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The Significance of the Trinitarian Theology for the Life and the Mission of the Church

The speech of His Beatitude Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, addressed at the Symposium “God the Father and the Life of the Holy Trinity”, Bucharest, October 17th, 2009

Abstract

The profound sensitiveness of Orthodoxy for the Mystery of the Holy Trinity is, in fact, sensitiveness for the specificity of Christian Revelation. The revelation of Christ in His incarnation does not reveal Him as a singular Person, but as a divine Person in communion with other two divine Persons: in relation to the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The Trinitarian revelation shows that ultimately the truth, life and unity in God are identical with koinonia/communion. The Father and the Son sent the Spirit into the world in order that the Son may reveal to the world the love of the Father for it and the future action of the Spirit, Who by His personal dwelling in the believers enables

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them to participate in the eternal love and glory which unite the Father and the Son.

In this perspective, the author emphasizes that the differentiated, yet indivisible action of the three distinct and inseparable divine Persons, revealed through the mystery of the incarnation of Christ is present in the whole economy of salvation and consequently in the whole life of the Church, pointing to the Kingdom of God as being the Kingdom of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The fact that all the Sacraments in the Orthodox Church begin with the formula: "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" shows that the entire sacramental life is an introduction and an immersion into the Trinitarian communion and at the same time an abiding of the Trinitarian life within us. But, within the Church, one cannot separate the sacramental life from the everyday life or from ministry or from mission. For, within the Church, there should be a interdependence between persons and structures, as an icon of the mutual dwelling of each divine Person in the others (perichoresis) within the Trinitarian communion.

Keywords

Trinity, Revelation, mission, sacramental life, Church

For the Orthodox Christian, the Holy Trinity is the source, the starting point and the ultimate goal of the entire theology and spirituality, of the entire anthropology and ecclesiology, of the entire understanding of the world and of the existence.

The profound sensitiveness of Orthodoxy for the Mystery of the Holy Trinity is, in fact, sensitiveness for the specificity of Christian Revelation. The revelation of the Holy Trinity in the incarnation of Christ does not reveal Himself as a singular Person, but as a divine Person in relation with other two divine Persons: in relation to the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Father and the Holy Spirit not only confirm the very identity of Jesus Christ as being the only-begotten, eternal Son of the Father, upon Whom rests the Holy Spirit (Mt 3.16-17 and par.; Jn 1.29-34), but They are also united with the Son, co-operating permanently with Him, being present in Him even in or from the very moment of the Son's incarnation, although the Son alone became man (Lk 1.35).

This differentiated, yet indivisible action of the three distinct and inseparable divine Persons, revealed through the mystery of the

incarnation of Christ is in fact present in the whole economy of salvation and consequently in the whole life of the Church, pointing to the Kingdom of God as being the Kingdom of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This life and activity of the Holy Trinity is an eternal and perfect communion of love, a permanent movement of mutual and fully free self-offering of each Person to the others and of all of Them to the world (Jn 10.17-18, 17.4; Phil 2.6-11; Hebr 9.14).

The Trinitarian revelation shows that ultimately the truth, life and unity in God are identical with *koinonia*/communion¹. The Father and the Son send the Spirit into the world (Lk 4.18), Who by His personal dwelling in the believers enables them to participate in the eternal love and glory which unite the Father and the Son (Jn 14.15-26, 15.26, 16.14-15). It is precisely by the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in those who believe in Christ that they can truly confess Jesus Christ as Lord (1 Cor 12.3) and call God "Abba, Father!" (Rom 8.15-16), for the Spirit alone knows and declares all that the Father possesses and has given to the Son (Jn 16.13-15).

The fact that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father (Jn 15.26) and rests upon the Son, or is received by the Son from the Father (Jn 1.32; Lk 4.18; Acts 2.32-33), allows Him to be called the Spirit of God the Father (1 Cor 2.12, 3.16) and the Spirit of His Son or the Spirit of Christ (Gal 4.6; Rom. 8.9). Since the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, He is called the Spirit of God, but He is also called the Spirit of the Son since He is received by the Son and sent by the Son from the Father or by the Father in the name of Christ and at the request of Christ (Jn 14.26, 15.26). Being in a distinct manner the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of Christ, the one Holy Spirit bears witness to the other two distinct Persons in their irreducible distinctiveness: the Father and the Son.

