

The Ascension and St Agnes (ASA), DC, School of Theology and Prayer

June 7, Trinity Sunday 2020

‘The Doctrine of the Trinity: What Does it Mean and Why Do we Need it?’

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[All questions are open for discussion! Short sections of exposition or interchange from the presenters in each section will be followed by brief phases of discussion, with questions taken from the participants via the facilitator (right-click the Q and A icon at the bottom of the Zoom screen to open the box to compose a question, then press Enter to send it).]

Introduction: Reprise(s) from last time – distinction but unity in the Godhead: how to do justice to both? *And:* Is the doctrine of the Trinity merely a redundant metaphysical brain puzzle or a reflection on the ineluctable features of our transformative encounter with God (cp. the ‘ontological’ and the ‘economic’ Trinity)? *Finally:* What has the doctrine of the Trinity got to do with pressing social and political questions such as we confront in church and society today?

1. *The Early Development – Two Stories and their Relation:*

New Testament ‘evidences’ for the Trinity? Emerging ‘formulae’: 11 Cor 13.13; Matt 28. 19; cp. [ambiguously] ‘divine’ status of ‘Son’ (Rom 1.4, Mark 1.11, Phil 2.6,11; John 1.1, John 20.28; but see, e.g., Mark 10.18, John 14.28) and [ambiguously] distinct ‘personhood’ of the Spirit: Luke 1.35, Acts 19.6, John 15.26, 16.7. Also note variety of ‘orderings’: Fr, Son, Spirit (Acts, John’s Farewell Discourses); or Fr, Spirit, Son (Luke’s Annunciation, Romans 8.14-27). And, from the perspective of later ‘orthodoxy’, two different NT problems in relation to ‘Son’ (full divinity?), and Spirit (distinct ‘person’?). Now *compare* two different ‘stories’ about the development of the doctrine of the Trinity in the early church:

a. The ‘text-book’ story of the Councils: first, Nicaea, 325 (the Son ‘of one substance’ with the Father); then, Constantinople, 381 (the Spirit as ‘the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father’)

b. The ‘prayer-based’ story of the Trinity: Romans 8 and its reception. The Spirit energizes human prayer to the ‘Father’ and unites the pray-er with the life of ‘Sonship’

Question: why was b. not foregrounded in the conciliar discussion of a.? (Some possibilities: the ‘threat’ of the Spirit in 2nd-century Montanism? The dangerously ‘erotic’ nature of deep prayer in the Spirit à la Romans 8, suitable only for the spiritually ‘mature’ (Origen’s *De Oracione*)?)

Some preliminary conclusions and questions: How can we deduce the doctrine of the Trinity from the NT? Is the ‘official’, conciliar, story of the development perhaps not the whole picture?

2. The 20th-century Turn to 'Social Trinitarianism': Gains and false leads?

The recovery of a vibrant rendition of the doctrine of the Trinity in the late 20th century (Rahner, Moltmann, Zizioulas): its political and social significance. The supposed divergence between 'Eastern' and 'Western' doctrines of the Trinity as intrinsic to this move (now queried); the dangers of idolatry in suggesting that 'community' can be directly modelled on the Trinity; the difference between 'community' (tending to tritheism) and 'communion' (Gk: *koinonia*); the difference between 'imitating' the Trinity and 'participating' in it – as a means of transcendent, purgative, transformation of human projects.

3. Symbolism, Power and Gender in the Trinity: what art can show us about unconscious human projections into the Trinity about sex, power and gender. But why is the classic language of the Trinity still difficult to 'trade in' for something else?

Conclusions: *The Trinity and Politics Today* - why the Trinity is not a doctrinal 'weapon' of religious superiority; nor an imitable prototype for direct political or ecclesiastical reform; but a triune life into which we may enter, though grace, participatorily, at the cost of sacrificial discipleship and 'interruptive' divine transformation of sinful political and ecclesiastical conditions.

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