

## “As we Are One”: Thinking into the Mystery<sup>1</sup>

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Οὐ περὶ τούτων δὲ ἐρωτῶ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ τῶν πιστευόντων διὰ τοῦ λόγου αὐτῶν  
εἰς ἐμέ, ἵνα πάντες ἔν ὧσιν, καθὼς σύ, πάτερ, ἐν ἐμοὶ κάγω ἐν σοί, ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν  
ᾧσιν... John 17. 20-21.

“Faith is not a light which scatters all our darkness,  
but a lamp which guides our steps in the night  
and suffices for the journey.” *Lumen Fidei*, 57.

### **I: Introduction**

It is an honor and a delight to open this meeting. As you have just heard, I am not a Baptist; I am not even protesting anything much! And thus, the Christian communion of which I am a member, and the traditions from which I imagine most of you come are divided by many things - but I hope we are also united by others. We all, I think, believe that when Christians struggle to conceive of God and God’s creative and salvific action they must turn to the scriptures under the guidance of the Spirit. We certainly differ about how we read, and we even differ over the bounds of the canon, but we may for a time come together in attention to and in love of God’s written word. I pray that this conference can be such a time, and I thank those who have made our meeting possible.

I did not begin by speaking of Scripture simply because I wanted to find a common ground for our time together. When we come together as Christians and as theologians to discuss the nature of God, Father, Son and Spirit, remembering the

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<sup>1</sup> This paper draws on two of my Pentecost Lectures offered to the Benedictine community of Pluscarden Abbey in Scotland during 2012. A later version was then delivered to the 2013 conference “Beholding the Wonder of Trinitarian Relations” at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY. I would like to thank my hosts on both occasions – Dom Anselm Atkinson and Dr Bruce Ware – and those in these two communities who provided such good conversation.

importance of God's word in our thought is peculiarly important. Trinitarian theology has a long, complex history and has stimulated some of the most philosophically deep and beautiful reflection in western thought. But before we find ourselves drawn into the fascinating conceptual structures and details of that tradition, we do well to take a breath and remember where we begin and to where we must return. The language of Trinitarian theology begins in the scriptures, language and life of Israel, and then in the earliest Christians' use of that scripture, language and life as a resource for understanding what God had done and was doing in Christ. Classical Trinitarian theology then arose as a reflection on the scriptures that those earliest Christians left and which the community recognized. The formulae and definitions that resulted are, for me, and for my communion, a gift that enables us to understand those scriptures more truthfully, and one which enables Christians to find in them ever greater depths that draw the Christian mind and heart. My focus here will not be those formulae *per se*, but with the reading of the scriptures that gave rise to them and which they in turn nurture. But before we can say anything useful about the divine life and relationships we will have to spend a little time thinking about the character of revelation and about the modes of thinking that should follow. What I have to say will probably make more sense at the end of my paper than at the beginning, but saying something at this point will be helpful.

## **II: Seeing and Not Seeing<sup>2</sup>**

The first 18 verses of John's gospel seem to tell a clear story. The Word who is also Life and Light is with God. John the Baptist is sent to witness to the light, and soon after, the light to which he has borne witness comes into the world. Many did not recognize him for the light that he was, but those who did, knew that this man was the Son of God, the Word, and they saw his glory. The story seems to be one of revelation: "no one has ever seen God; the only son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known". The language of the Word becoming flesh here seems to have as one of its

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<sup>2</sup> There are many complex questions here about the character of appropriate biblical interpretation. I attempt to give a fuller view of the task which faces the Catholic interpreter in my "The Word Answering the Word: Opening The Space of Biblical Interpretation" in R. David Nelson, Darren Sarisky, and Justin Stratis (eds.), *Theological Theology: Essays in Honor of John B. Webster* (Bloomsbury, forthcoming 2014).

main implications the Word becoming visible and known. But the language of visibility and invisibility is actually used here in a more complex manner than this, and if we are to understand something about how the Scriptures speak of the Trinity to us, we must follow something of this complexity.

