*ad extra*) were undivided, i.e. the God who created the world was the Trinity. But Calvin, following Anselm, who had stressed the fact that the atonement was a work of God inside the Trinity (*ad intra*), said that Christians are admitted, through the Holy Spirit, to participation in the inner life of the Godhead. We are sons of God, not as Christ was, by nature, but by the grace of adoption. As a result of this, the Reformed tradition witnessed an explosion of works dealing with the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, in a depth which had previously been unknown.²⁶

THE MODERN PERIOD

Although the doctrine of the Trinity had always had its opponents, even when such opposition was highly dangerous, it was the eighteenth century which saw a revival of anti-orthodox views (i.e. anti-"Nicene"/Augustinian). Louis Berkhof summarizes the issues of the eighteenth century thus:

In England Samuel Clarke, court preacher to Queen Anne, published a work on the Trinity in 1712, in which he approached the Arian view of subordination. He speaks of the Father as the supreme and only God, the sole origin of all being, power, and authority. Alongside him there existed from the beginning a second divine Person called the Son, who derives His being and all His attributes from the Father, *not by a mere necessity of nature, but by an act of the Father's optional will*. He refuses to commit himself on the question, whether the Son was

²³ *Evanescens*: quickly fading, infinitesimal (C.O.D)

²⁴ *Institutes*, Vol. 1, p. 144.

²⁵ *Calvin*, Fontana, London, 1963, p. 167f

²⁶ *Op. cit.* p. 694.

begotten from the essence of the Father, or was made out of nothing; and whether He existed from all eternity or only before all worlds. Alongside of these two there is a third person, who derives His essence from the Father through the Son. He is subordinate to the Son both by nature and by the will of the Father.

Some of the New England theologians criticized the doctrine of eternal generation. Emmons even called it eternal nonsense and Moses Stuart declared that the expression was a palpable contradiction of language, and that their most distinguished theologians, for forty years past, had declared against it. He himself disliked it, because he regarded it as contrary to the proper equality of the Father and the Son. The following words seem to express his view: “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are words which designate the distinctions of the Godhead as manifested to us in the economy of redemption, and are not intended to mark the eternal relations of the Godhead as they are in themselves.”²⁷

It was against the background of a general rise in “unitarian” thinking that these opinions were expressed. The denial of the “essential” (ontological) Trinity as in Moses Stuart seems reproduced in the work of Hendrikus Berkhof (b. 1914). He discusses the Trinity under the heading of “The Covenant as Tri-u-nity”, and says,

Contrary to common dogmatic practice we did not use the concept “triune” or “trinity” when we considered the being and attributes of God. As we see it, when we discuss God as the source of everything . . . there is no reason to ascribe to him something like triuneness. . . . the classical doctrine of God as “three persons in one essence” . . . has saddled us with problems that are foreign to Scripture and indigestible to the believing mind . . . So the combination of the three names of Father–Son–Spirit, or with equal validity, of Father–Spirit–Son proves to be the summarizing description of the covenantal event, both as to its historical and its existential aspect. The Father is the divine partner, the Son the human representative, the Spirit the bond between them and therefore the bond between the Son and the sons whom he draws to the Father. Can we say then that we have here “one essence in three persons”? No, there is here *one* event that happens from God, thus an event that is performed by the Spirit, one which occurs primarily between two persons, God and Jesus, but in which all the time new persons are being involved.²⁸ May we then not call the Spirit a person? No, if thereby we put him separately beside the person of God. Yes, if we understand that this name expresses the personhood of God in its outward actions. The Spirit is precisely God-as-person, God-in-relation.

. . . The trinitarian event arises from the very nature (essence) of God and leads to it. In that sense the Trinity is natural (essential) for God. It describes how God, according to his eternal purpose, extends and carries on in time his own life so as to share it with man. The Trinity is thus not a description of an abstract God-in-himself, but of the revealed God-with-us.²⁹

He adds, in an extended note:

A customary distinction in the doctrine of the Trinity is that between the immanent or ontological Trinity and the economic or revelational Trinity. Though this distinction is based on a conception of the Trinity which we reject, we use it wherever it is helpful to clarify points of view.³⁰

It becomes plain that many modern authors are at one with this principle of using

²⁷ *The History of Christian Doctrines*, Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1969, p. 96f. Emphasis his.

²⁸ Moltmann observes that Berkhof is here very close to his own doctrine of “the Open Trinity” which he himself espouses; *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, p. 242.

²⁹ *Christian Faith, An Introduction to the Study of the Faith*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979, p. 330ff. Commenting on II Cor. 3:18, Berkhof makes the enigmatic suggestion that “the risen Jesus is Lord in his transcendence and Spirit in ‘a special *modus existendi*, the mode of immanence, in which he nevertheless does not cease to be remain transcendent as the exalted Lord’ ” (*The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1964, p. 28f.)

³⁰ *Op. cit.* p. 332.

the orthodox terminology while having other than orthodox views of the $\mu\iota\alpha\ \sigma\upsilon\varsigma\tau\iota\alpha\alpha$ and $\tau\rho\epsilon\iota\ \upsilon\ \nu\upsilon\pi\omicron\sigma\tau\alpha\alpha\sigma\epsilon\iota\ \upsilon$.

Karl Barth

Berkhof regards the Trinity as arising out of the event of revelation, which itself arises out of the essence of God. Karl Barth (1886–1968) regarded revelation as the key, not to the economy of the Trinity, but to the knowledge of the Trinity. A knowledge of the Word of God means, inescapably, a knowledge of the Trinity.

Geoffrey Bingham quotes G. W. Bromily to the effect that

Since God occurs at all stages as subject, act and effect, we are led to the triune God as the controlling factor in revelation. A true doctrine of revelation cannot be obtained in abstraction from the doctrine of the Trinity.³¹

Elsewhere, Bromily describes Barth's treatment of the Triune God:

The Word is God Himself in His self-revelation. But the God thus self-revealed is the triune God. Hence the primary theme of Christian dogmatics is the doctrine of the Trinity to which there correspond the three aspects of revelation as revealer, thing revealed and act of revelation. The doctrine of the Trinity must be placed thus early in dogmatics because the all-important question is who is the self-revealing God. God's sovereign self-revelation is what Barth calls the root of the doctrine.³²

Barth himself says:

Apart from the indicated way by which we have reached it, two mutually related historical facts strengthen us in this conviction that discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity belongs directly to the discussion of revelation. The older Protestant orthodox, whether or not they knew what they were saying, could not emphasise enough the character of the Trinity as a mystery or indeed as *the* mystery of the faith . . . For this reason, in harmony with the fathers and mediaeval Schoolmen, they never spoke so impressively as here about the need for revelation as the only source of the knowledge of this mystery that governs all mysteries. And this fits in exactly with the aversion that Modernist Protestantism has had for this very doctrine from the days of Servetus and other anti-Trinitarians of the age of the Reformation. As Scleiermacher very rightly saw and stated, it is distinguished from all other Christian studies by the fact that it cannot be made comprehensible as the immediate utterance of Christian self-consciousness.³³

With this in mind, Barth rejected the use of analogies and the so-called *Vestigium Trinitatis*, an expression which

. . . seems to come from Augustine and it means an analogue of the Trinity, of the trinitarian God of Christian revelation, in some creaturely reality distinct from Him, a creaturely reality which is not a form assumed by God in His revelation, but which quite apart from God's revelation manifests in its own structure by creation a certain similarity to the structure of the trinitarian concept of God, so that it may be regarded as an image of the trinitarian God Himself.³⁴

He does not deny that there are *vestigia trinitatis*; he only asks "of which trinity?"³⁵ As

³¹ *Op. cit.* ch. 4.

³² Karl Barth, in *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology*, Ed. P. E. Hughes, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1966, p. 33.

³³ *C.D. I, i.* T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1975, p. 303f.

³⁴ *Op. cit.* p. 334.

³⁵ *Op. cit.* p. 343.

Hartwell says:

In his [i.e. Barth's] opinion the real *vestigia trinitatis* are to be found in the worldly forms of the revealed, written and proclaimed Word of God and thus in the creaturely forms which God Himself has assumed in His revelation.³⁶

Barth prefers the phrase “modes of being” to the traditional “Person” in describing the three *υποστασεις*. He does this because “Person” is too often equated with the modern notion of “personality”, which may imply tritheism.³⁷ He says:

“Mode (or way) of being” (*Seinsweise*) is the literal translation of the concept *τροποῦ ὑποαρχεωῦ* or *modus entitativus* . . . But the word *υποαστασι* understood in the sense in which, after initial hesitation and in the face of the permanent doubts of the West, the Eastern Church finally accepted in place of *προσωπον*, means *subsistentia* (not *substantia*), i.e. the mode of existence or mode of being of an existent. It is perhaps in this sense that Heb. 1:3 already called the Son *χαρακτηρ τῆ ὑποστασεω θεου*, i.e. in his mode of being an “impress” or countertype of the mode of being of God the “Father”.³⁸

Lest this use of “modes of being” appear as “modalism”, Barth proceeds immediately to define what he means:

What we have here are God's specific, different, and always very distinctive modes of being. This means that God's modes of being are not to be exchanged or confounded. In all three modes of being God is the one God both in Himself and in relation to the world and man. But this one God is God three times in different ways, so different that it is only in this threefold difference that He is God, so different that this difference, this being in these three modes of being, is absolutely essential to Him, so different, then, that this difference is irremovable. Nor can there be any possibility that one of the modes of being might just as well be the other, e.g. that the Father might just as well be the Son or the Son the Spirit, not that two of them or all three might coalesce and dissolve into one. In this case the modes of being would not be essential to the divine being. Because the threeness is grounded in the one essence of the revealed God; because in denying the threeness in the unity of God we should be referring at once to another God than the God revealed in Holy Scripture—for this very reason this threeness must be regarded as irremovable and the distinctiveness of the three modes of being must be regarded as ineffaceable.³⁹

The Social Trinity

The mediaeval picture of *περιχωρησι* mentioned above has become an apparent basis for what has been called “The Social Trinity”.⁴⁰ This approach to the subject has arisen partly as a reaction against what Moltmann (b. 1926) describes as “The Trinity of Supreme Substance” and “The Trinity as Absolute Subject”.⁴¹ The former he describes as rising from an overemphasis on the cosmological speculation about God as the supreme essence, with its danger (often very real) of relegating the Trinity to a backwater in the treatment of the one God and so leads to the “disintegration of the doctrine of the Trinity in abstract monotheism.”⁴² The latter is, possibly, best represented, in this context, by the theology of Karl Barth. Moltmann regards the

³⁶ Herbert Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction*, Duckworth, London, 1964, p. 74.

