

The Most Holy Trinity

Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Three Persons in One God

Some of us may know the story of Meister Eckhart (1260 - 1328) who was a Catholic German theologian, philosopher, and mystic. "Eckhart came into prominence during the Avignon Papacy, at a time of increased tensions between the Franciscan Order and Eckhart's Dominican Order of Preachers.

He once stated that, "Theologians may quarrel, but the mystics of the world speak the same language."

In later life, Eckhart was accused of heresy, brought up before the local Franciscan-led Inquisition, and tried as a heretic by Pope John XXII.

Eckhart described one of his mystical experiences as follows:

"When I came out from God, that is, into multiplicity, then all proclaimed 'There is a God' (i.e. the personal God, Creator of all things). Now this cannot make me blessed, for hereby I realize myself as creature. But in the breaking through (i.e. through all limitations), I am more than all creatures, I am neither God nor creature; I am that which I was and shall remain evermore.

There I receive a thrust which carries me above all angels. By this sudden touch I am become so rich that God (i.e. God as opposed to the Godhead – the essential being of God) is not sufficient for me, so far as he is only God and in all his divine works. For in this breaking through I perceive what God and I are in common.

There I am what I was. There I neither increase nor decrease. For there I am the immovable which moves all things. Here man has won against what he is eternally (i.e. in his essential being) and ever shall be.

Here God (i.e. the Godhead) is received into the soul" (Quoted by Rudolf Otto in *Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism*).

The mystical experience of Meister Eckhart leads us to an appreciation of the mystery of the Trinity. Life on earth is lived within the ontic and ontological spheres. On the ontic level, we experience the duality and ordinariness of life. To make sense of human experience at this level things are numbered, colored, measured and classified within the past or the present.

Over and above the ontic or ordinary sphere of life is the ontological or transcendental level. This is the level where duality does not exist. Everything is

one, present and true. This is the level of the divine. This is where Meister Eckhart was able to experience the Divine.

On the ontic level we experience God as Three unique persons – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Our experience of God the Father is preeminent in the creation of the world. God spoke, and the world was made. However, in the creation of man, God said, "Let US make man in OUR own image and likeness" and so a human being becomes the apex of all that God had made and God commissioned human beings to become co-creators with Him in caring for the earth.

The work of God the Son is manifest in the redemption of the world. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him might not perish but might live" (Jn 3:16). In Jesus, the WORD through whom all things were created assumed flesh to live among us, to show us the way to God and to restore creation to God by dying on the cross for the salvation of the world.

The Holy Spirit is the power of sanctification. It is the Holy Spirit that renews the face of the earth and sustains creation in being. Without the Spirit of God at work in the world, all perish and turn to naught. It is the Holy Spirit that intercedes for us making it possible for human beings to be empowered and graced enough to call God "Abba – Father." Human beings can no longer be limited to ontic level of existence but have the innate power to transcend the ordinary in order to experience while in this world, a foretasted of the extraordinary realm of being (Divine).

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity which states that there is "One God in three divine Persons" is the most profound and all encompassing dogma of the Catholic Church. Although the word "Trinity" may not be found in the Bible, yet, this dogma is classified as a **proxima fidei** – it is an approximation of faith. It reveals a truth which lies hidden in the Bible.

Now we begin to understand why Jesus said that there are many things He wished to teach us but the apostles could only understand it after they have received the Holy Spirit from God (Jn 16:12-13). It is the Holy Spirit that leads believers to the complete truth.

The Church led by the Holy Spirit teaches us that "The whole divine economy is the common work of the three divine persons. For as the Trinity has only one and the same natures so too does it have only one and the same operation: "The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not three principles of creation but one principle."

However, each divine person performs the common work according to his unique personal property. Thus the Church confesses, following the New Testament, "One God and Father from whom all things are, and One Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things are, and One Holy Spirit in whom all things are." It is above all the divine missions of the Son's Incarnation and the gift of the Holy Spirit that show forth the properties of the divine persons" (CCC #258).

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is not a truth of reason but a truth of faith. There is no way the human mind can wholly comprehend it. It is qualified as *fides quaerens intellectum* – faith seeking understanding. In the world we understand before we believe but in this divine doctrine, we need to believe before we could appreciate the truth revealed in this dogma.

It goes to mean that Christians are Trinitarian in character - all who are baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" have in essence become an integral part of the Most Holy and Blessed Trinity. Hence, in God we live, move and have our being. We are no longer alone in the world, for we are the product of a loving God, redeemed by a loving Son and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

All baptized persons are not only chosen, sanctified and blessed, we are also intrinsically interrelated and interconnected, hence, when one suffers, all are suffering. We can no longer sit in silence watching our fellow human beings dehumanized by the forces of evil and darkness in the world. Thanks to the power of communication, people of good will are now able to speak out and actively participate in fighting racism, corruption and all the systemic injustices that aim at dehumanizing the human person created in the image and likeness of a Triune God.