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# Worship: The Activity of the Trinity

JIM BUSHUR



## PROLOGUE

THE TRINITARIAN NAME IS THE HEART OF WORSHIP. IT PERMEATES the divine service from invocation to benediction. It is the essence of baptism and the object of praise in the Gloria in Excelsis, Gloria Patri, and the Sanctus. Instead of being glorified in the worship of saints, however, the doctrine of the Trinity suffers today in the classroom. It has been reduced to an academic subject reserved for Holy Trinity Sunday, catechism class, and when Jehovah's Witnesses come to the door. Eastern Orthodox Bishop Kallistos Ware writes, "God is not so much the object of our knowledge as the cause of our wonder."<sup>1</sup> For Bishop Ware and the Christian church the Trinity is more than a dogmatic proposition. He is the God who created and redeemed us. He is the mystery whose revelation gives life to the worship and liturgy of the catholic church.

When we speak of the relationship between the Trinity and worship, we are speaking of the relationship between theology and liturgy. Since theology is the language of Christ and liturgy is the language of the church, their relationship reflects the marital union between Christ and the church. In other words, theology is to liturgy as husband is to wife. This defines theology as the source and life of the liturgy, and liturgy as the expression and glory of theology. Yet this glorious one-flesh union has suffered a divorce at the hands of its children. Instead of drawing her language from our heavenly Father, the liturgy is forced into an adulterous affair with earthly men. Likewise, instead of being the proclamation of God and the confession of saints, theology has been seduced by academia and has become an abstract discussion between academic theologians.

Why are churches divorcing the liturgy from theology? The answer lies in catechesis and, more specifically, in our application of the Scriptures. American Evangelicalism, with its Reformed roots, applies the Scriptures primarily to the individual's life and experience. In his book *Sanctification: Christ in Action* the Reverend Harold Senkbeil writes, "The reader gets the definite impression that the central purpose of the Bible [for Evangelicals] is not to bring us to the cross but to provide us with a set of principles to guide our lives."<sup>2</sup> This Reformed emphasis has influenced our application of the Scriptures. Instead of focusing on the common life of the church (namely, liturgy and doxology),

we have emphasized the lives and experiences of individuals. This neglect threatens to sever the union between theology and liturgy.

Today, the doctrine of the Trinity suffers severely from this neglect. When its application is divorced from the church's liturgical life, it becomes only an abstract concept with little relevance for laymen. Because the Triune mystery is vital for the church, pastors and teachers must again unite the Trinity and worship in their catechesis. I will summarize the relationship between the Trinity and worship under the headings Worship as Revelation and Worship as Movement. However, first I will define the anti-trinitarian dangers that threaten the church as a result of our catechetical crisis.

## ANTI-TRINITARIAN WORSHIP

When the one-flesh union of theology and liturgy is put asunder, both suffer. This leads to three anti-trinitarian dangers, one danger with respect to theology and two with respect to liturgy.

First, theology is fulfilled and expressed in the liturgy, as the wife is the glory of her husband (1 Cor 11:7). When they are separated, however, theology loses its true expression and becomes an academic enterprise. This in turn reduces God to an object of study and to a sedentary being. This is Unitarianism. The Triune God is transformed from the omnipotent Father (who reveals himself by sending his Son and Spirit) into the impersonal object of man's investigation. Thus, when theology is separated from liturgy, it teeters on the edge of idolatry.

Second, liturgy draws her life and language from theology, as Adam is the source of Eve (Gn 2). When divorced from theology, however, liturgy is forced into an illegitimate union with sociology. In this context the liturgy becomes the expression of man and primarily his activity. This again reduces God to the passive object of man's liturgy and replaces the activity of the Trinity with the activity of man. For example, some churches replace the invocation with a "call to worship."<sup>3</sup> Here addressing the Triune God to fill worship with his activity is replaced with a call to man to fill worship with his activity. This practice again flirts with Unitarianism.