³⁷ *Op. cit.* p. 351, 355–358.

³⁸ *Op. cit.* p. 360.

³⁹ *Op. cit.* p. 360f.

⁴⁰ Geoffrey Bingham, *op. cit.* has an extended discussion of this in ch. 4.

⁴¹ See *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, pp. 10–16; cf. J. Mackey, *The Christian Experience of God as Trinity*, S.C.M. London, 1983, p. 203.

⁴² Moltmann, *op. cit.* p. 17.

problem with this approach this way:

To represent the trinitarian Persons in the one, identical divine subject leads unintentionally but inescapably to the reduction of the doctrine of the Trinity to monotheism.⁴³

Moltmann's approach to the study of the Trinity can be summed up by referring to the Preface of his *Trinity and the Kingdom of God* where he describes a fifteenth century Russian icon depicting the Trinity:

Through their tenderly intimate inclination towards one another, the three Persons show the profound unity joining them, in which they are one. The chalice on the table points to the surrender of the Son on Golgotha. Just as the chalice stands at the centre of the table round which the three persons are sitting, *so the cross of the Son stands from eternity in the centre of the Trinity.*⁴⁴

Moltmann's conclusion to his examination of

'the Passion of God' with the insistence that God's passionate involvement with the world implies a self-differentiation in God himself.⁴⁵

In the earlier work, *The Crucified God*, Moltmann said:

The 'mystical theology of the Eastern church', unrestricted by the doctrine of the two natures by which God and man are distinguished, could go further . . . and say: 'The kenosis . . . (and) the work of the incarnate Son (is) the work of the entire most holy Trinity, from which Christ cannot be separated'. But if the kenosis of the Son to the point of death upon the Cross is the 'revelation of the entire Trinity', this event too can only be presented as a God-event in trinitarian terms. What happens on the cross manifests the relationships of Jesus, the Son, to the Father, and vice versa. The cross and its liberating effect makes possible the movement of the Spirit from the Father to us. The cross stands at the heart of the trinitarian being of God; it divides and conjoins the persons in their relationships to each other and portrays them in a specific way. For . . . the theological dimension of the death of Jesus on the cross is what happens between Jesus and his Father in the spirit of abandonment and surrender. In these relationships the person of Jesus comes to the fore in its totality as the Son, and the relationship of the Godhead and the manhood in his person fall into the background. Anyone who really talks of the Trinity talks of the cross of Jesus, and does not speculate in heavenly riddles.⁴⁶

These relationships between Father and Son are that **περιχωρησιῶν** which we mentioned when discussing John of Damascus earlier. This **περιχωρησιῶν** is the flow of love which we encounter in the great event of the cross.

. . . the First Epistle of John (4.16) defines God by saying 'God is love'. It is not just that God loves, in the same way that he is sometimes angry. He *is* love. His very existence is love. He constitutes himself as love. That is what happens on the cross. This definition only acquires its full force when we continually make the way that leads to the definition clear to ourselves: Jesus' forsakenness on the cross, the surrender of the Son by the Father and the love which does everything—gives everything—suffers everything—for lost men and women. God is love. That means that God is self-giving. It means he exists for us: on the cross. To put it in trinitarian terms—The Father lets his Son sacrifice himself through the Spirit. The Father is crucifying love, the Son is crucified love, and the Holy Spirit is the unvanquishable power of the cross. The cross is at the centre of the Trinity. This brought out by tradition, when it takes up the Book of the Revelation's image of 'the Lamb who was slain from the

⁴³ *Op. cit.* p. 18.

⁴⁴ P. xvi (emphasis mine). Cf. Moltmann's *The Crucified God*, S.C.M. London, 1974, p. 237f., where he says, "One does not 'philosophize' speculatively about the mysteries of the Trinity, as Melancthon put it, but stands before the question how God is to be understood in the event of the Cross of Christ."

⁴⁵ Mackay, *op. cit.* p. 205.

⁴⁶ P. 206f.

foundation of the world' (Rev. 5.12). Before the world was, the sacrifice was already in God. No Trinity is conceivable without the Lamb, without the sacrifice of love, without the crucified Son. For he is the slaughtered Lamb glorified in eternity.⁴⁷

Moltmann's perception of the cross as a work *ad intra* leads to the point that salvation brings us into a "participation in the divine nature" (II Pet. 1:4). Richard Bauckham summarizes it this way:

The Trinity is therefore a dialectical historical process which, by means of the Son's identification with all godlessness, godforsakenness and the nothingness in which transitory being ends, takes up into itself all human history in its negativity: "this history of God [the trinitarian event of the cross] contains within itself the whole abyss of godforsakenness, absolute death and the non-God" (CG 246). But this also means that, through the Spirit of the resurrection and the new creation, all nothingness is done away with in this history of God and history opened to its new, eschatological future (CG 218). In this sense, the "history of God", which is the event of the cross, is not an event within the history of the world but contains all the history of the world (CG 246). And since this "history of God" is the innertrinitarian life of God, this means that the salvation of the world consists in its being taken into the divine life within which it is reconciled and transformed.⁴⁸

There is thus another possible meaning to the title of these studies than simply "The History of the Doctrine of the Trinity"; it is Moltmann's meaning that God is in himself what he is in the event of the cross.

This is what it means for Moltmann to identify the immanent and the economic Trinities: God's trinitarian history for us makes him what he is for himself. There is no immanent Trinity supra-temporally "behind" God's temporal, worldly history, so that he would be who he is independently of this history. This history is who he is.⁴⁹

(There is one element of this understanding of "the social Trinity" which does not seem to have been given the prominence that it needs. It is this: in the rigorous attempts to avoid what was called "subordinationism", the notion of "a hierarchy of equals" has been almost completely overlooked. By this I mean that the Father, the Son and the Spirit, though equal as regards the *ουσιαια*, each have distinct roles, by which the Son is submissive to the Father, and the Spirit is submissive to Father and Son, without any idea of superiority or inferiority ever being present.)

CONCLUSION

Leonard Hodgson reminds us that "Christianity was a trinitarian religion before it had a trinitarian theology".⁵⁰ We have traced, superficially, the way our understanding of God as Trinity has developed through the centuries. As we have seen in our last section, the development is hardly completed. Nor should this surprise us. Paul said

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. (I Cor. 13:12).

No doubt we may read this to mean that as the Word was *προ;ὸ το;ν θεο;ν*, face to face with God (John 1:2), so we will see *προ;σωπον προ;ὸ προ;σωπον*, face to face, caught up into the glory of the liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:21) which Bruno Forte

⁴⁷ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, p. 82f.

⁴⁸ R. Bauckham, *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making*, Marshall-Pickering, Basingstoke, 1987, p. 99.

⁴⁹ R. Bauckham, *op. cit.* p. 100.

⁵⁰ *Op. cit.* p. 17.

calls our “return to the trinitarian homeland”.⁵¹

Until then, our concern must not be simply to understand the doctrine of the Trinity. Rather, echoing Anselm’s *fides quaerens intellectum*, we must first be men and women caught up in rich worship of the triune God *in* the triune God. As Hodgson noted:

Until our life and worship are trinitarian, the theological doctrine of the Trinity will be for our minds a mathematical monstrosity, for our worship a kind of diagrammatic triangle in the sky.⁵²

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⁵¹ The Trinity as History, Alba House, New York, 1989, pp. 5–7, 221–28.

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Study Seven

The Dynamics of Divine & Human Perichoresis—II

(by Deane Meatheringham)

INTRODUCTION

The Divine *perichoresis-circumincessio* has to do with the ceaseless, vital Presence to each Person of the Godhead in their inter-penetration of each other. This is the dynamic circulation of love and life from each Person to the other in the Divine Communion.

In this study we are concerned with the reality and practice of *perichoresis* in human relationships.

THE INCARNATION—GOD WITH US

Out of his great love God sent his Son, who, through the Holy Spirit, becomes man (I John 4:10; John 3:16; Gal. 4:4; Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:20–25).

God became bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh (John 1:14; Phil. 2:6f.; Heb. 2:10–18). God comes in union with us so that he is directly present and active in Man. Jesus Christ assumes our condition and lives in the servility of our fallenness (Matt. 3:15ff.).

