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MAN'S NEED OF THE TRINITY

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ALL revelation is God's response to our needs. All his truth is saving truth. It answers to the needs of our salvation, of our healing and our health, health of soul and body, of mind and will, both here and in eternity. The truths which he has revealed are not like hurdles in a steeplechase, which are set to test us during the race, but which bear no other relation to the winning post and the prize. The man, well-known to readers of Frank Sheed's *Theology and Sanity*, who said of the Trinity that he 'wished there were four of 'em, that he might believe more of 'em', no doubt had the purest faith and charity, but his words do not express the true Christian attitude. Again, none of the revealed truths is an optional extra, which can be embraced by a few specialists but is of no particular relevance to the ordinary Christian. It would not even be true to say that though all the articles of faith are, of course, to be *believed* by all, some of them are not intended to be *used* or made much of except by the few. No; all that God tells us is true, and he tells it to us because we need to know it.

If this is so, then it will apply as much to the dogma of the Trinity as to any other article of faith. Indeed, since this is the highest of all Christian mysteries, and takes us more deeply than any other into the inner life of God, we can expect that it will have the most ultimate significance for us. One can accept this as true, but at the same time find it hard to see the significance. Then the danger is that the doctrine remains irretrievably remote, something about which we hope to have enlightenment in heaven, but which for the time being has no importance in ordinary Christian living. Of course such an attitude may not be expressed, may not

even be recognized; or it may take the form of a puzzlement of mind, understandable enough in view of the extreme difficulty of the mystery, but which should not prevent us from trying to penetrate into it a little.

On the other hand most of us have a strong sense of the three divine Persons, of the Father our creator, of the Son our redeemer, of the Holy Spirit our sanctifier. We may love our Lord as saviour and head, and not be guilty of the neglect of the Holy Spirit of which spiritual writers warn us, nor of the neglect of the Father, of which we hear much less. All this is exactly as it ought to be. It should be the normal expression of every Christian life. But still it is concerned with the three Persons in their individual relations to ourselves, in their creative, redeeming and sanctifying activities. The doctrine of the Trinity on the other hand is concerned with the three Persons *primarily* in their relations with each other, with the vital interchange which goes on within the Godhead; and that is a life which continues eternally, unchanged and unchangeable, and would so continue even if man had never been created or needed redeeming and sanctifying. And it is not only the outward activity of the divine Persons towards us which is of significance for us, but also, and even primarily, their inward activity. Both have been revealed to us; but the interior life of the godhead is revealed not simply to be an example for us, but because it is the life we are to share. The outward activity is revealed because it is the means by which we come to share that life.

What briefly does the doctrine of the Trinity contain? We believe in one God, one divine nature infinite in all perfections, eternal, immutable, incomprehensible. And this one divine nature exists in three divine Persons, so that the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God, and yet there are not three Gods, but one God. The nature is one and undivided; the Persons are three, distinct but not separate. All that refers to the nature—power, wisdom, love, for example—is one, and must be referred wholly to each Person. The Father is wise by the same wisdom as the Son is wise. The Holy Spirit loves with the same love as does the Son. But what denotes each person must be referred to him alone. The Father is not the Son; to him alone belongs paternity. The Son is not the Holy Spirit; to him alone belongs sonship. The Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son; to him alone it

belongs that he proceeds from Father and Son as from one source. Similarly it was the Son, not the Father, who was incarnate. It was the Father, not the Spirit, who spoke at Christ's baptism and transfiguration. It was the Spirit, not the Son, who descended at Pentecost. Yet where one Person is, there the other two are also. For the Son is eternally generated by the Father as his Word and Image. The Spirit eternally proceeds from Father and Son as Love. And these brief but profound hints in Scripture about the two immanent processions within the godhead enable us to resolve, so far as it is possible, the paradoxes contained in the revealed data of the Trinity, and also serve as the foundation of all trinitarian theology.