Third, when man is the focus of the liturgy, he becomes the goal of the liturgy. In other words, man-centered liturgies seek to create an emotional experience in the individual to hold his interest. One example of this enthusiasm is found in a hymnal that is being promoted in our church. In the introduction this statement is quoted favorably:

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Music prepares the heart for worship and commitment. Music is the greatest mood alternator of all, and unlocks the ministry of God in the untrespassed soil of a person's soul. People love singing. They love being moved even when there is not a song in their hearts.<sup>4</sup>

In this view, the purpose of music and song is to influence the inner mood of the people. Such enthusiasm tears God from the external word and seeks him in the inner experiences of the heart. Luther warns against this when he writes,

To cast aside the external Word and Baptism is surely the true mark and sign of all false and heterodox spirits. . . . They disdain to hear from Him how they are to find Him; but they presume to teach and prescribe to Him how He should deal with them.<sup>5</sup>

And Gregory of Nyssa writes,

We are not to think of the Father as ever parted from the Son, nor look for the Son as separate from the Holy Spirit. As it is impossible to mount to the Father, unless our thoughts are exalted thither through the Son, so it is impossible also to say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup>

For Martin Luther and Gregory of Nyssa, the Father, Son, and Spirit can never be separated. This means that all enthusiasm is tritheism, since it seeks God apart from the incarnate Son (that is, apart from the means of grace).

Yet the question remains: how do we unite theology and liturgy in our catechesis? It is my hope that what follows will demonstrate the glorious one-flesh union that exists between the Trinity and worship. I also hope it will illustrate how crucial it is to unite theology and liturgy in our catechesis.

#### WORSHIP AS REVELATION

Most of us have been raised in an academic atmosphere. We are sent to school at the age of five or six and remain in school until we are at least eighteen. Depending on our career choice, we will very likely attend college for four more years. In other words, our most formative years are spent as students trying to get the right information in order to pass tests and get jobs. The danger in this is that we often run our churches like schools. We turn our congregations into student bodies who seek the right information concerning God so that they can pass the test and enter heaven. Yet, what does this approach do to God? He is reduced to an academic subject. He becomes like a tree, and we, the biologists, dissect him to learn the correct information. In this context, the Bible is our textbook for extracting the correct spiritual theories and postulates. Likewise, worship is a lecture that imparts knowledge about God to those with the rational ability to comprehend it.

What is lost in this is the true worship, which is not an imparting of knowledge about God but the revelation of God himself. We do not enter worship as the actors who investigate and discover facts about God. Rather, God is the actor who

reveals himself to us. Worship as revelation becomes more clear when we understand three points: God as mystery, God's name as proclamation, and God's name as confession.

#### *God as Mystery*

In this day there is very little left in the realm of mystery. Everything is analyzed to the point that nothing happens without someone giving his opinion about it. This is apparent in the media's coverage of the presidential candidates. This critical attitude has also infiltrated the church. God is often treated like a political candidate. He is analyzed and forced into a neat system that has all the right answers to life's toughest questions. In such a milieu the doctrine of the Trinity is not a popular topic because it is incomprehensible and, therefore, impossible to analyze. It remains an obscure and sorely neglected doctrine of the church.

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#### *When divorced from theology, liturgy is forced into an illegitimate union with sociology.*

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However, the doctrine of the Trinity is vital for the church's well-being precisely because it is beyond our understanding. In the trinitarian name God reveals himself to us; he gives us a way of speaking about him so that we can stand in awe of the divine mystery. The hymnist writes, "Let all mortal flesh keep silence / And with fear and trembling stand" (LW 241). Bishop Ware writes,

It [the Trinity] is something revealed to us by God, not demonstrated to us by our own reason. . . . The Trinity is not a philosophical theory but the living God whom we worship; and so there comes a point in our approach to the Trinity when argumentation and analysis must give place to wordless prayer.<sup>7</sup>

For Bishop Ware, if the church's doctrine of the Trinity is to be orthodox, it must be spoken in worship not in academic analysis. Thus the Trinity is to be encountered and confessed but never figured out. According to Bishop Ware,

Faith in God, then, is not at all the same as the kind of logical certainty that we attain in Euclidian geometry. God is not the conclusion to a process of reasoning, the solution to a mathematical problem. To believe in God is not to accept the possibility of his existence because it has been "proved" to us by some theoretical argument, but it is to put our trust in One whom we know and love. Faith is not the supposition that something might be true, but the assurance that someone is there.<sup>8</sup>

In this view, faith is radically opposed to reason. While reason seeks to annihilate God's mysteries through scrutiny, faith requires God's mysteries for survival. The definition of "mystery" and its relation to worship will help us better understand God as mystery.

"Mystery" is rich with meaning in both the Old and New Testaments. In Daniel 2, King Nebuchadnezzar has a dream, and no one can interpret it. Nebuchadnezzar decrees that all the wise men of Babylon, including Daniel, will be killed. However, God reveals the dream and its meaning to Daniel. When the king asks Daniel whether he is able to interpret the dream, Daniel replies, "No wise men, enchanter, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery which the king has asked, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days" (Dn 2:27-28). After Daniel explains the dream to King Nebuchadnezzar, the king makes a significant statement about the God of Daniel. He says, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery" (Dn 2:47). The point of this story is that God alone is the revealer of mysteries; God alone reveals what is hidden from men.