On our behalf Jesus obeys the Father, worships the Father, and offers himself to the Father, and all this through the power of the Holy Spirit (John 5:19f., 30; Matt. 3:16, 17; 12:28; Heb. 2:8; 9:14).

The incarnation is soteriological. God the Son came in complete somatic solidarity with the sinful, diseased, perverted and degenerate humanity, On our behalf and in our place he made atonement for sin by obediently bearing our judgement in the Cross (II Cor. 5:21; Rom. 8:3; Gal. 3:13; I Pet. 2:24; Mark 10:45). When Christ died we were intimately found with him in his death, and when he was raised we were raised as the new humanity in him (Rom. 6:1ff.; Gal. 2:20; II Cor. 5:14f.).

Reconciliation between God and man took place within the Godhead. The incarnation is within the reality of the Godhead himself. As the incarnate eternal Son, Jesus Christ our brother reconciles God and man in his atoning death. As our representative and mediator he brings us into the intimate presence of the Father (Heb. 2:17; 4:14f.; 6:19–20; 9:24; 10:19–22; I Tim. 2:5f.). Jesus is the *self-giving* and *self-communicating* God to us, and as Head of the race he offers himself to God on our behalf. ‘In making himself one with us he both took what is ours and imparted to us what is his’ (Tom Torrance). See II Corinthians 5:21; Romans 5:18; I Corinthians 1:30.

IN CHRIST WE PARTICIPATE IN THE GODHEAD

God sends the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying, ‘Abba Father’ (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:14–17). By the Spirit we are all baptized into Christ’s humanity and Sonship (I Cor. 12:12f.; Gal. 3:26ff.). In Christ we all have access in one Spirit to the Father (Eph. 2:18), giving us the same intimacy with the Father as that enjoyed by the Son. *The point we are making is that the Triune Godhead dwells in us, and we in the Godhead* (John 14:17–24; Col. 3:3).

The Christian life is one *in* Christ, but it is also *in* the Holy Spirit and *in* the Father (II Cor. 13:14). It is a life of inter-penetration, a life of communion (I Cor. 10:16f.; Matt. 26:26ff.; II Pet. 1:4).

THE *Perichoretic* FAMILY

The Church is constantly constituted in the *perichoretic* life of the Godhead as she emerges out of the co-occurrence and convergence of the relationships which she has with the Father through the Spirit and the Son. She is in the Father, as she is in the Son and in the Spirit (I Thess. 1:1; II Thess. I:1; Rom. 8:9–11).

Our personhood is realized in the reciprocity of being partakers in the family in God (John 17:20–26). It is not realized as an individual, but in relationship with others, in a relational unity of inner-animation (Eph. 2:14ff.; Acts 2:44ff.; 4:32ff.; Rom. 12:4ff.). Individualism can be seen for what it is in Karl Barth’s criticism of Nietzsche ‘the prophet of that humanity without the fellow man . . . the man who is utterly inaccessible to others, having no friends and despising women . . .’

The circuit of *perichoresis* is realized in the con-centredness of love. We are commanded to love. This love is not our human reciprocal love to God and others, but the love which first comes from him and circulates to God and others (Rom. 5:5–8; I John 4:10; 4:7, 19; II Cor. 5:15f.). Thus, while we do love, it is in fact the love which flows from our abiding in God’s love.

Add to this the ministry effected through the gifts. The gifts of the Spirit are given to Christ’s body by Christ himself (Eph. 4:1ff.). These are the means for the praxis of relationships in love, given for the common good, and the building up of the whole community. But the gifts are the actions of Christ himself, present with his people (I Cor. 12–14; Heb. 2:4).

Order (*taxis*) in the family is not an abstract, ecclesiastically impersonal principle if lived in the inner-animation of the Godhead. Eldership, headship, leadership, subordination, obedience and discipline in the church do not entail an inferiority or superiority of personhood in the *perichoretic* family. In the Divine Trinity the Son has always done the will of the Father, and the Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son, but there is no hint of superiority or inferiority because it is a hierarchy of inter-penetrating love. Elders, then, are not apart or separate from the flock, but all are knit together in love (Eph. 4:11–16; cf. Col. 3:14). It is those who are over us *in the Lord* that we are to respect, and the shepherds who are to attend the flock will be partakers of the future glory.

What we have said of the inter-relationships of the Persons of the Trinity now flows into and from the communion of saints who have one centre of consciousness. They both receive and give to one another. Geoffrey Bingham categorizes the circuit of *perichoresis* into four elements:

- (a) Asking (Matt. 6:8; 7:7–11; Luke 11:13; James 1:5; John 11:22; 14:14; 16:24, 26).
- (b) Receiving (I Cor. 4:7; John 3:27; 6:65; 19:11; Rev. 13:5).
- (c) Giving (Matt. 5:42; Luke 6:38; II Cor. 8:9; John 17).
- (d) Thanksgiving (Eph. 5:4, 20; Phil. 4:6; Col. 2:7; 4:2; I Thess. 3:9; I Tim. 2:1; 4:3–4).

THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH TO THE WORLD

The ministry comes by the constraint of Christ's love (II Cor. 5:14f.), flooded into the heart by the Spirit (Rom. 5:5), which is God's saving love (Rom. 5:6–8). so that by the Spirit we participate in Christ's glorified humanity, going with him to the world, knowing nothing but him and him crucified. This preaching of the Cross avoids making a dualism between the Father and the Son, for the preacher will know that God is who we proclaim him to be in the Cross of Christ, and not some dark arbitrary Deity behind the back of Jesus Christ.

Being the Body of Christ which partakes in the Divine nature, the church cannot but be involved in the life and politics of society. But the church of the Trinity is not to be one more secular player seeking to wield power. All political systems tend to become either a collectivistic monolith with an elite or solitary divinized leadership, or an anarchist rabble of individual gods. Therefore the church's greatest contribution is to simply be the church—the church of the Trinity where the unlimited and eternal love of Three Persons in 'ec-static self-giving to one another' is primary for our understanding of personhood and community.

External Relations of the Trinity

(by Geoffrey Bingham)

RELATIONSHIPS AND WORK ARE IN HIERARCHY

Hierarchy is a term that is generally unpopular. This is primarily because it represents gradations of authority, superordination and subordination—elements which are disliked, and because humanism and current democratization seek to level out all humanity. Hierarchy is misunderstood¹ and this is most unfortunate. It is misunderstood because in the thinking of many is the idea that subordination predicates inferiority and superordination, superiority. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus taught the one who would be greatest should serve, and said he was amongst them as one who serves.

We need to see that hierarchy is functional to true Divine and human action, and that hierarchy is essentially a re-lational love structure. Let us first look at a Divinehuman hierarchy, namely I Corinthians 11:3 where God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of the man (husband) and the man the head of the woman (wife). Since all Members of the Godhead inter-dwell one another, then whilst the Father is the head of Christ he is also *in* Christ, and Christ is *in* Him. Christ is head of the man but is *in* him and the man is *in* Christ—as the New Testament strongly affirms. The man is the head of the woman but is *in* her and she is *in* him. In the entire hierarchy there is an intimate relational unity: it is a love unity. The woman is *in* the man, Christ and *in* God—and so on. Of course, none of this makes full sense without an understanding of the Divine *perichoresis*, from which issues the Divinehuman *perichoresis*, and the fact that all true hierarchy exists in *communion*, i.e. the *communion* of love.

Commenting on John 14:28 ‘the Father is greater than I’, C. K. Barrett says, ‘The Father is *fons divinitatis* in which the being of the Son has its source; the Father is sending and commanding, the Son is God sent and obedient’ (quoted in G. R. Beasley-Murray *John*, p. 262). Many older and modern theologians speak of Christ’s subordination as incarnate, but not as Son. This would be difficult to uphold since the Son was commanded prior to, and for, the Incarnation. Raymond Brown (*John*, p. 655) commenting on John 14:28 says, ‘the key probably lies in a similar statement made in xiii:16: “No messenger is more important than the one who sent him.”’² This is not the place to press the fact of the eternal generation of the Son, and procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son, or ‘from the Father through the Son’ as our Eastern Orthodox brethren prefer it. If we did press this matter then we would see that ‘I and the Father are one’ discounts any superiority–inferiority relationship, even in the face of

¹ See *The Matter of Hierarchy—Functional and Relational*, Pastors Group Study for 6th August 1990.

² See Appendix I of my thesis *The Glory of God and Human Relationships* on ‘Superordination and Subordination’.

superordination and subordination.

What we are saying is that the Triune Godhead in its external works (*ad extra*) operates in the relational love-hierarchy in order to create, sustain creation, bring covenant, effect redemption, and bring to pass the final regeneration and glorification of all creation—matters we are at present studying in our sessions. All of these external works are wrought from the internal relations of the Godhead, and are indeed the expression of that eternal love, holiness, righteousness, goodness and truth.