These few verses of John's gospel parallel statements about the Word being made visible with statements that the Word was and remains curiously unseen. The Word came and yet was already here; the Word came and yet his own people did not receive him. What, then, does it mean to emphasize that the Word shines and cannot be extinguished? A clue is offered when verse 14 emphasizes that "we have *seen* his glory", but who are we? Well, verses 11-12 are clear that although "his own" did not receive him", those who did so receive and believe, to these he has given "the power to become the children of God". The "we" mentioned in verse 14 seems to be those who have believed: only these can be said to have seen. The seeing that is, then, possible, is not the seeing we understand when we speak of all those with sight seeing that the sun rises or falls; this is a seeing that follows on from belief, and is only ever analogous to the "seeing" of which we so easily speak.

The paradoxes and ambiguities of this seeing in faith are explored throughout John's gospel. To take just one example, call to mind John 14. Chapter 13 focuses on Jesus's washing of the disciples feet. But the chapter is framed by emphasis on Jesus doing this because he knew the time had come for him to depart from the world. The theme is announced at the beginning of the chapter, and ends with Peter asking "Lord, where are you going?" The answer he receives is that Peter cannot yet follow. It is this exchange that introduces chapter 14. Christ calls us not to be troubled, to calm our anxiety and to have faith that while he will go where we cannot yet, he *will* return for us. But Christ does not only speak of a future bodily return at some distant point; in the middle of the chapter he speaks of sending the Spirit to lead us in love, and he speaks of us continuing to live because Christ *continues* to dwell in us. Here we have it again: going, hiding, and yet still being present.

This theme recurs throughout this chapter. Thomas asks his Lord, "how can we know the way [to where you are going]?" Jesus answers by saying, first, that he *is* "the way, the truth and the life", and then immediately adding "if you had known, you would

have known my Father also”; when Philip, unsatisfied, pursues the point by saying “Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied”, Jesus repeats his point: “Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father... Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?” The true seeing that Christ recommends to Philip is a seeing-in-faith. Christ draws Philip to question his seeing in aid of a deeper seeing and knowing; that which is visible must now be known as a guide to that which lies within and beyond the visible. That which lies beyond and within is known to us through faith, and that faith has a clear content. To see Christ we must see him as the Word made flesh, as the Son of God who comes from his Father, as the one in whom the Father dwells and who dwells in the Father. Knowledge of the Trinity – although we will need to think about what we mean by knowledge here – is at the heart of the Christian’s grasp of who Jesus is.

Just a few verses Christ explains that he will come to anyone who loves him and will “manifest myself to him”. Once again the text pushes us to ask what it means for Christ to “manifest” himself when our seeing of him fails and he himself has also gone away. The answer Christ gives is simply that the Father and the Son will come and be in the one who loves. The manifestation of which Christ speaks, then, does not occur so much *to* someone but *in* them.

The character of our “seeing” of Christ thus should be shaped by the complexities of trying to know ourselves as indwelt by Father, Son and Spirit. Jesus says to Philip in that wonderful Johannine irony, not only “If you know me, you will know my Father” but also “From now on you do know him and have seen him”. Central to the task of understanding scripture’s speech about God is the task of understanding what is before us although we fail to see it, attention to why this is so, attention to how we may reform our vision so that we do see. We do not just “see” God in us; rather, the Johannine Christ calls us to consider in more complex ways about the very task of seeing and understanding God. In the first place, we may recognize that the central task in any “seeing” of God is the reformation of the heart. In the second place, we must attend ever more closely to what it means for the existence of Father, Son and Spirit to be unlike objects in the world: as we reflect on how it can be that the divine life indwells us, this truth (and the mysteriousness of God) is driven ever more deeply into our awareness. And

then, in third place, we must, I think we must also not fail to see that if Father, Son and Spirit indwell us as individuals and as members of Christ's body, then we must divert our gaze also to the fruits of that indwelling, the love of God shown in the body of Christ in the world.

This, then, is the character of the revealed Word: the paradox that what is made visible reveals and points toward the invisible. God's revelation takes the form of an invitation into mystery. But that invitation is always in part an invitation to understand ourselves anew, to understand that Christ reveals the Father as the one who is in the Son, as the Son is in the Father – Christ reveals the mystery of the divine life – only to tell us that we have been indwelt by that life already, thus giving a new character to our search for God.