For the Old Testament, "mystery" entails two aspects: hiddenness and disclosure. It refers to that which is incomprehensible to man but revealed by God. This definition continues in the New Testament. The gospel is referred to as the mystery of God. Paul writes, "Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages" (Rom 16:25). The sacraments and indeed the entire Christian faith are mysteries to men yet revealed by God (1 Cor 4:1; Eph 5:32; 1 Tim 3:16). However, the revealed mysteries are not disconnected truths. Rather, they are united in the greatest mystery, God himself. Paul writes to Timothy, "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He [God] was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory" (1 Tim 3:16). For Paul the salvation of man is found in the mystery of God's self-revelation, a mystery that is revealed and hidden at the same time.

This concept of mystery has great implications for worship. Worship is not a time when like-minded people gather to analyze God and his work in their private lives, but a time when the bride of Christ stands in holy awe of the trinitarian mystery that is ever revealed, yet ever hidden. Bishop Ware writes,

These, then, are the two "poles" in man's experience of the Divine. God is both further from us, and nearer to us, than anything else. And we find paradoxically, that these two poles do not cancel one another out: on the contrary, the more we are attracted to the one "pole," the more vividly we become aware of the other at the same time. Advancing on the way, each finds that God grows ever more intimate and ever more distant, well-known and yet unknown—well known to the smallest child, incomprehensible to the most brilliant theologian.<sup>9</sup>

Worship, then, is an encounter with God where we stand in unapproachable light, blinded by its brightness yet seeing more clearly than ever before. What do we mean when we say that worship is an encounter with God? We mean that worship is the place where the Trinity becomes visible in the womb of the church to

create life. That is to say, worship is the continuing incarnation of God. Consequently, the content of worship must be nothing other than Jesus Christ himself, who is God in the flesh. Hermann Sasse writes,

Therefore Jesus Christ, the Word (Logos) become flesh, is the revelation of God in this world. Only in Him, the eternal Word, does God step out of His hiddenness. He is the content of all the divine Word; His incarnation makes the Word visible. The man Jesus Christ is the visible Word (*verbum visibile*). Whoever sees Him sees God as much as God can be seen in this world.<sup>10</sup>

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***Just as God revealed himself by hiding  
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bread and wine, and water.***

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Just as God revealed himself by hiding in human flesh, in worship he reveals himself by hiding in human words, bread and wine, and water. As the hymnist writes,

Lord of lords in human vesture,  
In the body and the blood,  
He will give to all the faithful  
His own self for heavenly food. (LW 241)

And as we proclaim in the common responsory for Matins, "Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells." Thus in worship—the sermon, the sung responses, the hymns, the readings, the Sanctus, and the sacrament—the Trinity is revealing himself in the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

#### *God's Name and Worship*

The most fundamental revelation that takes place in worship is the revelation of God's name. If his name is not known, worship is impossible. In order to understand the importance of God's name for worship, it is helpful to see the significance of his name in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the worship of the church. In the Old Testament God comes to his people through the revelation of his holy name to save them and to give them access to himself. In the New Testament this revelation of God's name continues in Jesus, who comes in the name of the Lord, and culminates in baptism with the revelation of the trinitarian name. Finally, in the worship of the Christian church the trinitarian name is revealed in baptism, absolution, and the word that in turn forms our confession in the Nicene, Apostles', and Athanasian Creeds.

In the Old Testament the revelation of God's name is especially significant in light of Israel's thoroughly idolatrous, pagan environment. As John Kleinig has pointed out, for the pagan an idol meant more than just having a god; it meant having access to

a god.<sup>11</sup> Yet, while all the pagan nations had idols, the first commandment of the Decalogue forbade idols of any kind for Israel. For this reason the Israelites were often taunted with the question, "Where is your God?" (Psalm 42:3, 10). This was a difficult question for the Israelites, since they had no idol. The Israelites often committed the sin of idolatry not because they were so primitive, but because in their culture the possession of an idol was crucial for worship. One could certainly argue that access to God is still the crucial issue of worship in our day.