THE GODHEAD ALWAYS WORKING

‘Before the foundation of the world’, ‘before the world began’, and ‘before times eternal’ are terms found in the Scriptures, generally referring to God’s planning for creation, salvation history and the *eschaton-telos*. Ephesians 1:3–14 is apt for this point. John 5:17 could be paraphrased, ‘My Father has always been working and I have always worked with him, and I am doing so now.’ Psalm 40:6–8 is quoted of Jesus in Hebrews 10:5–9. John 17:1–5 catches up the pre-creation plan of the Father for—and with—the Son, i.e. the salvation of the elect. Our present studies show us the Trinitarian nature of all the works. All works are Pateriological, Filial and Pneumato-logical. Such works guarantee the ontological and teleological nature of creation. Only by God’s working are all things explained. We will now seek to see the relationships the Father and the Son had in the outward works, always remembering that the Father commanded the Son prior to his incarnation, i.e. when he was in the full glory (cf. John 17:1–5, 24; Phil. 2:5–9).

The Father’s Superordination in Regard to the Son

- (a) The Father commanded the Son to come into the world. Over 40 times in John’s Gospel Jesus uses the verb for being sent—by the Father.
- (b) Jesus spoke of the Father giving him commands (John 10:18; 12:49; 14:31) and said, ‘. . . I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.’ In John 12:50 he said, ‘I know that his commandment is eternal life.’
- (c) The Father took the initiative in the Incarnation and the Atonement (Rom. 3:24–25; II Cor. 5:21; I John 4:9–10, 13). The Son was commanded to do these things.

Christ’s Willing Subordination in Regard to the Father

- (a) Christ was under the Father’s authority (see above, and also John 5:19–20; 8:28; 14:10).
- (b) The Father gave the Son authority (Matt. 11:27; John 3:35; 5:22ff.; 10:27–30; Matt. 28:18; see also Matt. 3:17; Ps. 2:6–7; Isa. 42:1; Rev. 2:27; 3:21f.).
- (iii) The Son learned obedience (Heb. 5:9–10; cf. 2:10) and was obedient (John 9:4; 10:17; 14:30–31; Phil. 2:8).
- (iv) He rejoiced in the Father’s will (Matt. 11:25–26; Heb. 10:7; Ps. 40:8; John 4:34).
- (v) He said many times that he had kept the Father’s will. See John 15:10, ‘I have kept my Father’s commandments.’

THE EFFECTS OF THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS OF THE TRIUNE GODHEAD ON THE ELECT

What we have seen—though ever so briefly—is the Triune Godhead in its social and familial subsistence and its external workings. Man being in the image of God must reflect these relationships and workings. He is part of the Divine–human hierarchy, and the Divine–human plan for history and especially its glorious *telos*. We have seen the *union* of all members of the Godhead but the true word is *communion*. It is in *communion* that the Godhead is One, and it is in *communion* that we are one with the Godhead, and one with one another. In further studies we will see how this refers to worship and service, as we have just seen how it refers to obedience and submission. From Philippians 2:5–9 (cf. Rom. 15:1–3, 7ff.). We are looking to see how the Godhead effects unity and true relationships. A study of our indwelling the persons of the Godhead, and they indwelling us, of our having fellowship with the Father and with His Son, of our lives being hid with Christ in God, and of our participating in the Divine nature, all tell us we are within the internal relationships, and therefore will work out the external working relationships of the Triune God. All of this is, of course, in the state of *communion*.

The Trinity in the Epistle to the Hebrews

(by Noel Due)

A topic such as this could be examined in a couple of different ways. One way could be to list and exegete those verses which speak of, or imply, the divinity of the Son and the Spirit, thus producing an apologetic for the doctrine of the Trinity in Hebrews. But such an approach would only restate much of what has already been given in many commentaries where the ‘high Christology’ of the Book has been examined. Rather than this I have assumed such a theological basis and attempted to provide some analysis of the actions and interrelationships of the Trinity as seen in the Book.

THE ACTION OF THE FATHER IN THE BOOK

1. God (the Father) speaks through the Son (1:1–3).
 - (a) The Son is heir of all things (cf. *prototokos* in 1:6). Note the implicit teleological nature of the title.
 - (b) The Son is the mediator of creation, bringing the *aionas* into being.
 - (c) The Son is the outshining (*apaugasma*) of the glory of God.
 - (d) The Son is the exact representation of God (*charaktér*).In the Son we see the actions of the Father, and hear His voice.
2. The Father is bringing all enemies to the feet of the Son (1:13; 10:11ff.) that indeed he (the Son) might be the heir of all things. He (God) has purposed that the world to come would be subject to Man, but only in and through Jesus (2:5ff.).
3. He sets forth Jesus by His grace to taste death for all men (2:9).
4. He perfects the Son as the saviour of His people (2:10; 5:9; 7:28).
5. Through the Son He is intent on bringing many sons to glory (2:10).
6. He appoints (cf. 1:2; 3:2; 5:1; 7:28; 8:3) Jesus both as Apostle and High Priest (3:1; cf. 5:1–6), such a High Priest being no less than the Son made perfect for ever. This is the confirmation of the word of God’s oath (7:28). His Priesthood is eternal—of the order of Melchizedek—by the designation of God (5:10).
7. He causes us (by His will) to be sanctified through the offering of the Son (10:10).
8. As the true Father He disciplines His (true) sons that we might share His holiness (12:9ff.).

9. The Father raised up the Son through the blood of the eternal covenant (13:20).
10. He works in us that which is pleasing in His sight through the Son (13:21).

THE ACTION OF THE SON IN THE BOOK

1. The Son makes purification for sins (1:3) by offering himself to God (9:14; 7:27; 10:10) as a perfect sacrifice.
2. The Son rules (1:8f.)—he sits at the right hand of God (1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2)—such rule having been given to him from the Father.
3. He sanctifies his people (2:11), thus causing him not to be ashamed of calling them brethren.
4. The Son proclaims the name of the Father to his brethren (2:12f.).
5. He is faithful to the one who has appointed him (3:2). Moreover he is faithful as a Son (3:6).
6. His ministry as God's High Priest (which is the ministry of the Son, 5:5):
 - (a) He is a merciful and faithful High Priest who makes atonement for the sins of the people (2:17).
 - (b) He has taken the position of all authority in his Priesthood (4:14), yet he is able to sympathize with our weaknesses (4:15). It is on the basis of his Priesthood that we have confidence to approach the throne of grace (4:16), which is to enter the rest of God.
 - (c) He represents us in relationship to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins (5:1) and this in an eternal matter—he being a perpetual Priest of Melchizedek's order (5:10; 6:20; 7:3, 5, 11; 15–24).
 - (d) His Priesthood brings sacrifice to perfection (7:11; cf. 9:11, 25; 10:11f.) for he, as High Priest, has offered himself (7:26–27). We are thus perfected (10:14, 1ff.).
 - (e) As the appointed High Priest the Son glorifies the one who appointed him (5:5). All Priesthood only makes sense, or has meaning, in reference to the One worshipped, i.e. the Father.
7. The Son appeals to the Father, submits to the will of the Father, and is perfected by the Father (5:7f.).
8. Jesus is the surety of the Father's promise (6:13ff.). He is the guarantee of a better covenant. The Covenant is of God, therefore his people are able to draw near to God through him (7:22f.).
9. Jesus worships the Father, for us thus obliterating the need for further offerings (9:24f.).
10. Jesus has come to do the will of God (10:5ff.), which is none other than to provide purification for sins through his death.

11. Jesus, who has sanctified his people through his blood (13:12), enables the true sacrifice of praise to be received by God (13:15).
12. The Son is the shepherd of the sheep (13:20).

THE ACTION OF THE SPIRIT IN THE BOOK

1. The Holy Spirit (through the Scriptures) bears witness to the Son (3:7; 9:8; 10:15).
2. Teaches the truth of the Father and the Son's New Covenant sacrifice through the Old Covenant symbols (9:8).

TRINITARIAN VERSES

1. 2:3–4—Salvation: spoken through the Lord (Jesus), God bearing witness, part of such witness being the gifts of the Spirit.
2. 6:4f.—Apostasy is against the whole person of the Godhead (cf. 10:29). To spurn the Son is to insult the Spirit.
3. 9:13f.—The action of the Cross is Trinitarian. (Some see the theological context as referring to Christ's 'eternal spirit' rather than being a strictly Trinitarian formulation, but against this must be held both the clearly Trinitarian nature of much of the rest of the Book and the question of how the hearers would have understood the phrase 'eternal spirit' in any case. There seems no decisive reason to reject the statement as a Trinitarian one.)

CONCLUSIONS

1. The Father is seen to be the one who sets forth the Son as the mediator of the New Covenant by which He brings many sons to glory. He is the initiator of the action of grace to sinners.
2. The work of the Son makes sense only in relationship to the Father's will. The whole purpose of his work is to lead us to the Father.
3. The Spirit bears witness to the work of the Father and the Son, seeking not his own glory, but theirs.
4. In all these things Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one in the work of redemption, i.e. their being is not self preserving but self giving. The Father, who appoints the Son as High Priest, the Son in his High Priestly ministry, and the Spirit who bears witness to both, have purposed together to bring humanity into the full flow of their being.

The Trinity & Redemption

(by Martin Bleby)

What do we class as ‘redemption’? Everything from Genesis 3:15 to Revelation 22:17, including the coming of the Word and the Spirit to Israel? The answer is ‘yes’.

Even before that, God is ‘our Father, our Redeemer from of old’ (Isa. 63:16), i.e. from before the beginning. The Son was ‘destined before the foundation of the world’ as ‘a lamb without blemish or spot’ whose blood would be shed (I Pet. 1:18–21). And the Spirit ever ‘searches everything, even the depths of God’ (I Cor. 2:9–11).

