

## Catechism & Theology Course

Session III, Class VII

2/27/24

“...And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Creator of life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke through the prophets.”

- From the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed

““God’s name is not known; it is wondered at.”

- St. Gregory of Nyssa

“Life begins with the Trinity, and its end and aim is the Trinity.”

- Unknown, from 13<sup>th</sup> Century Coptic Manuscript

“Between Trinity and hell there lies no other choice.”

- Vladimir Lossky

## The Holy Trinity & Personhood

(Summary of Bishop Kallistos Ware’s “The Human Person as an Icon of The Trinity,” from *Sobornost* Vol. 8 no. 2, 1986)

“‘One-in-Three’: Does it make any difference?”

- Doctrine of the Holy Trinity has something to do with us- *who* and *how* we are
- Doctrine of Holy Trinity has consequences for *my* personhood

“Christians, for all their orthodox profession of faith in the Trinity, are almost just ‘monotheist’ in their actual religious experience. One might almost dare to affirm that if the doctrine of the Trinity were to be erased as false, most religious literature could be preserved almost unchanged throughout the process.”

- Karl Rahner, ‘Remarks in the Dogmatic Treatise “De Deo”, Theological Investigations, vol iv (London 1966), p. 38 ... on the neglect of the Trinity in the West
- Trinity is a mystery; Usually articulated apophatically
- Best way to understand is in “doxology” and “silence”
- Can never be understood exhaustively, because it leads to darkness of God
- Revealed for our understanding
- Reveals something about us

## “God as Communion”

God is not an abstraction, but discloses Himself in specific way and at definite moments.

- What is the inner logic of the doctrine of the Trinity, its coherence, its basic information, and what are the moral and spiritual implications? ... consists of thinking of God in terms of mutual love.

### I. Basil the Great, from *On the Holy Spirit*

- Thinks in terms of *koinonia*, communion, fellowship (different from St. Athanasius who thinks in terms of *homoousios*, substance or essence)
- Cappadocians think in terms of unity of communion of persons or *hypostaseis*

“The unity of God lies in the communion (koinonia) of the Godhead.”

- Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*

- God is social, conciliar. He is community

### II. Augustine of Hippo, from *De Trinitate*

- Different than the Cappadocians, he thinks in upon a shared essence

“The divinity [...] is the unity of the Trinity.”

- Augustine of Hippo, *De Trin.*

- Likens the three divine *hypostaseis* to the various faculties or aspects of the single human being: most notably to the mind, its knowledge of itself, and its love of itself- also to memory, understanding, and will
- Uni-personal model
- All acknowledge the shortcomings of any model
- He also puts forward an analogy of love which is to be understood in an interpersonal way: Love implies three things, lover (*amans*), the object that is loved (*quod amatur*), and the love (*amor*) passing reciprocally between lover and beloved
- In this example Father is Lover, the Son is the Beloved, and the Holy Spirit as the bond of love uniting them
- Two defects present themselves however: 1) Though Augustine is not a Filioquist, this does lend itself to a double procession doctrine of *filioque*, and 2) it depersonalizes the Holy Spirit
- It has disadvantage of being bi-personal and not tri-personal
- But does possess virtue of thinking in terms of mutual love

### III. Richard of St. Victor, from *De Trinitate*

- Mutual love in a triadic fashion better worked out

- Begins with the fact of God as love
- Love is the perfection of human nature and the highest reality of personal experience, it expresses better than anything else the perfection of the divine nature
- But self-love is not true love. Love is gift and exchange and so to be present in its fullness needs to be mutual.
- Can only exist in plurality of persons
- This is the case with humans and with God: both are characterized by sharing and communion of love
- If God is love, it is impossible that should be merely one person loving himself
- Love must not only be 'mutual,' but 'shared'
- Richard sees God as Cappadocians do in terms of interpersonal community. In his argument there is a movement from self-love (the Father alone) to mutual love (Father and Son), and so to shared love (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).
- Admits limits of this analogy – this is still a mystery 'above your understanding'
- Thomas Aquinas objected to Richard's analogy of shared love- saying God is perfect within Himself and needs no fellow for perfection and self-fulfillment. He believes that necessity of love implies a lack or deficiency. Seems to be Neoplatonic, static transcendent, only contemplative
- Aquinas characterizing love as deficient brings to mind Plato's *Symposium* argument about *eros* as offspring of poverty and resourcefulness
- Richard's analogy closer to the spirit of Scripture
- Richard sees love not as an effort to acquire what one lacks, but as an attitude of self-giving
- His doctrine of Trinity is a way of saying that God's eternal being is self-giving