What did the Israelites have instead of an idol? They had the pillar of fire and smoke, and the ark of the covenant, which had the mercy seat (namely, the throne of God, but, significantly, no idol sitting on it). Most importantly, however, the Israelites had the name of God. This meant that they could call on him and he would listen. Dr. Kleinig suggests that this is the point behind Moses' question in Exodus 3:13.<sup>12</sup> Moses asks God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' What shall I say to them?" Moses asks for God's name not because it will fulfill his idle curiosity, but because it will give the people access to him.

In the Old Testament God reveals his name so that his people can worship him. This is first mentioned in Genesis 4:26: "At that time men began to call upon the name of the Lord." This is mentioned in connection with the birth of Seth to Eve and with the birth of Enosh to Seth. In verse 25 the child is given the name Seth because "God has appointed . . . another child instead of Abel, for Cain slew him." Here Moses points out that God reveals his name to men at a time when the effects of sin are growing ever greater. David Scaer makes this connection when he writes, "God reveals his name to men at the time of Seth so that instead of venting their hatred on one another, they might know God through the revelation of his name and call upon it."<sup>13</sup> Thus, as God reveals his name, the church is founded and worship is possible.

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### *The incarnation of Jesus Christ continues today in the worship of the Christian church.*

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This revelation of his name continues as he reveals himself to Abraham as *El Shaddai*, "God Almighty" and to Moses as YHWH, "I AM." In these two instances God gives access to himself at crucial points in Israel's history. Hence the name of God is the basis for worship in the Old Testament. God commands the Israelites, "But you shall seek the place which the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there; thither you shall go, and thither you shall bring your burnt offerings" (Dt 12:5-6). Where the name of God is, he is present, because there access is possible.

The revelations of God's name find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. He is the exact representation of God's nature; he is God's name made visible for all to see. He comes in the name of the Lord in order to make the Father known as he says, "I am

the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me. If you had known me you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him" (Jn 14:6-7). And John writes, "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known (Jn 1:18)." In the New Testament, access to God is given in the incarnate Son.

This access to God does not end with the ascension of Jesus into heaven; it is made greater. Through the word and the sacraments, all people at all times and places can enter his presence. In other words, the incarnation of Jesus Christ continues today in the worship of the Christian church. This is what we mean when we say that worship is revelation, for it is the place where God's name dwells. It is the place where the Son continues to proclaim the name of God so that man can confess that name and be saved. Hence in worship the divine name is proclaimed by God and confessed by man.

#### *God's Name as Proclamation*

The proclamation of God's name properly begins in baptism. Jesus instituted baptism as his last act on earth. This indicates that baptism is God's highest and most intimate revelation of himself to the individual. Dr. Scaer writes,

To understand what baptism is and what the power of baptism is, more careful attention must be given to the word "name" in the phrase "Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." Baptism is the highest revelatory act of God's grace to the individual because through it God reveals his essence or what he is through a revelation of his name as Father, Son, and Spirit.<sup>14</sup>

For Dr. Scaer, the series of revelations beginning with Seth and continuing with Abraham and Moses reaches its apex in baptism, where God reveals his very essence in the trinitarian name.<sup>15</sup> Baptism signifies two very important privileges for us. First, as a son receives the name of his father, in baptism we receive the trinitarian name to mark us as his children. Second, because we are given his name, baptism also signifies that we have access to him in prayer.

However, baptism is not limited to a past event. It continues daily in the life of the believer as he repents and trusts Christ for forgiveness. Luther indicates this when he writes about the significance of baptism,

It signifies that the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.<sup>16</sup>

For Luther, confession and absolution is simply an extension of baptism in the life of the church. This is evident in the divine service. The pastor begins with the invocation so that God turns his face toward us. It is customary to make the sign of the cross to acknowledge that worship is possible only because God has given

that privilege in baptism. Then, when his presence is invoked, we immediately confess our sins. The pastor, standing in the stead of Christ, forgives our sins "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." This first proclamation of the trinitarian name in the absolution prepares the believer for the divine service.

The proclamation of the trinitarian name continues in the readings and the sermon. Here the gospel is proclaimed, which is nothing other than that the Father sent the Son to die for us and he in turn sent the Spirit to work faith in us through the word. We pray for the proclamation of God's name when we say, "Hallowed be Thy name." Luther comments, "God's name is indeed holy in itself; but we pray in this petition that it may be holy among us also." How is this done? Luther continues, "When the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity."<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the proclamation of the trinitarian name is the proclamation of the gospel. It permeates our worship beginning in the absolution, continuing in the service of the word, and ending in the benediction. Here we depart from God's presence under the trinitarian blessing, "The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you, the Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace."