Is it ‘O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a redeemer!’ (Paschal Liturgy)? No, not quite. Redeemerhood is that in God which Satan sought to impugn, but served only to delineate in all the fullness of His sovereign grace (see Job 1:11; 2:4; 19:25–27; 42:2).

We could go into great detail regarding the actions of the Trinity in the Old Testament, with e.g. the revelation of Christ to Abraham, and Moses and Isaiah (John 8:56; 5:46; 12:41), and the coming of the Spirit and the Word to the prophets (Isa. 48:16; Micah 3:8; I Pet. 1:10–12; II Pet. 1:21; Rev. 19:10). But all of this is with a view to God’s redemptive action in the incarnate Christ (Luke 24:25–27, 44–47; Acts 1:3).

John 13:31–32; 17:4–5, 24–26—the Cross is the setting forth of the full nature and action and glory of God as Trinity. Isaiah 52:13—53:12 viewed from a Trinitarian understanding: what, in each verse, is the Father doing? The Son? The Spirit? (cf. I Pet. 2:24; John 13:3; 15:1; Mark 14:27; 15:34; cf. John 16:32; John 5:19; Heb. 9:14; I Cor. 2:10; Rom. 5:5, 6).

John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God*, page 102, with pictures. More tellingly, Geoffrey C. Bingham, *Bright Bird and Shining Sails*, pages 46–48.

Martin Bleby, *The Vinedresser*, page 31 ‘Love’s Word’. See also Geoffrey C. Bingham, *The Meaning and Significance of the Trinity*.

Study Eleven

The Trinity & the Consummation

(by Rod James)

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit Are In Dynamic Trinitarian Action 'Even To The Consummation Of The Age'

To the Consummation:

Matthew 28:16–20:

- The Father has given all authority in heaven and on earth to the Son.
- By this authority disciples are to be made of all nations.
- These disciples are to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus will be with his disciples always (through the Holy Spirit), even to the end (consummation) of the age.

I Corinthians 15:20–28:

- Christ, the first fruits of those who have died and risen.
- Christ, reigning and putting all his enemies under his feet.
- Then the end will come, when Christ will hand over the kingdom to God the Father, so that God may be all in all.

At the Consummation:

Revelation 19—21:

- The great prostitute, Babylon, is condemned.
- ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord God Almighty reigns.’
- The wedding of the Lamb has come.
- The devil is thrown into the lake of fire.
- The Holy City, the new Jerusalem, is adorned as a bride for her husband.
- The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’

The Purpose Of This Dynamic Trinitarian Activity Is Familial

Hebrews 2:10:

- Bringing many sons to glory.

I John 3:1–3:

- See what love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God.

Ephesians 2:6:

- God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

Revelation 17 and 18:

—All non-familial contenders are judged and condemned. They are defeated by the rider who is called Faithful and True.

Psalm 2:8:

—The nations are given to the Son as an inheritance.

Revelation 5:9, 10:

—Men are purchased for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

Revelation 19:

—The wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.

The Goal Of This Familial Activity Is Love: Love In Its Unity And Liberty, Its Intimacy And Mutuality

Unity:

Ephesians 1:10:

—To bring all things . . . together under one head, even Christ.

I Corinthians 15:20–28:

—So that God may be all in all.

John 17:20–26:

—That they may be one as we are one.

Liberty:

Romans 8:21:

—The glorious liberty of the children of God.

There is no oppression or coercion. In the familial relationships of God's reign all have found their true identity and fulfilment.

Intimacy:

John 15:15:

—No longer servants but friends, 'for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you'.

John 17:21:

—Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us.

Mutuality:

John 3:35:

—The Father loves the Son and has given everything into his hands.

John 14:31:

—The Son does as the Father has commanded him, so that the world may know that I love the Father.

Ephesians 5:21–23:

—Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her. In turn the church is subject to Christ in everything. In the same way the husband gives himself up for his wife and the wife submits to her husband.

Unity, liberty, intimacy and mutuality are the familial qualities of the Triune God.

It is into this fullness of relationship that we have been raised in Christ, and it is in this fulfilment that all things find their final Consummation.

The Triune God in the Life of the Parish

(by Dean Carter)

Our theology of the Church's life, mission and ministry must be based on ministry—that of God. The ongoing ministry of the Triune God leads us to our view of the Church (here the parish) as grounded in God's mission through Israel and realized in and by Christ. Hence, the mission and ministry of the Church is the continuing of the Messianic, incarnate and resurrected life and ministry of the Son of God, through the Spirit who came at Pentecost.

[The issues of parish ministry, generally treated in a 'how to . . .' presentation, are here dealt with from a different perspective. The Biblical view operates by asking two prior questions, giving us the *modus operandi*, of 'Who?', then 'What?', and finally 'How?'. For this paper the 'Who?' is the Triune God, the 'What?' is the life and ministry of the Church (Parish) in Christ, which leads to the 'How?' as the Spirit applies the life of Christ to the Church, and equips for ministry.]

MAN'S EXPERIENCE OF THE LIFE OF THE TRIUNE GOD

The Triune God and Humanity

The Triune God is known by revelation as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; II Cor. 13:14; John 14:18–23; I Pet. 1:2). Yet we must continue to affirm the unity of the Godhead (Deut. 6:4ff.; I Cor. 8:6). This God has made man in His own image (*imago dei*): his being and function correlate to God's, as he lives to God. However, in rebellion, man has sought autonomous life; that is, apart from the font of life. Under the sentence and judgement of death, yet as recipient of the promise of life, man waited for the coming of the Promised One.

The eternal Son, incarnate as the Messiah, from and with the people of God, the Jews, is 'God with us' (Matt. 1:23). As eternal Word, the life and light of all, He has become flesh: He is one 'of us' (John 1:14; cf. Rom. 8:3). In His life and death He revealed the Father, and reconciled humanity to God (John 1:18; II Cor. 5:18ff.). His 'kenotic' service (Phil. 2:7) was both a ministry to God for man, and to man for God. That self-giving service continues 'posthumously', as the resurrected Christ continues His ministry (Acts 1:1, for what He had 'begun to do and teach'), through His Spirit (the Spirit of God, Christ, Jesus, of Holiness).

God in His fullness (Trinity) is present to creation; Christ in His fullness (God and Man) is present both to God and man.

Humanity Revivified by the Life of God

The life of God, now with us in the humanity of the incarnate Son, has been applied to us via the word of the Cross by the Spirit. Humanity is created, judged and recreated as

the *imago dei*: the new humanity issues out of the Cross and Resurrection (Eph. 2:15; Rom. 6:4ff.).

The Spirit reveals through John that this 'life' is the knowledge of God as Father (John 17:3), is eternal (8:51; 14:19), is due to the Spirit's operation (3:3, 6), and is dependent on Christ as the Resurrection (11:25; 14:6; cf. I John 4:9): Christ's life is both causative and formative.

Through Paul, the Spirit discloses that as Lord, Christ offers the gift of life (Rom. 6:23), so now to live is Christ (Phil. 1:21; Gal. 2:20), in whom our life is 'concealed' (Col. 3:3). Again, the life we now share is contingent upon Christ's divinely oriented and disposed life (II Cor. 5:14ff.). It is dependent upon the resurrecting Spirit (Rom. 8), who applies to us the saving life of Christ (Rom 5:10).

Eschatological and Teleological Dimension

Life as the new creation means there is an eschatological and teleological dimension: this determines the mission and ministry of the Church, as it did and does for Christ.

Christ came as the 'last Man': the last shall be first, and the first (in Adam) don't last (cf. Matt. 20:16; I Cor. 15:45ff.). He came at the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4: 'when the time appointed for this had fully run its course' in H. W. Cassirer, *God's New Covenant*, Eerdmans, 1989). Hence, there is a new beginning, a new epoch (II Cor. 5:16ff.): we live in the present, on the basis of the new age (I Cor. 10:11; Heb. 1:2; 9:10).

THE LIFE OF GOD IN THE PARISH

The Parish as the 'Local Church'

See Ian Pennicook's paper 'The Parish in Today's World' (pages 79–84) in *The Pastor in Life and Ministry*, the studies for the 1987 Pastors' School. Pennicook suggests that the most appropriate term would be the 'local church'. He continues his paper by considering the identity, growth and function of the local church.

The Ministry of the Incarnate Son as the Praxis for the Church

The Son's service (*latreia*) of the Father is the basis of His continued obedient action. His self-giving, seen in His incarnation and earthly life, and culminating at the Cross, continues in His resurrected life. It is this renewed humanity which provides the mode and manner of our life and ministry. That is, just as Christ is the *nexus* of the life of God for humanity, so also He is our *praxis*. This means that the *leitourgia*, *kerygma*, *didache*, *diaconia*, *paraclesis* and *koinonia* of the Church are simply the entering into the continued vicarious humanity of the Son, as He ministers in the name of His (and now 'our') Father, by the Spirit. Not only is Christ the centre of our life and mission, He is also its circumference: because He is God's exclusive gift to humanity, He encompasses all humanity (He identifies with all humanity both in terms of judgement and grace).

The Mission and Ministry of the Church

The mission of the Church is to participate in the reconciliation of all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10). Its ministry is manifold, diverse but united. There can be no disjunction between word and work, articulation and action, just as this is so for God, and for Christ.

The *leitourgia* (worship) is the gladness and gratitude of the Church as it enters

into the worship of God by the true minister, Jesus (Heb. 8:2). The elements of the worship are the Word and sacrament: the incarnate, written and spoken Word calls to man who gathers round the table to receive Christ the Bread of Life. All such worship is directed to the Father, in and with the Son, through the Spirit.