### **III: Patterns of Naming**

Faith, then, draws us toward the mystery of God and to the mystery of God's presence in and to the Christian. But, within our search to know the divine life that is already in us, what can we say about the relationships of Father, Son and Spirit. I want to begin by thinking a little about the manner in which scripture speaks of those relationships. Allow me to turn to Romans chapter 8, a text not normally noted as the important Trinitarian witness that it is. Let me look, first, at something on the surface of the text, and then try to penetrate its depths a little more. Paul's language here is, I take it, no accident. And yet, it is very complex in the way that it speaks of three character or actors in the story of our salvation and Christian life. The theme of the chapter is announced at the beginning: through sending the Son for sin, and through enabling us to live in Christ, God has done what the law could not. Two themes are thus intertwined: God's action in sending his Son and the character of life in Christ. Both of these themes are described in the same language, a language I think we can term "paradoxical".

Verse 11 reads "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit." How many characters are named here? There is one who raised Jesus and there is also the Spirit of him who raised. If we look through the chapter as a whole we find this Spirit named sometimes as the "Spirit of" and thus we might be tempted to

understand it as a periphrastic expression, “the Spirit of Christ” being equivalent to “Christ’s spirit”. And yet, elsewhere in this chapter the Spirit is also presented as a distinct actor”: the Spirit is that which leads some of us to be Sons of God; to live according to the Spirit is to set one’s mind on the things of the Spirit. The picture is even more complex when we note that the Spirit is also named in the same chapter as “the spirit of God” or “the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead”, and as “the spirit of Christ”. This ambiguity in the Spirit’s status is seen even more clearly when we bring into the conversation Galatians 4.6: “and because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba, Father’”. Here it is God or the Father who sends his Son’s spirit into our hearts. The final ambiguity is that, going back to Romans 8, verse 10 speaks not of the Spirit of Christ being in us, but simply Christ. In the same way, at Galatians 2.20, Paul famously asserts that “it is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me”.

Thus, Romans 8 presents us with a paradox and an invitation. The paradox is that there seem to be three actors, each of whom plays a role in bringing the Christian to new life, often in overlapping ways. Some basic ordering of these agents is clear enough: God or Father appears to order the actions of Son and Spirit, but Son and Spirit act with a power that we think of as divine – the power to give life to the dead for example. One of the most fundamental questions the text poses to us concerns how we speak of the Father’s self-gift to Son and Spirit, what it means for our understanding of the divine life that Son and Spirit possess the full reality of divine power. Throughout the chapter, the text also plays with us. The relationship between Son and Spirit remains unclear, the same actions are accorded to both, the relationship between the two is not codified, but performed for us.

We might seek to dissolve these paradoxes by claiming simply that Paul himself did not clearly differentiate Son and Spirit, and that the linguistic complexity I have identified resulted from his confusion. In the first place, I am not convinced even as a historian that this is so, that this explanation accounts for the evidence before us. But, in the second place, I think that we do not only read scripture by attempting to uncover Paul’s intentions – we have this text given us through the Spirit, and its complexities are an invitation to us. In the third place, the invitations any one passage of scripture puts

before us become even more complex when we remember that we read a canon of texts together: the patterns that I have drawn out of this one text are then both complexified (because we see so many different vocabularies and nuances: the Son, for example, is also Word and Wisdom and Power and Light and Image and Glory and the only-begotten) and rendered all the more central (because we see just how often they may be read from the text).

It is from reflecting on these invitations, reflecting on them in the light of our encounter with Christ and his Spirit, that doctrinal statements were borne. But these doctrinal terms and statements should be understood not only as summaries of biblical narratives, as rules for Christian speech (although these are two of the tasks they perform), but as ways of stimulating our return to the matrices of terms and passages that they guard and organize. Working hard at what we mean when we say that Father, Son and Spirit are of one “nature” is certainly a good. Clarity in and care about our language should surely be valued by those to whom God has given minds? But I suggest that such arguments should always be viewed as also parasitic on, and as gateways to, the terms and statements and passages that stimulated their appearance. We should not forget this relationship between doctrinal formulae and the text of scripture in part because then we are able more easily to remember the true character of theological speech and speculation as a formation of the intellect and will that God’s word brings about. In other words, remembering that our formulae are signposts back to particular patchworks of texts, particular configurations of scriptural invitations, may help to order all our speech and thinking appropriately toward God, toward a place where rational investigation must draw us only toward mystery. I will be spending much of my time this afternoon thinking about the character of this movement into mystery and how it should govern our approach to questions of Trinitarian theology.

#### **IV: The Holy Spirit Who Has Been Given To Us**

What do all these invitations allow us to say about the divine life? There are many paths that we might take to answer this question, given the time we have together I want to explore just one – a path of reflection on the Spirit that opens to us some of the fundamental mysteries of the divine relationships.