The most obvious reason why we need to know this doctrine is so that we shall rightly understand our redemption. Christ appeared a man among men, claiming to redeem and reconcile us to God. But only God himself could do this. Only God could bridge the infinite gap which man's sin placed between himself and God. Redemption of its very nature therefore involves the revelation of Christ's divinity, and without this it would be meaningless. But we are redeemed not only by the incarnation of the Son, but also by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Faith in our redemption therefore demands as its background a faith in the Trinity, demands some awareness, however slight, that God is three Persons in one nature. Again we can say that the doctrine of the Trinity helps us properly to understand the doctrine of creation. God created all things by his Word (John 1, 3), not by any constraint of his nature, but by the free uttering-forth of his creative Word. And since in God Love proceeds from the Word, the Spirit from Father and Son, the motive for his creative act was not the needs of creatures or any other extrinsic cause, but simply the love of his own goodness.

All this is true and valuable. But to say this and no more is to say that we needed the revelation of the Trinity not so much for its own sake as for the sake of other articles of faith. And this is hardly enough as an account of why the Trinity has been revealed to us—in so far as we can know the *why* of anything that God has done. It is not that we look for completely compelling reasons, as though God were bound by any necessities; obviously he was not bound to reveal the Trinity to us, or anything else for that matter. But in fact he has done so; and we are looking for reasons

which show the fitness of such a revelation. Can we go further, then, and show that the Trinity was revealed not only for the sake of other articles of faith, but also, and perhaps primarily, for its own sake?

We are made by God to see him face to face in heaven. But this beatific vision, this life of glory, though it has its consummation in heaven, has its beginning here. It is not something completely different from what God gives us now; our present grace is the seed which will finally flower into the life of glory in heaven. There will indeed be a total transformation, so that the seed seems as nothing in comparison with the flower. But there is an organic link, a growth between the beginning and the end; and the end is present at the beginning, in seed. 'Dearly beloved, we are now the sons of God; and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like to him: because we shall see him as he is. And everyone that hath this hope in him, sanctifieth himself, as he also is holy' (1 John iii, 2-3). We have a beginning now of the life which we will have in heaven. We are sons of God now because we are united to the Son of God; and not only he but also his Father and the Holy Spirit dwell in us. But our life in heaven will be the open vision of the Trinity; so our life of grace on earth contains that vision in seed—our knowledge of the Trinity by faith. Thus the mystery of the Trinity lies at the heart of that seed of grace which will blossom into the heavenly vision. The revelation of the Trinity not only helps us to understand how our redemption is effected; it is part of our redemption, which is also a restoration, a return of the creature to its creator. So we begin to know now, in a dark manner, the same God whom we will then see face to face.

We know him now by faith, and so long as we remain here it will always be so. However much we may grow in our understanding of the mystery, it remains veiled knowledge until we come to the heavenly vision. But we can grow in understanding while still in this life, and the revelation is given precisely so that we should. This involves a growth in our knowledge and love of God, a growth which is also a purification, because it is an approach to the God of holiness: 'everyone that hath this hope in him, sanctifieth himself, as he also is holy'.

The pattern of this growth is given by another fundamental article of our faith—that man is made 'to the image and likeness

of God' (Genesis i, 26). This should be taken not as a loose vague phrase, but as a plain statement of fact. It means that man in some way, according to his own capacity, is patterned upon, configured to his creator; God makes man so that his own image is in him. The image of God is thus both exemplar and terminus of God's creative act when he fashions man. It is this which distinguishes man from the animals. God created the beasts according to their various kinds; man he created 'to his own image and likeness' (Genesis i, 25, 26). But an image is not just any sort of likeness. Every creature bears some likeness to God, in that it either is, or lives, or knows, and is to that extent a reflection of God's goodness and wisdom. But only rational creatures are made 'to the image and likeness of God'. An image expresses the likeness of its origin; its whole purpose is to give back its source to itself, to point back directly to that of which it is a likeness. However alike two peas in a pod may be, the one is not, strictly speaking, the image of the other, for the one is not patterned upon the other, not made to express a likeness of the other. The important characteristic of an image is its reference back to its origin. It follows then that in man, precisely as image, there is a tending towards God: 'we shall be like him'. And we shall be like him, not simply because as rational creatures we image the divine *nature* in our intellectual souls, but also because we image the Trinity, the divine *Persons*.

