

THE HOLY TRINITY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH

“The Trinity is, for the Orthodox Church, the unshakable foundation of all religious thought, of piety, of all spiritual life, of all experience. It is the Trinity that we seek in seeking after God, when we search for the fullness of being, for the end and meaning of existence.” (*The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, Lossky, p. 65)

Why is the doctrine of the Trinity the most difficult teaching of the Church to grasp?

The Church teaches that there are three co-equal and co-eternal persons in one, undivided Godhead, and that these three persons are one God and not three.

The incarnation of the Son of God was to reveal the fullness of God and to make a way for man to be united to God.

- *No man hath seen God at any time; the Only-begotten God, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.* (John 1:18)
- *I and my Father are one.* (John 10:30)
- God bore witness to this truth in the baptism of Jesus. *This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased* (Matthew 3:17).
- *Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...* (Matthew 28:19).

The perfection and totality of love of God cannot be contained in a single, isolated individual. True love demands another. God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—reveals the real truth that, in God, perfect unity and genuine diversity exists. Bp Kallistos Ware: God “is tri-unity: three equal persons, each one dwelling in the other by virtue of an unceasing movement of mutual love (*The Orthodox Way*, p. 27).

The basic foundation of the doctrine of the Trinity is, as follows:

- There is one God because there is one Father, who is the source of the Godhead. The Son is the Son *of* God. The Spirit is the Spirit *of* God. The Son is begotten of the Father (John 1: 14). The Spirit proceeds from the Father (John 15:26). This occurs in eternity.
- There is one and only one God. *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!* (Deuteronomy 6:4).
- The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three co-eternal, co-equal persons. God is not one person who plays three roles (Modal Monarchianism).
- In begetting the Son and breathing forth the Spirit, the Father bestows on them the fullness of his divine being. Each person possesses the same essence or substance. The Church uses the word “consubstantial” (*ousia*, in the Greek) to describe this.
- Each person of the Trinity possesses the totality of the divine nature. Each person is therefore *catholic*—whole and complete. For example, St. Paul refers to Christ, when he *says in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily* (Colossians 2:9).

- Each person of the Godhead exists by the complete gift of Himself to the other persons in an unbroken gift of love. Each person exists in the others. This is the Church's teaching of "coinherence" (*perichoresis*, in the Greek).
- This perfect communion of person is eternal. There never was a time that the Father did not beget his Son and breathe forth his Spirit. God is eternal. See Hebrews 13:8.
- God is perfect love and communion. Where there is no love, there is only the absurdity of death and non-being. "Between the Trinity and hell there lies no other choice" (V. Lossky).
- Thus, the principle and source of all that exists is not an equation, but a person. When we pray, we seek communion with the personal God, who has revealed himself to us. *And this is eternal life, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent* (John 17:3).
- The doctrine of the Trinity means that there can be genuine diversity and order among the persons without diminishing their equality. "Equal" does not necessarily mean "the same."
- What is the meaning of life? It is God--the Holy Trinity. See John 17:21-23.

*There is one and the same person of the Father, from whom the Son is begotten, and the Holy Spirit proceeds. He is the cause of those persons who are caused by Him; and therefore we rightly assert one God, since He coexists with them. For the persons of the Godhead are not divided from each other in time, place, will, occupation, activity, or any qualifications of this sort, the distinguishing marks observed in human beings. The only distinction here is that the Father is father, not son; the Son is the son, not father; similarly, the Holy Spirit is neither father nor son. **St. Gregory of Nyssa***

Reflect

- Find several scriptural passages that underscore the trinitarian foundations of our faith. Use a concordance.
- Write down an Orthodox prayer that underscores our communion in the Holy Trinity. Then, pray that prayer daily.