The *kerygma* and *didache* (preaching and teaching) are the ongoing ministry of the Word incarnate, heeded by humbled and hallowed believers, and addressed to all (our 'neighbours') in the name of Christ. Those who respond to the Gospel (it is *proclaimed* that they are *preclaimed*), enter the Church via baptism, applied in the name of the Triune God.

Further, the *diaconia* (service) is coupled with *paraclesis* (encouragement): it is practical, not only 'being there' but 'bringing there' what is offered by God for the renewing and reconciliation of humanity.

The *koinonia* (fellowship) experienced by the Church is with the Father (I John 1:3), the Son (I Cor. 1:9), the Spirit (II Cor. 13:14; cf. Phil. 2:1): it is corporate (Acts 2:42). Further, there is fellowship in the Gospel and faith (Phil. 1:5; Philemon 6), the collection of the Gentile Church for the Jewish (II Cor. 8–9), in the body and blood of Christ (I Cor. 10:16–17), and in the suffering and glory of Christ (Phil. 3:10–11; cf. II Cor. 4:10 for the life of Christ being manifest in the action of the 'killing of Jesus').

Ministry means 'Planning for the Future', or 'Preparing for Advent'?

The mission and ministry are determined by the *parousia* (i.e. eschatology determines soteriology): hence the Church (and so its local 'outcrops') is not to plan for the future, but be preparing for Advent. The 'Second Advent' is not so much an event which is to occur, but He Who is coming: the Church doesn't expect or plan for 'something to happen', but anticipates the coming of her Lord. Hence, the Church must live by the Spirit, not the flesh (live on basis of promise, not projections into the future based on past and present). Again, we must consider the implications for evangelism and stewardship (entrusted with charismata for all the Church's ministry, see I Cor. 12)—are we prepared for His coming?

Only as the Church (and so the local church or parish) knows the life of the Triune God is she one, free, holy, catholic and apostolic, for such is Christ, as is God.

Worship of the Triune God

(by Geoffrey Bingham)

GOD IS TO BE WORSHIPPED

Satan sought Jesus' worship and was answered from Deuteronomy 6:13, 'You shall worship¹ the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.' This is the order for all creation. The Psalms tell us creation continually worships God. In our verse we see that 'worship' and 'serve' are really synonyms, Sometimes in the O.T. *abad* (to serve) and *shachah* (to worship) are used interchangeably or are paired together. Likewise in the N.T. *latreuo* can be used interchangeably for worshipping and serving. In both Testaments there are other words used for the acts of worship, i.e. relating to their modes and ritual.

In English, to worship is to give worth commensurate with the object worshipped. God is to be given glory and honour and wisdom and power and might—amongst other things—because they are already His and worship is the *grateful* recognition of this. At the same time all things in the universe are to be given commensurate honour. The test of our worshipping God is the honour we give to our fellow-humans, and other created things of God. If we wish to have a revelation of pure worship we should read the appropriate passages in the Book of the Revelation (see 1:12–20; 4:1–11; 5:8–14; 7:9–17; 8:1–6; 11:15–18; 14:1–5; 15:3–4; 16:4–7; 19:1–8). Some of the *themes* of the worship are God's holiness, His creatorhood, salvation via the Lamb, God's judgements, and the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. It would seem that all worship is based on the *gift* of creation and the *grace* of redemption.

REFUSAL TO WORSHIP GOD

Genesis 3:1–6, Job 15:17–31, and Romans 1:19–32 show that man refused to worship God, i.e. to give Him thanks and glory, and yet man had to worship something—since worship is innate in all creatures—so he devised gods of his own liking and expressed his idolatry, which, incidentally, then destroyed the symmetry of his life and thinking. In the celestial sphere was Lucifer's rebellion—in rivalry—against God, taking a third of the angelic beings with him.² History is the story of the evil powers seeking the worship of the creation which belongs to God. Refusal to worship God is deeply embedded in the human heart.

¹ The biblical matter of worship is dealt with extensively in my book *The Way and Wonder of Worship* (NCPI, 1990). The index indicates its comprehensive coverage.

² See my *The Clash of the Kingdoms* (NCPI, 1989) where I have tried to interpret this event.

WORSHIP OF THE TRIUNE GOD

The Lord God alone is to be worshipped—that was the command given to Israel along with covenant. Romans 9:4–5 gives all the gifts of God which pertain to worship—the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the law, the promises, the patriarchs and Messiah. With them is the worship but it is one with them all. Law and worship are inextricably one. The worship of Yahweh is one, as the ordinances command: hence the central place for worship. Hence the fierce rejection of the idols and gods, and the terrible judgements that came on Israel through their idolatry. The gifts of Romans 9:4–5 are precisely the gifts given to the community of the new covenant. Certain prophecies concerning the new covenant, e.g. Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 36:24–28, speak of new elements to this Messianic covenant, such as forgiveness without sacrifices, obedience from the heart—through love—to all God’s laws and ordinances. Jesus in particular spoke of a new kind and a new era of worship. This is set out well in John 4:19–26. Some points of this are (i) worship will be to the Father, (ii) the Father will initiate such worship, (iii) worship will be in the spirit of persons, by the Holy Spirit, (iv) worship will be in the truth, (v) worship will not be locational so much as relational.

The new worship came at Pentecost in the context of (i) the Holy Spirit, (ii) the truth of the gospel in (a) the Cross, the Resurrection and—so—the Lordship of Christ, (b) the forgiveness of sins, (c) the gift of the Holy Spirit. From that point onwards the worship of the community was set. In regard to worship of the Triune God we should notice that it is *God* who is worshipped, that He is worshipped *in communion*, and that He is worshipped as Father and as Son, the agent being the Holy Spirit (cf. John 4:23; Phil. 3:3).

Worship of the Father: Worship by the Father

- (a) For worship of the Father—especially if we include prayer in that worship—see (i) Luke 11:1–4; Matthew 6:5; (ii) John 4:21–23; (iii) Galatians 4:4–6, Romans 8:14–17; (iv) Ephesians 3:14, 5:18, cf. I Peter 1:17.
- (b) For worship by the Father keep in mind that He is initiator, that His Fatherhood causes us to cry ‘Abba! Father!’ in worship. Thus we are drawn to bow before him (cf. Eph. 3:14f.).

Worship of the Son—Christ: Worship by the Son

- (a) Here we should note that there is worship of Christ by his people, and worship of the Father, through his people. Worship of Christ is seen in John 20:26–29 (Thomas); Matthew 28:7–10 (the women); in the whole matter of Christ’s Lordship (‘Lord of glory’) as in Acts 2:38ff.; and in the passages of Revelation where he is worshipped as the Lamb with God (5:6–14; 7:10f.; 11:15; 12:10; cf. 21:1f.; 22:1).
- (b) We recognize that such worship comes through the Son (cf. John 14:13; 16:23, 24), for he is ‘the minister in the sanctuary’ (Heb. 8:1–2; 13:15–16), and so we offer up sacrifices through him (I Pet. 2:4–5). He ever lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25) and is at the right hand of God as our intervener (Rom. 8:34; cf. Isa. 59:16ff.).

Worship of the Spirit: Worship by the Spirit

- (a) No worship is accorded directly to the Spirit who is the Spirit of worship. In II Corinthians 3:17–18 he is ‘the Spirit the Lord’, and as we have seen is accorded high honour by the Father and the Son and is worshipped within the Triune God.
- (b) We recognize that true worship comes through the Spirit (John 4:21–23; Phil. 3:3; Eph. 5:18f.; etc.). He intercedes for us in a beautiful intimacy and fellowship (Rom. 8:26f.).

The Key To True Worship: The Inner Intimacy of The Triune Godhead and Our Fellowship With and In Them

We must come back, time and again, to the fact that the Three are One *in communion*, in the *perichoretic* love that is Trinitarian. Hence they glory in their unity, and their glory is their unity. It is thus unitive also for us (cf. John 17:20–26, esp. v. 22). We have been called into the fellowship of the Son (I Cor. 1:9); have fellowship with the Father and with His Son (I John 1:3); the Persons indwell us (John 14:15–23) and we indwell them (I John 4:16); our lives are hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3); and we participate in the Divine nature (II Pet. 1:4). The Divine human *perichoretic* flow keeps us as one, i.e. in the unity, love and fellowship of the Spirit. The Persons honour, serve, and give to one another. They honour, serve and give to us. We honour the Persons, serve and give to them. This is true worship—whatever its forms may take in baptism, the Lord’s Supper, proclamation of the word, and in the service we render within Christ’s fellowship, and out to the world.

Study Fourteen

Prayer that is Trinitarian

(by Deane Meatheringham)

PRAYER IS DIALOGUE

To appreciate this point it needs to be stated at the outset that prayer is a dangerous venture, and one which cannot be entered without risk (Heb. 10:31). Meeting the living God is, in a certain sense, a last judgement (Gen. 15:12ff.; 28:10–17; Exod. 3:4–6; Isa. 6:1ff.; etc.). If we come to God in anger, demanding and self-assertive, we find a distance between us and God.

David's excruciating prayer of Psalm 51 recognizes that he can only truly speak to God when God opens his lips (v. 15). This will be the fruit of God's forgiveness and God's 'coming near' to David.