As may be obvious, if you want to talk about the Son or the Father, not only do you have a lot of Scriptural discussion of what Father and Son *do*, you also have a great deal of material that discusses who they *are*. Thus, the Son is the only-begotten, he is the Word, he is the image of God's substance. Sometimes we find lists of terms that seem to tell us mostly about the Son's role in our salvation: the Son is, for example, "the way, the truth and the life". But, still, each of these titles requires our reflection and thought, and each may help us learn a little more about him.

When we try to find the same sort of material about the Spirit we find ourselves in some difficulty. John 4.24 tells us simply that "God is spirit", and is possible to take a great many of the New Testament's references to "Spirit" to be simply references to Father or Son as divine. At the same time we find a lot of descriptions of what the Spirit does in the world, but none of these seem immediately to tell us who the Spirit is. Thus, for example, through Luke and Acts the Spirit is at work. Above all, the Spirit makes it possible for people to understand God's will and for them to prophecy by "filling" them. Just a few examples: close to the beginning of the Gospel Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit and prophecies, telling all who can hear that John will "go before the Lord to prepare his ways" (1.67-80). When Joseph and Mary bring the infant Jesus to the temple, they encounter Simeon, to whom it was revealed "by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ" (2.26). Simeon goes to the temple "inspired by the Spirit" (2.27) and prophecies when he encounters the infant. When we look on into the book of Acts we continue to find the Spirit leading, instructing and filling. Thus, in the very first chapter of Acts Jesus has taught "through the Holy Spirit", telling the disciples that they will be baptized with the Spirit, and will receive from the Spirit the power to witness to Christ "to the end of the earth". In chapter two, it is by being filled with the Holy Spirit that the apostles speak and are heard in many languages. All of these texts enable us to speak ever more clearly of one of the key roles of the Spirit and to see that the Spirit is different from Father and Son, but what do they enable us to say about the Spirit's nature and the Spirit's relationship to Son and Father?

Well, turn again to Romans. There we saw the Holy Spirit as that which is both distinct and given, and that which is the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of Christ. How else is the Spirit of Father and Son named? Romans 5.5 says "...God's love has



been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” At the very least this text points us toward the idea that the Spirit is the one who gives us God’s love, but there may be more here – hidden in a question the text poses. The sentence actually breaks into two parallel halves: “God’s love has been poured into our hearts” and “the Holy Spirit has been given to us”? Is the Spirit the love which is given and which is then the fount of love for God in our hearts?

We know that this Spirit gives life – we see that here and in other Pauline texts which speak of the Spirit as simply “life-giving” – and we know that through the giving of this Spirit we become lovers of God and of each other. We see it also in the community of those who received the Spirit in Acts: filled with the Spirit they are “of one heart and soul”. Moreover, not only does the New Testament call God Spirit (John 4.24) we know from 1 John that “God is love”. The Spirit is God’s own Spirit, Christ’s Spirit and the Spirit who is love drawing us into a communion of love: from the character of the Spirit’s mission do we learn of his eternal character? Theologians have for centuries believed so. And thus when we seek to speak about the unity of Father and Son, a unity that can also be narrated as their sharing the same Spirit, we can say that the divine being is a communion brought about from eternity through the Father’s sharing of his being, his spirit, his love with the Son and the Son’s possessing as his own life the Spirit who also shares the fullness of divinity, who himself gives life and blows where he will.

But once we begin to speak like this we are inexorably drawn to confess that while we can and should found our speaking about the divine life in a personalist language of individual agents acting, this language is gradually rendered more and more opaque to our minds as we see the ways in which we must talking of the persons “in” in each other. The language that we thought we could grasp is seen to point towards a reality that shines beyond the temporal and the spatial. It does so, to make the point again, because of the character of the divine love. It is here that we find the divine unity, that we find the reality toward which the Church’s history of terminology and definition enables us to think.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Add something on ways in which this shows God’s determination of himself as communion from eternity.