How? As we have seen, revelation speaks of the processions of the divine Persons in terms of the activities of intellect and will, and this points directly to the trinity in the human soul. For although God is utterly transcendent, there is some likeness of kind between the divine and human trinities; and indeed it is precisely because man is image that we can (and must) speak of the divine Persons in these terms. God, who is infinite intellect, utters his perfect Word, which wholly expresses himself, which is therefore in every respect the image of himself, possessing the same nature. Father and Son differ only in that whereas the Son possesses the divine nature as received from his Father, the Father possesses that same nature as received from none. And just as in all intellectual beings every apprehension of the mind produces some outgoing, some movement of the will, so from God and his Word, which is his knowledge of himself, proceeds his Spirit, which is his love of himself. This is the divine Trinity. In the

human trinity the pattern is similar. In our process of thought there is the interior utterance of a word expressing our thought. This gives us two terms: knowledge possessed and knowledge expressed. These are what St Augustine called memory and understanding. Ideally our word is wholly adequate to that which it expresses, our understanding to our memory. So although the two are distinct, they are one in content. Knowledge possessed is not destroyed by knowledge expressed, but rather is presupposed to it and produces it. But on every act of the mind, an act of will follows, a movement of will towards or away from the object or content of thought. This act of will proceeds from the memory-understanding, has the same object, and is, ideally, wholly adequate to that object.

This trinity in man is seen most clearly when the object of knowledge and love is the soul itself. The soul's self-awareness and self-presence generates knowledge of self, and from this proceeds love of self. So there are three immanent activities which yet are one life, which are one in content and substance, but three when considered in their mutual relations; three, but not multiplying the soul in which they are found, and having in relation to one another a true interpenetration, so that each one is in the others, and implies the others.

But this does not mean that the soul is fully God's image simply by having the capacity for this three-fold pattern of immanent acts. This is the root of the image, but we have to go further. For in all this we have been speaking of the soul's *acts*, not merely of its powers. The human trinity is not properly and fully present except when we are *actually* knowing and loving, though it is always present in the sense that the activities of the soul are rooted in its powers, which belong to the soul's essence. But man can know and love many things. Does he image the divine Trinity equally well whatever he knows and loves? Clearly not; otherwise there would be no difference between sinner and saint. The sinner, whose knowledge and love are set on things that lead him away from God, is still radically God's image; he still has in his soul the human trinity which is created to be conformed to the divine Trinity. But in him the image is deformed, defaced, abused. At the other end of the scale the saint in glory is God's image as fully as he can be, not simply because he has this trinitarian pattern in him, but because he is directing the three-fold

activities of his soul towards God, who alone fulfils and satisfies man. 'This trinity of the soul', says St Augustine, 'is not the image of God because the soul remembers and knows and loves itself, but because it can also remember and know and love him by whom it was made. If it does this, it becomes wise. If it does not, it is foolish, even though it remembers and knows and loves itself. Let it, then, remember its God to whose image it was made, and know him and love him' (*de Trinitate* XIV, 15). The word which we generate when we know God, expresses God himself, as does the Word who is God. And the love in us which proceeds from this word is a love of God himself, as is the Holy Spirit who proceeds from Father and Son.

So when we speak of the image of God in man, we are not speaking simply of another, and perhaps more adequate, illustration by which we understand a little better the divine Trinity. That is one aspect of it, certainly. But primarily what we are doing is to compare two articles of faith, the Trinity, and man as God's image; and by the comparison light is shed on both. We penetrate more deeply into an understanding of the faith in two directions. It is the paradox of two mysteries enlightening one another. For if it is true that man is God's image, then we will not recognize our true nature unless we see ourselves *as image*, unless we recognize the nature of our own soul with its trinity of immanent activity, and see that our perfection and fulfilment lies in the fixing of these in God through the purification of his grace. But when we do so see ourselves, the knowledge that we gain will help us now to enter a little more deeply into the mystery of the divine Trinity, will develop the seed of the beatific vision which is in us by grace, until it comes to its fulness. Then indeed 'we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is'.