God speaks his word to us, communicating himself to us, giving us hearing, taking us into his intimacy and enabling us to bring our response. This is the dialogue between God and Man; the Divine and the human. Now Man obeys the command to pray, which is the one true reason for prayer, but he does so out of the encounter of life between himself and God. This puts paid to the 'heavenly telephone' which tells me I can do something by the technique to hand, because prayer is not made possible by a system but through the God who comes close to us (into us), and in his grace gives us speaking and chooses to listen.

Later we will see that through the Spirit we know what to pray and are taken into the Council of the Lord to converse with him.

PRAYER IN 'THE NAME'

The worshippers of idols call on the names, the powers of the gods in the belief that the god hears. Paul says that idol worshippers become partners with demons (I Cor. 10:20). But the demons and their gods exploit and enslave their devotees.

From early times men called upon the Name of the Lord to worship and pray to him (Gen. 4:26). God made his Name known to his people and out of that knowledge his people knew God and prayed in his authority and power (Exod. 34:6ff.; Ps. 25:11; 79:9; Isa. 26:13).

We are to pray in Christ's Name (Heb. 13:15; cf. John 14:13; 15:16; 16:23ff.). It is through Jesus Christ the Son that we come to the Father, and in his Name that our prayers are acceptable. Thus we are to abide in Christ (John 15:1–11, 16).

THE MEDIATOR OF PRAYER

Jesus Christ is the High Priest of our confession who as the Son is identical with God in bringing him to us and as our brother truly represents us to God (Heb. 3:1). The Levitical High Priest who offered sacrifices of atonement also prayed on behalf of the people in the Holy of Holies. Christ prayed on our behalf and made sacrifice for sins. In this great offering of himself God and man are joined. Christ also has gone into the presence of God on our behalf, taking us with him (John 17:1ff.; Matt. 26:36ff.; Luke 22:31ff.; Heb. 5:7–10; 4:14–16; 6:19f.; 9:11ff., 24; 10:19ff.; Rom. 5:1f.; Eph. 3:11–12).

Jesus continues as High Priest, having an eternal priesthood (Heb. 5:9–10; 6:20; 7:16). Hebrews 7:24–25 says that Christ saves us forever because he continues to make intercession for us. This does not detract from his ‘once for all’ sacrifice for sins, rather because he has secured an eternal redemption, Christ now continues as High Priest, intervening on our behalf. His intervention is to protect us from our enemies (including ourselves), but it also means that he prays for us (Rom. 8:34). From what has already been said in earlier studies, this does not mean that Jesus the Son is placating a reluctant God to save us, but his intercession as our brother comes from the Father in the Spirit.

Man, created in God’s image, was made to relate to God, to be God’s representative on earth and to fulfil God’s creational plan. From this, and what we are told of his redemption, he was made to be a priest to the creation. Jesus Christ is the true Priest, and we are priests together in him (e.g. I Pet. 2:9f.).

In Jesus Christ, God addresses himself to us in such a way that his word is wrapped up in Christ’s incarnate flesh. Jesus Christ is the Mediator in whom God has provided us with prayer which is identical with Christ’s own prayer to the Father. Another way of saying this is that from his solidarity with us, and so from the depths of our humanity, Christ prays ‘Our Father . . .’ What our union with Christ means is that his prayer is effected as our own, issuing freely and spontaneously from out of ourselves.

I Timothy 2:1–8 tells us that prayer is commanded, that we are to intercede for all men, for God’s desire is for the salvation of all men, and this is linked with the man Jesus Christ who is the Mediator between God and Man. Such prayer is acceptable to God.

PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT

By the regeneration of the Spirit we are restored to a conversing relationship with the Father (Rom. 8:26f.; Gal. 4:6; John 4:21–24).

The Spirit himself speaks to us in prayer so that out of his intercessions we pray (Luke 10:21; Rom. 8:26–27; Acts 8:29; 13:1–3; Zech. 12:1; Eph. 6:18; Jude 20).

By the Spirit we have the mind of Christ imparted to us, and God’s wisdom is imparted by the Spirit to those who love him (I Cor. 1:30; 2:6–13).

The Spirit of Christ brings us into the presence and communion with the Holy Father. This is the equivalent of dwelling in the Council of the Lord, where God converses with us and we with him (Jer. 23:18). In Christ’s Name we now pray according to the *will* of God (and if we don’t know his will we don’t pray). See John 15:17; I John 5:14–15; cf. James 1:5–8).

All true prayer must be Trinitarian. We can't pray acceptably unless the Father reveals himself and brings us into the family home. In the home, the family prayer is not according to the world's consumer demands, but according to the revelation of his will. The people of prayer have gone through the judgement and their joy is mixed with fear, but in the fear there is ecstasy and in Christ there is much assurance.

One Body Through the Cross

(by Dean Carter)

The study will focus on the unity of the Church, with particular reference to the Letter of Paul to the Ephesians (cf. Acts 19—20, I & II Tim. and Rev. 2:1–7 for further information concerning the founding, formation and failures of the Ephesian Church).

The critical issues raised by the Epistle to the Ephesians are the ultimate purpose (*telos*) of God for His creation, and how the final reconciliation of all is to be consummated in and by the incarnate Son, the Messiah. Hence, Paul discloses his knowledge of this now uncovered mystery, and unravels the implications for the Church in its ministry. Along the way he must explain the necessity of the Atonement, and the forging of a new people of God, minted in Christ as the fulfilment of Old Testament promises, and resolving the failures of Israel.

THE TRINITY AND THE ATONEMENT

The Atonement Reveals the Trinity

Israel is the unique recipient of the covenant promises and revelation of the one true God, Lord. She is the elect of God, and salvation is from the Jews (John 4:22; Rom. 3:1–2; 9:4–5). Again, she has an integral role in the destiny of the nations, and is a key in the consummation of the ages. Since the Messiah was to be Jewish, Israel could provide much that would disclose and clarify His identity and ministry. In fact, the Jews can answer three significant questions: ‘Who are God and Jesus; what is the Atonement; and how does God deal with the world?’

The Jews rightly maintain that God is One and transcendent: Christians affirm that God has revealed Himself as Trinity. For Israel, the continued knowledge of the Lord was mediated and revealed through reconciling atonement. In fact, revelation and reconciliation were inseparably linked. How, then, would Israel function as the mediator of the one covenant—to all nations: what would the relation be between Israel as the people of God, and the Church?

Paul deals with this very issue in Ephesians 2:11ff. when he speaks of the Temple ‘middle wall of partition’: this safeguards the holiness of the Temple, and the people of God. However, both in the life and ministry of Jesus we observe many breaches of ‘middle wall’. Further, at Pentecost Peter preaches that the gift of forgiveness and baptism in the name of Jesus are open to even ‘those far off’, due to the action of the Cross and the ministry of the Spirit.

Two features stand out: i) the Christian knowledge of God must be admitted to be dependent on God’s revelation through the Old Testament transmitted via Israel, and ii) there is no access to God apart from the Cross. Hence, the Gentiles are incorporated into the Jewish people of God. But, can the Jews now recognize their Messiah in our Christ? Do they perceive the revelation of the one true God mediated through the Cross?

For apart from the Cross of Christ, the Jews do not know the Trinity, and life in the Spirit. In the face of the Jewish insistence on the Oneness of God, we must affirm that since God was only known by the Atonement to Israel, then the Atonement was necessary to disclose the Trinity. That is, the one God, the LORD is only known as Trinity, by means of propitiation. In the gift of Christ, we know both God with us, and man with God—we are ‘at one’. This is made known by the Spirit, who discloses the truth of God Himself (Matt. 11:25ff.; cf. I Cor. 9–12).

The Trinity and the Atonement

If the Atonement is necessary to reveal the Trinity, the Trinity is essential to our understanding the Atonement. Since God has revealed Himself to us in the three-fold way as Father, Son and Spirit, and that the saving actions are the outward expressions of the inner reality of God, we must affirm that the Trinity belongs to the very core of our knowledge of salvation, and its message to the world. Apart from the Trinity, our salvation is empty: within the communion of God, we know perfect salvation.

WHAT IS THE NEW HUMANITY?

The Incarnation and Atonement

As incarnate Son, Christ reconciled both God and man within Himself: Atonement was made as He was given as a sin offering. His humanity is a form of God’s judgement which shocked the Jews (cf. Rom. 8:3). Christ formed the new man as both Judge and judged: He made all to be ‘at one’. While humanity formed a Cross to dispose of the new Man, the new Man disposed of the old and minted a cruciform humanity. Just as by the Spirit Christ took His body in the incarnation, now by the same Spirit He takes His new body, which He is bringing to maturity (Eph. 4:13ff.).

The message of Atonement (‘he came and preached peace’) and unity is directed to both Jews and Gentiles. In the mystery of God’s purpose, both now have access to the Father, by means of the Spirit. But is peace and unity known within the people of God?

Jews as the People of God

The perennial concern for Israel was whether she would fulfil her destiny and mission as the ‘people of God’ (*laos*) or become like the ‘nations’ (*ethnos*). The closer she related to the Lord, the more she became alienated from the nations. The critical rejection of Jesus as Messiah was over this very issue, as in John 11:47–53: it remains so for Israel at present.

Nevertheless, God has not permanently discarded Israel as His people (Rom. 9–11), and the nations are still called to observe Israel as the ‘servant of the Lord’. The Jews must come to learn that the holocaust of the Cross places the Cross in, and alone interprets, the Holocaust (here perhaps is the closest the Jews have been to fulfilling as a people their destiny as the ‘suffering servant of the Lord’).