## **V: The Still Point**

Exploring how the Scriptures speak to us about the Trinity is to follow a path that leads us from statements making use of temporal and material imagery, statements that we initially seem to grasp fairly easily, toward a recognition that such language points us toward a reality of mutual indwelling that escapes our mental grasp. The road leads, in another terminology toward a still point whose beauty we can sense, and whose necessity we can imagine, but which always alludes our intellectual grasp in this life. The language I use here comes from the first of T.S. Eliot's "Four Quartets". Eliot uses this language to describe the true experience of beauty and time possible in the memory that has been schooled in the garden of earthly beauty and come to see – as far as we can – the nature of time's movement. As we see the true beauty that is possible in the temporal world we inhabit we recognize that the turning of the world draws us toward and stems from a point where all our categories are transcended. Thus, by analogy, as we come to grasp something of the divine indwelling and unity that is the divine life, we are seeing what shines within all the many different scriptural discussions of the various divine relations, within and between the various different terminologies used for Father, Son and Spirit. *Within* here is an important word; we do not move beyond that language, we discover that to which it points. Eliot writes:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;

Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,

But neither arrest nor movement.

And do not call it fixity,

Where past and future are gathered.

Neither movement from nor towards,

Neither ascent nor decline.

Except for the point, the still point, there would be no dance, and there is only the dance.

I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where.

The movement of the intellect toward awareness of this still point for the intellect contemplating Scripture's speech about the divine life is not, however, a movement toward a point at which we realize the futility of all our thought. It is *not* a movement that

convinces us Trinitarian theology is merely a fiction. It is, in fact, a movement that may shape the heart and the imagination toward an ever-deeper recognition of ways in which the Trinitarian life lies within each of the actions scripture attributes to Father, Son and Spirit. Each of those titles and actions that scripture attributes to Father, Son and Spirit eventually draws us by a particular path toward this same still point. This is a movement in knowing and loving that the Spirit intends for us to follow as far as we may; this is a movement into knowing and into mystery that is intended when God addresses us in his Word.

But let me return for a moment to the Trinitarian life itself. By following this path I hope we have seen that the unity of Father, Son and Spirit is not a unity that results from the three being individuals with parallel capacities, nor from their being sharers in a particular and prior substance that is more real than their individuality. The divine unity results from the eternal action and life of Father through Son and Spirit. The divine unity eternally results from the Father eternally generating the Son and breathing forth the Spirit. It results from the Son seeing and loving the Father, from the Spirit of the Father being given to the Son. Of course “results from” is a problematic phrase in that last sentence unless we remember that I actually said “eternally results from”; we must talk in time, but we may still know the points at which the temporal fails us!

An important figure in my own communion recently wrote the following: “faith is not a light which scatters all our darkness, but a lamp which guides our steps in the night and suffices for the journey.”<sup>4</sup> This statement offers us helpful resources for thinking about the character of scripture’s speech about God. The language of faith, the language of scripture, illuminates, enabling the human mind and will to understand its true object, God, and to understand the character of our world, its brokenness, redemption, origin and destiny. But this light also illuminates a darkness that lies ahead and surrounds us, for it shows to us the limits of our knowledge – or better it begins to initiate us into those limits and if we rest upon the language of faith, we can be drawn ever more deeply into this darkness. Learning to love not only the illumination but also the darkness is, I suggest, essential if we are to see both what faith is, and the importance of de-centering

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<sup>4</sup> [comment on different sorts of darkness: certainly epistemological, hence we can still say light; but also a certain emotional weight or value]

our search for knowledge into a search for greater awareness of our own failure and our need for grace. The language of faith then is a lamp that draws us through and into a darkness – but we can trust that the illumination it provides is sufficient for the journey!

## **VI: The Father and the Divine Life**

Now that we have spoken a little of the divine life, I want us to think about the role of the Father – illuminating the same reality from a different angle. We can turn first to the relationship between the Father and the Son. The Son has come not to do his own will. The incarnate Christ is a model for us of humility before his heavenly father, and even the eternal Word and Son depends on the father. One of the most interesting texts in this regard is John 5.19-29. Jesus’s discourse here culminates a chapter in which he has healed on the Sabbath and been accused of making himself equal to God by naming God as his Father. As in response to this critique – which is he given by the narrator, not put into the actual dialogue – Jesus relates his mission to the will of the Father. In the ebb and flow of his enigmatic words I would like to point to two layers in his account. First, Jesus tells us that “the Son “can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing”. The passage seems easily enough to parallel famous words found later in this chapter and virtually repeated in the next: “I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me”, and I certainly think that we must take from them the principle that the incarnate Son’s humility before the Father reveals something about what it means for the Son to be eternally who is he is. The Son in eternity looks toward the Father, knows the Father and in the words of John 5.19 “does likewise”.