*"The 'social' doctrines and its critics"*

There is a social aspect and consequence of this doctrine; this involves thinking of God in terms of *life* rather than *substance* (of life and love)

God is love: not self-love, the love of one isolated, turned in upon himself, but mutual love that is exchanged and shared.

"The being of God is a relational being."

- Metropolitan John Zizoulas of Pergamos

- God is not personal, but interpersonal. Not a unit, but a union; not a lonely God.
- He is a *koinonia* of three persons, coeternal, coequal
- The divine simplicity is a complex simplicity
- Each person of Trinity- unlike our personhood in a fallen world- is entirely open to the others, transparent and receptive
- Summed up as *perichoresis* (cyclical movement, or round dance), in English 'co-inheritance'
- Applied to Christ, the term signifies that his two natures, the divine and the human, interpenetrate one another without separation and without confusion. Applied to the

Trinity it signifies that each person ‘contains’ the other two and ‘moves’ within them. In the words of St. Gregory of Nyssa, “All that is the Father’s is seen in the Son, and all that is the Son’s belongs also to the Father. For the who Son abides in the Father, and He has in turn the whole Father abiding in Himself.”

- By virtue of *perichoresis* Father, Son, and Holy Spirit co-inhere in one another, each dwelling in the other two through an unceasing movement of mutual love
- And we too, enter into this divine dialogue in prayer!
- When we pray it is not we who pray, but God (God the Trinity) Who is praying in us
- By Christ, we too become sons
- Such is the significance of the Trinity. God is love- not self-love but mutual shared love. God is exchange, self-giving, solidarity.
- A few remarks on the limitations in English of “person” as lends itself to tri-theism and on “being” as lends itself to modalism
- All theology is ‘saying and unsaying to a positive effect’

“*The human person as communion*”

“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness”

- Genesis 1:26

- Sts. Justin, Theophilus, Irenaeus and others say this is God as Trinity taking council on creating us in His image
- The making of a human as a conciliar act from shared love
- Even between man and woman reflecting ‘relational image’
- Only within an interpersonal community can the triune likeness be properly realized
- If human beings are made in the image of the Trinitarian God, then all that was said earlier about God as Trinity is also to be affirmed of the human person
- Because God is a relational being, the human person in God’s image is also relational
- We are who we are only in relation to other persons
- Selfhood is social, or it is nothing
- To be human is to share: Dostoevsky’s story of the old woman and the onion
- Not only at the Eucharist only but throughout the entire liturgy of human life we offer ‘in all and for all’
- Individual vs. person
- The shared love of the Trinity is an outgoing, self-giving love.
- Divine *eros* is ecstatic
- Self-giving also signifies *sacrifice*
- Mutual love after the likeness of the Trinity is *kenotic*, suffering love

*“Sacrificial love”*

Mutual outgoing love of the Trinity, expressed in the creation of the human person, is at the same time a sacrificial love

In solidarity with the world, God the Trinity takes responsibility for all the consequences of the act of creation

“There was a cross in the heart of God before there was one planted outside of Jerusalem”

- Fr. Lev Gillet

When God the Trinity willed the creation of humanity, this was by an act that was already sacrificial

To be human, after the image and likeness of God the Holy Trinity, means to love others with a love that is costly and sacrificial

Without *kenosis* and cross-bearing without the exchange of substituted love and all the voluntary suffering which this involves, there can be no likeness to the Trinity

“Let us love one another, that with one mind we may confess: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Trinity consubstantial and undivided.”

- Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

Either we love others, after the image of God the Trinity, or we condemn ourselves.