The Gentiles Becoming the People of God

Paul speaks of the former status of the Gentiles in two ways. Firstly, he contrasts the Gentiles as bereft of God and His benefits, while Israel enjoyed the manifold blessings of the Lord (Eph. 2:11ff.). Then he exposes the folly of the Gentiles and their hardness of heart (Eph. 4:17ff.), as he reminds the believers that they have been renewed as joint heirs with the Jews in Christ.

The Division of the People of God

The most significant division of the one people of God is not between male and female, Roman Catholic and Protestant, or even the Eastern Church over against the Western. Rather, the radical breach still remains that between the Hebrew people of God and the Christian Church.

MOTIFS OF UNITY IN THE EPHESIAN EPISTLE

The four motifs (not mere metaphors but expressions of reality) denoting the unity of the Church are the Bride (5:30–31; cf. the fiancé in II Cor. 2:2–4), ‘one flesh’ (5:29–32), the Body (1:22–23) and the Temple (2:21–22). Perhaps there is a progression, as we move from the fiancé being separated from other suitors (idols and gods) to the Bride (which is a term only used at the ceremony and celebration, of her action at the wedding). Next comes the ‘one flesh’ with its covenantal faithfulness, its sharing and fruitfulness.

The motif of the Temple indicates that there is a fixed design or form. As Williams notes, ‘the Christian Church is not intended by its builder to be a formless polyglot of accidental Christian groups huddled together like the hovels of a spiritual shanty town. It is intended to be built together into a purposeful and beautiful design’ [R. H. L. Williams, ‘Some Theological Pressures Towards Christian Unity’ in the *Canadian Journal of Theology*, Vol. VII (1961), No. 3 pp. 186–7]. The master builder alone has the plan, and basing the edifice on Christ as foundation, with the operations of the Spirit, all will be accomplished according to that plan. All of these elements require unity, which can only be attempted and achieved at great cost—the Cross.

THE PRAXIS OF UNITY

The Praxis of and Within the Church

The form of the Church’s praxis is that of the suffering servant, under the one Lord and one Father. As the recipient of grace and peace, the Church lives at the Cross, and co-operates in the continuation of the one reconciling mission to all creation. The Church, engifted by her Lord for ministry (all the saints are being equipped for the work of ministry; Eph. 4:12), exercises this in the name of Christ, and grows into the unity of faith and love under the Spirit. Note that in the list of ‘ones’, i.e. the one body, one hope, etc., there is no mention of either ministry or eucharist (for neither of them constitute the basis of unity).

The Unity of the Church in Daily Life

The unity is expressed and matured in daily life. But it is contested, within each believer, within the Church itself and from without (Acts 20:29–30). In the face of cosmic rebellion (Eph. 3:10; 6:10ff.) the saints are to know unity in the family—of husbands and wives, parents and children; in socio-economic relations—masters and servants; and in all inter-racial relations. In fact, all divisions known by man are healed and resolved within the Church by the atonement of the Cross. As Paul so fervently witnessed, we have become ‘one body through the Cross’.

Study Seventeen

The Trinity, Human Unity & Relationships

(by Geoffrey Bingham)

GOD, AND MAN IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

We come now to the conclusion of our studies. We have looked at the internal and external relationships of the Members of the Triune Godhead, and have seen their unity as God is love. Man should, then, reflect the nature of God. We recognize that in history Man has fallen, but the provision has also been made for his regeneration. In fact there is a people of God who are members of the Kingdom of heaven—yet to be fully inherited—and the same people now constitute God’s family, the community of Christ. The proper—though not the ideal—context is provided for redeemed Man to reflect the relationships of the Triune God. We must remind ourselves of those relationships.

Internal Relationships of the Godhead are constituted by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit honouring (glorifying) one another, serving one another, and giving to one another. This constitutes and expresses their unity.

The External Relationships of the Trinity are manifested by their works *ad extra*, i.e. creation, the will, counsel, plan, purpose and *telos* of God, which includes covenant, redemption, and the regeneration and glorification of all things, including the people of God as ‘a kingdom of priests unto their God’, and their reigning forever. We can call these ‘working relationships’, the lesson we draw being that relational life is in doing works, viz. ‘the living God’—the God who acts. In speaking of the subsistent Trinity and the economic Trinity we use convenient terms, but in fact their relationships are all the one—there are not, of course, two ‘sides’ to the Trinity.

CHRIST THE POWER AND THE WISDOM OF GOD

None of the above would be known to us apart from the incarnation of Christ, and the works which he did with, and for, the Father for the sake of fallen humanity and the creation under the curse. The initiator in this was the Father, but the Son was one with Him. The love of God, and the compassion and self-giving of Christ are seen in the *kenosis* (see Phil. 2:1–11, esp. vv. 5–8; cf. Rom. 15:1–3, 7–9) itself a beautiful revelation of the love of God for the world. The honouring, serving and giving of the Son is seen in his life of obedience, his death, resurrection and ascension. In the process the Son revealed God as Father and gave revelations of the Godhead—Father, Son and Spirit—in their several relations.

Paul in I Corinthians 1:10—4:6 (cf. Col. 1:19; 2:3; Eph. 3:8f.) shows Christ to be the wisdom of God, but powerfully in I Corinthians 1:20–25 shows that Christ crucified is

‘the power of God and the wisdom of God’. That is, what He has done in Christ through the Cross is the power and wisdom to effect what God is about, redeeming, reconciling the world to Himself, reconciling all things to Himself, unifying and ‘filling up’ all things since His aim is to release the creation from its bondage to decay so that it may enter into ‘the liberty of the glory of the children of God’. This ‘liberty of the glory of the children of God’ is the ultimate admission of the elect into the mystery of the Godhead, forever to have fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in a divinization which does not deify them, but gives them full fellowship with the Godhead as ‘partakers of the divine nature’.

THE PRESENT OUTWORKING OF UNITY AND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE WORLD¹

So far as the Cross is concerned, reconciliation with God has been effected and proleptically the reconciliation and unification of all things (Col. 1:19–21; Eph. 1:9–10; cf. Eph. 4:10; Col. 3:4). The community of Christ is the place of true unity, fellowship, love and harmony, although that is attacked by evil powers and human frailty. The members of the *ekklesia* are each one, and corporately, dwelling in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit also dwell with them. Being in fellowship with God, partaking of the Divine nature, the Divine relationships flow into the church, and so the true image of God is given expression in love and unity. Relationships are as Divine ones.

THE PRACTICAL PERICHORESIS

Within the Godhead the *perichoresis–circumincessio* is that circulatory flow of love and relational unity which the Three contribute in giving–receiving movement. They give out of their differentiations—as Father, Son and Spirit—in their vocations, this being in the context and environment of being ‘other Person/s centred’. Knowledge of these things has come to us through the revelations given within the word of God in respect to the living God—‘the God who acts’.

In creation this ‘perichoretic movement’ would have been manifest in the human scene—and doubtless the whole creation—since Man was made in the image of God. The Fall choked this action, even though evidences of it have been seen in history. In the community of Christ *perichoresis* is the true order, and such is exhorted within the community for its own life, and towards the world for its sake. Love is *perichoresis*—we might say its active and demonstrated essence.

Even so, believers come slowly to this because they often lack the wisdom of God and need further liberation from the foolish mind—and actions—of the world. The love-unity and fellowship of God is already in the church. It needs to be appropriated. As Pastors we need to know how to teach and encourage *perichoresis* in the local congregation. The flow from God will always be there, but we can put self-saving impediments in the way of it. The reading of what happened after Pentecost—the distribution—of II Corinthians chapters 8–9, and the recognition that worship of God ceased with refusal to be thankful (Rom. 1:19f.) should be helpful. A firm preaching of the love of God through the Cross (cf. I John 4:7–21) should arouse the *perichoretic* response.

¹ For this Study see, in particular, Pastors’ Group Study of 6/5/91, *Practical Perichoresis*.

We often see it at times of tragedy and other crises in local churches.

I believe we take things for granted and suggest four steps to be taught and practised, (i) *asking*—as we are commanded, (ii) *receiving*—the result of asking and God's overflowing bounty, (iii) *giving*—don't receive without giving, but don't give to receive, (iv) *thanksgiving*—to take for granted, to retain for oneself, to fail to flow in giving teaches us selfishness. Thanksgiving is the overflowing of a heart that is filled. In this way we are in the stream—the circulatory movement—of the Divine *perichoresis*, and God forbid we should ever dam it!

CONCLUSION

All theology is Trinitarian; all true praxis is Trinitarian. Deficiency in Trinitarian theology and understanding means deficiency in living and pastoral ministry. It also means we do not have an adequate theology, cosmology and anthropology. True living and authentic *perichoresis* is intended to flow out to all the nations, not limited to our own local congregation—although it begins there—for the cosmic significance and power of the gospel are rooted in the total Godhead. Let us continually keep in mind the following:

- (a) believers are not to look on their own things, but the things of others;
- (b) they are to count others better than themselves;
- (c) they are not to seek their own good but the good of others;
- (d) they are not to please themselves but to please their neighbours;
- (e) they are to become servants one of another;
- (f) they are to discern the needs of others, and where possible, supply them;
- (g) they are to become poor that others may become rich as they give (i) according to their means, and (ii) beyond their means.