But note, second, the emphasis throughout this passage on what the Son does and what he is able to do. The father shows the Son *all* that he does and the Son is able to do those things. The Father raises the dead, the son raises the dead. Indeed, it is not even that the Son raises *because* he acts with the Father’s power; he gives life “to whom he will”. Verse 26 tells us that as the father has life *in himself*, so he has ranted the Son to have life *in himself*.” The gift that the Father gives to the Son by showing is one not of loaned authority or power, but of being in himself one who can give life. Both Son and Spirit are “life-giving”, *zoopoios*.

Complement these texts with the perspective found in the very first verses of John's gospel. God's Word is with God, but with God in a manner that enables the equivalent statement "and was God". This gnomic phrasing has of course invited a library of speculation, but let me note only that it conveys a mystery to us; the Word is with God – and thus a distinct reality - in such a way that we can also say "and was God". There is no hint here that we should read this as "and was a lesser not fully divine being" or as meaning "but not of course having the full power of the Father". The Word simply "was God". And yet, verse three tells us that it was "through" this Word "that all things were made". How? Well part of an answer should surely point to the next sentence "In him was life". The Son and Word is the one through whom all things are created, the one who follows the will of the Father – the one who embodies obedience. And yet the Word or Son does so because the Father has given all to him, given him *in himself* the power to give life and to restore life. This mystery points us I think toward the language of loving gift if we are to understand the relationship of the two: the Father holds back nothing from the Son – and I mean this in a deep ontological sense – all that the Father is he gives to the Son. The Son's love for the Father is one of endless conformity in will, endless exercise of the nature and power he has received – but what we may also describe as the endless exercise of his *own* will. At this point our notions of "ownness" and "authority" are stretched almost to breaking – are stretched toward the still-point of which I have spoken.

We can then certainly speak of an order among the Trinitarian persons. It is the Father who generates the Son and breathes forth the Spirit. Please, no more sermons about the divine three dancing around! And yet, scripture invites us to reflect until our minds fail on the reality of the gift or gifts that constitute the divine life. We are invited, I suggest, to ask what it means for the Father to be the Father by meditating on the Father's giving of his own Spirit so that the Son is fully divine, fully his own divine agent – the Father acts from eternity to give rise to a communion of Father with a Son and a Spirit in which these latter two owe all to the Father but also possess all. We are also invited to reflect on the divine Fatherhood by noting how "Father" and "Son" are also God and Word, the Son being the Father's own eternal speaking of what he is and what is to be. God from eternity determines that he will be God with his Word and Spirit,

defined as the Father who shares all with his Son in the Spirit as an eternally generative loving communion.

## **VII: “not a light... but a lamp”**

Meditating upon the communion that constitutes the divine life is in itself a good. I am among those old fashioned theologians who thinks that when God is all in all and the just live with God, the just will be eternally entranced by the inexhaustible vision of God, and so beginning to think about that vision now is part and parcel of training us toward heaven. But how should we draw parallels and analogies between the divine life and our own Christian lives?

One common move in recent Trinitarian theology has to been to argue for fairly direct links between accounts of the inner life of God and aspects of human relationships: just as the life of God is X, so should we be. This move is found in otherwise quite divergent forms. Thus we have, for example, the liberal Protestant argument that “the Trinity is Our Social Program”; we have the more conservative Protestant linking of the relations between Father and Son with the relationships of men and women; we have the Catholic movements of “*communio*” ecclesiology and some versions of what has become known as “the theology of the body”. Now, each one of these receives some warrant in the scriptures, and so my goal in this last section of the paper is not to favor or criticize any one of them, but to make a suggestion about all in the light of my argument so far.

There are obviously enough many dangers when we draw parallels between the divine life and ours. Most obviously we may simply claim too much. The divine life is unique, occurs under conditions that are not ours, and always recedes from our intellectual grasp even as it draws our minds and hearts. But such a dismissal is not sufficient: Christ himself calls us to the task and, as I have tried to argue, the darkness attendant on Christian faith does not *prevent* our speech but rather gives a particular cast to an enterprise that is commanded of us. And thus, we must ask ourselves what mode of analogical reasoning *is* appropriate for us when we consider texts which invite us to parallel the divine life and our own. I do not have a simple and clear answer to my own question. But I do want to offer three sets of related observations toward an answer.

