

God in Three Persons! Blessed Trinity!

I'm preaching on both Pentecost and Trinity Sundays over the next couple of weeks. Time for me to brush up on my Trinitarian theology.



It's something I've had to do recently, having interacted with muslims in a multi-linguistic context (try explaining trinitarian thinking when the only mutual language is the waving of hands!) All analogies are imperfect, but I have found Augustine's Lover-Beloved-Love dynamic to be a good place to start.

Trinitarian thought is asymptotic of course – you know where it is but you can't. quite. get. there... And God is mystery in true sense of the word – not unknowable, but unfathomable, if you know what I mean.

But for mine, a good explanation of the Trinity must be able to explain a few things at both the essential level: Why only three? What makes a three-person Trinity perfect and eternal? ...and the economic level: Why was it the Son who became incarnate? Join the dots between the kenosis of the Son, the anointing of Christ's work by the Holy Spirit, the Resurrection and Ascension, and the subsequent sending of the Holy Spirit... and show how such economic observations are *necessary* outworkings (not mere whims, because "God willed it" etc.) of Almighty God.

And so I've often found myself not approaching it from the point of view of the Unity (the essence, immutability etc.) or from the Persons (particularly in functional terms), but from

the point of view of the Relationships. The Relationships clarify the Persons. And they must be mutual, two-way, distinct and therefore perichoretic. And some of them we don't have ready language for, which is probably where angels fear to tread (and/or is scope for more work):

The Father	<i>begets</i>	The Son	and therefore(?)	The Spirit	<i>processes is brought forth(?)</i>
The Son	<i>exercises(?) shines with(?)</i>	The Spirit	and therefore(?)	The Father	<i>is reflected(?)</i>
The Spirit	<i>expresses(?) (as in reveals the depths of)</i>	The Father	and therefore(?)	The Son	<i>is energised(?) is embraced(?)</i>
The Father	<i>processes brings forth(?)</i>	The Spirit	and therefore(?)	The Son	<i>is begotten</i>
The Son	<i>reflects(?)</i>	The Father	and therefore(?)	The Spirit	<i>shines(?) is brought to action(?)</i>
The Spirit	<i>energises(?) embraces(?)</i>	The Son	and therefore(?)	The Father	<i>is expressed (?) revealed-in-his-depths (?)</i>

but even more tightly:

In the	<i>begetting</i> of the Son by the Father, being the <i>reflection(?)</i> of the Father by the Son	the Spirit	<i>is brought forth(?) and shines/acts(?)</i>
In the	<i>procession</i> of the Spirit by the Father, being the <i>expression/revelation(?)</i> of the Father by the Spirit	the Son	<i>is begotten and embraced(?) / energised(?)</i>
In the	<i>exercise(?)</i> of the Spirit by the Son, being the <i>embrace/energising(?)</i> of the Son by the Spirit	the Father	<i>is reflected(?) and expressed/revealed(?)</i>

Any suggestions for better words to describe these relationships?

This relational consideration gives some weight to the Orthodox assertion of the Unity of the Trinity originating in the Father (not some amorphous [and impersonal] divine essence). The analogy is this: The eternal creative Father, eternally and perfectly pours himself out in perfect and eternal creativity (that is he *begets* the Son). In with and through that perfect and eternal act of begetting the Father is perfectly and eternally revealed, expressed, and enacted – and so the Spirit of the Begetting Father *proceeds* in with and through the Son (who perfectly reflects the Begetting Father).

These two relationships (begetting and proceeding) inform the mutual perichoretic non-arbitrary interplay of relationships that I have (very imperfectly) attempted to render above.

In looking at this today I have been stimulated by this piece by Sorin Șelaru: *Eternal Intra-Trinitarian Relations and their Economic Consequences*.

He begins here...

The Holy Spirit continuously proceeds from the loving Father towards the beloved Son, and continuously shines forth the response of the Son's love towards the Father. The Father gives procession to the Holy Spirit in order to love the Son through the Spirit, while the Son turns towards the Father through the Holy Spirit, in order to love the Father through the Spirit.

...which is what I've been trying to express. And he then makes it economic and real...

The teaching on Trinitarian relations provides the basis for the relation between the Holy Trinity and the created world; therefore theological considerations concerning the special relationships between the Son and the Holy Spirit within the Holy Trinity, the Spirit's shining forth from the Son, resting upon the Son, and accompanying the Son, have several consequences for the economic domain.

Everything Christ works, He does so in the Holy Spirit. And everything the Holy Spirit works, He does so in and through Christ, to perfect the creative, deifying work of the Holy Trinity.

...and, with relevance for Pentecost:

As the Spirit, shining forth from the Son towards the Father brings to the Father the splendor and the joy of the Son, so He makes us shine as sons. He embraces us with the joy and the love for the Father. We all are loved by the Father and we all respond to the Father's love through the Son and with Son's love, because the Father's Spirit, dwelling within the Son, overshadows us all and from us all the Spirit shines forth towards the Father.

Which brings us into the picture: By the Spirit, in the Son, as the Father wills, we are *included* in the Trinitarian dance. That's awesomeness, right there.

Which means we also experience the mutual interplay of the Trinitarian relationships, which is the grace of the incarnation if nothing else:

- The Incarnate Son clearly receives and operates in the power of the Holy Spirit (a (F <-> HS) <-> S dynamic) – and we find God, who is the Son.
- The Ascended Son, with the Father, reveals and expresses through an economic sending/empowering (a (F <-> S) <-> HS dynamic) – and we find God, who is the Holy Spirit.
- The Son-in-Session, brings with him all those who are filled with his Spirit, adopted as sons, and sharing in his Sonship (a (HS <-> S) <-> F dynamic) – and we find God, who is the Father.

All of which makes the fact that Jesus is who Jesus is incredibly and stupendously amazing.