

The Mystery of the Holy Trinity

God is the only eternal Being. Beyond time, space, and all limitations, He abides without a beginning and without an end. “Thou hast no beginning,” says the Ethiopian priest who celebrates the Anaphora of St. John in prayer, “but Thou bringest all things to their end. Infinite art Thou, but for all things, Thou didst set bounds.”

God is the Creator of all that exists. Having made them all, He continues to sustain them. The Lord is high, says the Anaphora. Yet, “all were created through His grace, and all live through His kindness”. Perfect in Himself, He continually imparts perfection to His creatures. Individuals as well as the entire historical process are ultimately under His control. God is not a passive perfection or an abstract ideal, but a dynamic reality who is ever active in bringing all that exists to the final destiny which He has for each of them as well as for the whole created realm.

God is one in three and three in one. The unity of God is not conceived in the sense of an arithmetical digit nor of a solitary condition but in that of an all-inclusive perfection. So the one is also eternally three. He is, affirms the Anaphora, “three names and one God, three persons and one appearance, three persons and one essence”.

The unity of God is confessed as the unity of Godhead – Melekote as the word is used in Ethiopia. The one Godhead is shared equally and eternally by the three Persons – Akal as they

are referred to in Ethiopia. As in other parts of the Christian world, in Ethiopia also there were men who tried to interpret the doctrine in various ways. There were, for instance, persons who refused to accept the personal distinctions in the one Godhead and others who insisted that the three Persons were three Gods. Both these views were rejected by the Church.

God is eternally Father, eternally Son, and eternally Holy Spirit. “The Father begat His Son without days or hours; and when He begat Him, His Father was not separated from Him.” Beyond time, God is the eternal One. That One is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. No one of the three Persons is prior to the other two in time. “The One was not before the Other,” says the Anaphora, “and the Second was not before the Third.” But “we proclaim that the Father lived with His Son and that the Son lived with His Father before creation, and before the heavens and the earth were made.”

In the one co-eternal and co-equal Trinity, the Father is the eternal source of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son is born of, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from, the Father. While affirming that the Son and the Holy Spirit derive each of His respective beings eternally from the Father, it is insisted that “the Father did not beget the Son to help Him in His work before the world was created and the existence of the Holy Spirit is not to contribute wisdom and work.”

It is not with the Deity as it was with Abraham who was older than Isaac. Or with Isaac who was older than Jacob, but the Father is not older than the Son, neither is the Son older than

the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not younger than the Son, neither is the Son younger than His Father.

The Father is different from the Son and the Holy Spirit only in that He alone is the Father. The Son alone is the Son, and the Holy Spirit alone dwells in us and makes God known to us. So the priest who celebrates the Anaphora of St. John says in prayer, “But thy living Holy Spirit knoweth the depth of Thy Godhead. He has declared to us Thy nature and told us about Thy oneness. He taught thy unity, and helped to know Thy Trinity.” The one Godhead is, therefore, in the Father in perfection. From Him, the same Godhead is received in perfection by the Son through His eternal generation, and from the Father again the same Godhead in perfection is derived eternally by the Holy Spirit. It is affirmed at the same time with equal force that “the Father is not greater than the Son, and the Son is not less than His Father,” and the Holy Spirit is not greater or less than either the Father or Son. Thus the unity of God is affirmed by confessing that the Godhead is one and that the Godhead is eternally in the Father. The Son and the Holy Spirit receive the same Godhead eternally and in perfection from the Father.

There is also another equally important emphasis regarding divine unity. This lies in the affirmation that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are eternally inseparably together. In everything that the Father does, the Son and the Holy Spirit are there with Him; in all the things that the Son does, the Father and the Holy Spirit are there with Him; and in all activities of the Holy Spirit, the Father and the Son are also with him. It is affirmed that “the father, being Father, doth not give orders to the Son; and the Son, being Son, is not exalted; and the Holy Spirit is

equal. Both the divine Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal. But the divine Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, one Kingdom, one authority, and one government.”

If we may put the emphasis in our words, the term “Father” with reference to God signifies the divine reality that originates everything; the Son indicates the divine reality implying all that is originated; and the Holy Spirit signifies the divine reality which dwells in creatures relating them both individually and corporately to God. The eternal God, as we have noted already, is the all-inclusive perfection. He creates all things; He sustains them; and He guides them to a final destiny.

Infinite love, God creates and sustains the world and all that there is in it. It is God the Father who brings all this into being, but it is accomplished in reality through the Son and is perfected in the Holy Spirit. All this is one activity of God consisting of different aspects. Grounded in the Son and upheld and perfected by the Holy Spirit, the created world belongs to the Father. In His love God the Father sent His only Son into the world in order to accomplish its salvation; in the same love God the Son came and worked out the world’s salvation; in the same love again God the Holy Spirit perfects the salvation thus given. All these are manifestations at different levels of the same activity of God in relation to the world.

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