First, I do not think there is much use in our imagining for ourselves a comprehensible model of the divine life in abstract or formal terms, and then arguing that our lives should also be ordered to mirror such a model. Thus we might imagine for ourselves a highly personalist model of three persons in loving relationship and say that our community should also exhibit loving relationships. Such a mode of thinking may involve us projecting onto the divine life models of relationship that we favor and then, in an unconscious sleight of hand calling for those models to be promoted among us. In this sleight of hand there are many difficulties. One of the most important is that our conceptions of the divine life have become too far removed from the mass of scriptural references and images and complexities that we should call to mind when Christ says “as we are one”. We are rather projecting upon God a model that we favor and then, having seemingly given it divine sanction, we demand the same model be ours as human beings! Another difficulty is that thinking about the relationship between the divine life and ours *as if* we were dealing with two distinct and separated entities is a mistake. The divine unity that we seek to emulate or the love that the persons show to each other is already here among us and in us. If we are baptized we are in Christ, we have received Christ’s Spirit and hence Christ and the Father also. Somehow the life of the Church already shows us what we so easily take to be conceived only in an act of the imagination reaching up into the heavens.

To explore a little further what I think I am trying to say here, let me offer a second set of observations. It is, I suggest, also a mistake to think about the relationship between the divine life and ours without recognizing that we, now, are always only growing toward the unity that Christ tells us will be ours. The analogies that we offer are always offered in faith and to form hope and love. They are always analogies to aid the journey. And thus, I suspect we must draw such analogies with the intention that they illuminate our failure and our need. We fail both to undertake that to which Christ commands us if we are to manifest him to the world, and we fail to recognize that the unity we seek to exhibit, to own, is already at work within us. Our need to is to accept the slow reformation of mind and heart through grace that is constantly offered us; our need is to recognize that the life of the Church that is ours is a life in which the divine life is already at work. Resting in this body and attending to the ways in which God acts

among us through Son and Spirit is the context in which our most important learning occurs. It is here that the intellect is humbled and in being humbled it soars.

My third set of observations concerns the content of the analogies we *can* draw between aspects of the divine life and our own. If I am right about the importance of turning to the different range of scriptural passages that draw us toward such analogies, and meditating upon them, what may we say about the overall character of such analogies? Is there a primary focus to the analogies Scripture draws us toward? Yes, I think there is. In each case that I can think of, Scripture invites us to meditate on the priority of love as the constitutive feature of what it is to be a divine person in relationship. Whether we attend to the unity of Father and Son, to the manner in which the Father shows all to the Son, or to the complex parallels between the Spirit as the love of God and the gift that draws us into unity, in every case the reality that we are drawn to contemplate is that of an absolute and eternal self-giving love. But note two further and fundamental dimensions of this love. In the first place, this love is something that we can only move toward contemplating because each of the divine three *is* this love from eternity and from the Father's gift. This love will always escape our grasp. We should be, I suggest, very wary of describing the content of particular divine relationships in order to make our analogies too clear, too fixed; doing so might hide from our minds and hearts the manner in which our expectations are always transcended by the depth of the mutual gift that constitutes the divine unity. And yet, when we attend to these relationships well we see that we are drawn into them, that they ground our lives as created beings and as Christians. And thus we may perhaps find ourselves not simply imagining the life of God "out there" and wondering how we might emulate that which seems impossibly different; but we must also be drawn to reflect on how the Christian life reveals (and hides) the process of our being drawn into one as Father and Son (and Spirit) are one.<sup>5</sup>

Allow me to end by preaching again against the most common misunderstanding of the mind's failure to comprehend God's life. The mode of reflecting on the divine life that I have spent so much time on in this lecture, thinking from what may seem clear

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<sup>5</sup> [develop idea of priority of the theological/ecclesial symbolic order here over the natural?]



statements toward the still point that is the divine unity, is essential in our analogical thought because it reflects God's mode of address to us. Reaching a point in our reflections at which the divine life seems to have receded before our grasp, is not to reach a point of failure. In part, it is not because along the way toward that still point, paths and parameters for further thought will have been sketched and stimulated. But in the largest part, this is not failure, because this is to follow the path into the divine mystery that God's word himself opened up for us as he spoke through his person and through the writers of scripture.