Thus, the Holy Spirit confirms the Father's paternity in relation to the Son and of the filiation of the Son in relation to the Father. That is why, through the baptism in the Spirit, we are receiving the adoption as spiritual sonship, and through ordination, the spiritual paternity, both reflexes of the active presence of the Holy Trinity in the life of the Church.

At the same time, the Holy Spirit enables those who believe in Christ to be baptized in the *koinonia* of the one Body of Christ, while preserving their unique identity (1 Cor 12.13) and helping them to have access to the Father (Eph 2.18) and to live within the world as adopted sons and daughters of the Father, *receiving the same glorious gifts which the Risen Jesus Christ received from the Father* (Rom 8.14-18). These gifts of the

¹ Siehe auch D. Ciobotea, Trinity, in N. Lossky (ed.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (2nd edition, Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), pp. 1150-1153.

Father are communicated by the Spirit to those who believe in Christ in order that they may become like His Son, so that the Son should be the first born among many brothers and sisters (Rom 8.29). Those who receive the Holy Spirit know the love of the Father as the Son knows it (Jn 17.25). In this way the Holy Spirit builds up Church life and communion through the participation of human beings in the life and *koinonia* of the Holy Trinity.

The fact that all the Sacraments in the Orthodox Church begin with the formula: “*Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*” shows that the entire sacramental life is an introduction and an immersion into the Trinitarian communion and at the same time an abiding of the Trinitarian life within us.

For this reason, the apostolic Church *early identified baptism with sharing in the mystery of the cross and Resurrection of Christ* (Rom 6.3-4), *and in the eternal Trinitarian communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit* (Mt 28.19). This experience of the living presence of the Holy Trinity in Church life was, to early Christians, so deep and self-evident that they could easily grasp the fact that “*the Church is full of Trinity*” (Origen).

But, within the Church, one cannot separate the sacramental life from the everyday life or from ministry or from mission. That is why the sacramental life should not be separated from Church’s structures. Within the Church, what is juridical is Christian insofar as it makes transparent its sacramental and spiritual dimension, or the theological and Trinitarian one.

In order to achieve this, a whole and right faith is necessary as well as a permanent deepening of the spiritual life (spiritualization). For it is not enough to have Trinitarian structures (synodal, collegial), if there is no Christian life in the Holy Spirit or in the Spirit of the Holy Trinity. The lack of spiritual life impedes in practice the Trinitarian transparency of Church structures. For, within the Church, there should be a mutual dependence, between persons and structures, as an icon of the *mutual dwelling* of each divine Person in the others (*perichoresis*) within the Trinitarian communion.

For this reason, when Jesus speaks about the unity of the Church and prays for it, He does not give as example for this unity either the Roman Empire, or the Greek Republic, or any other form of political or social organisation, but the inter- and intra-personal relations within the Holy Trinity.

Jesus’ words are quoted very often: *omnes sint unum (that they all may be one)*, but not enough attention is paid to *how* or *in which way* that unity ought to be realised; the model of the Trinitarian life is, in fact, the one to

be followed: *“As Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee.”* Jesus’ prayer for the unity of the Church shows that the Trinity is not only a model for the life of the Church, but also its source and aim: *“that they may be one in Us”*.

Thus, the eternal communion of the distinct Persons of the same essence becomes the foundation, the ultimate source, strength and model for the Church (Jn 17.21-23) and points to the final communion in the glorious Kingdom of God, when the whole of creation will be renewed and united in God (Rev 21.1-4).

In the light of this unity revealed by Christ to His disciples and communicated to the Church by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Church Fathers consider the mysterious plural of the book of Genesis - *“Let Us make man in Our image after Our likeness”* (1.26) - as a project of God which anticipates the eschatological unity of all humankind in God. In this respect, the patristic doctrine of the Trinity, as expressed in the formulas of the ecumenical councils and in the sacramental life of the patristic Church, has a permanent ecumenical significance precisely, because it bears witness to the living apostolic faith that continues throughout the centuries, representing in itself a doxology directed to the Trinitarian communion present in the life of the Church.

In conclusion, we may assert that the spiritual and theological deepening of the dogma of the Trinity by contemporary theology offers a new basis for re-discovering the mystery of the *Most Holy Trinity as the source, model and ultimate goal of the life and the mission of the Church.*