#### *God's Name as Confession*

The proclamation of God's name forms our confession of his name. Only when God reveals his name can we use it to call on him in prayer. Only when he proclaims his name can we praise and confess his name and be saved. Norman Nagel writes,

Our Lord speaks and we listen. . . . Saying back to him what he has said to us, we repeat what is most true and sure. Most true and sure is his name, which he put upon us with the water of our baptism. We are his. This we acknowledge at the beginning of the divine service. Where his name is, there is he.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, the proclamation of God's name in baptism, absolution, and the word forms our speaking and confessing. Gregory of Nyssa writes, "Thus, too, the Christian is marked by his belief in Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; in this consists the form of him who is fashioned in accordance with the mystery of truth."<sup>19</sup> He connects this with 2 Timothy 1:13, where Paul exhorts Timothy, "Follow the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus." The "pattern of sound words" is for Gregory of Nyssa the trinitarian name—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The trinitarian name molds our speaking into creed. We are to confess nothing that is not the name of God. In the Athanasian Creed we confess:

Whoever wishes to be saved must, above all else, hold the true Christian [catholic] faith. Whoever does not keep it whole and undefiled will without doubt perish for eternity. This is the true Christian [catholic] faith, that we worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God.<sup>20</sup>

For this historic creed, to confess the trinitarian name of God is to confess the whole Christian [catholic] faith. As a result, the trinitarian name permeates our liturgy as we sing, "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."

As the trinitarian name forms our speaking, we recognize what worship truly is. It is the Father teaching his children how to speak. Fathers often spend hours with their children trying to get them to say "daddy." The father will repeat it continually, hoping that his child will say it back to him. When he finally does utter "daddy," the father is overwhelmed with joy. Worship is very much like this. Our heavenly Father comes to us in worship and continually speaks his name to us in the absolution and the word, hoping that we will repeat it back to him in the creed and hymns. When we do finally pray, "Abba, Father," God is filled with joy and all the angels rejoice.

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### *The proclamation of the trinitarian name is the proclamation of the gospel.*

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In conclusion, the Trinity relates to worship through the revelation of his name. By his name we have access to him and worship is possible. In addition, his name, revealed to us in baptism, permeates the divine service. God proclaims his name, which forms our speaking so that we are saved. "O Lord, open Thou my lips. And my mouth shall show forth Thy praise." It is God who must open our lips and fill our mouths with his holy name. Thus we pray in the hymn "Thy Strong Word":

Give us lips to sing thy glory,  
Tongues thy mercy to proclaim,  
Throats that shout the hope that fills us,  
Mouths to speak thy holy name.  
Alleluia, alleluia!  
May the light which thou dost send  
Fill our songs with alleluias,  
Alleluias without end! (LW 328)

#### WORSHIP AS DIVINE ACTIVITY

One of the reasons that the divine service is abused today is that the doctrine of the Trinity is misunderstood. To confess the Trinity is not to speak some correct words about the triune nature of God, but to share in his activity that animates worship. However, even though we consistently confess the doctrine of the Trinity, we often worship as if God were a sedentary object, and deny the Trinity in practice. This happens when our confession springs from the classroom rather than from worship. In the classroom God is the object of our action. However, in true worship (that is, divine service) God is the actor and we are the object. In fact, the divine service is nothing other than the activity

of the Triune God who moves out from himself to make us participants in his activity. It is this saving movement of the living God that I will discuss under two points: the trinitarian activity and its relation to the divine service.

### *The Trinitarian Activity*

The trinitarian activity is seen most clearly in creation. As a result, it is especially evident in Genesis 1-2. Moses writes, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light" (Gn 1:1-3). Here in the first three verses of Scripture we are introduced to the Triune God, who is at work creating. Throughout the Scriptures God is never a passive being, but always the acting subject, the great "I AM."

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### *One of the reasons that the divine service is abused today is that the doctrine of the Trinity is misunderstood.*

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This fundamental work of creation reveals the trinitarian activity. In this regard Luther writes,

The Father creates heaven and earth out of nothing through the Son, whom Moses calls the Word. Over these the Holy Spirit broods. . . . so Scripture says that the Holy Spirit brooded, as it were, on the waters to bring to life those substances which were to be quickened and adorned. For it is the office of the Holy Spirit to make alive.<sup>21</sup>

Scripture also speaks about God's work of creation in this way. The psalmist writes, "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath (Spirit) of his mouth" (Ps 33:6). And John writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (Jn 1:1-3). Hence the work of creation establishes the way in which God moves and works, that is to say, God moves from the Father through the Son in the Spirit. Gregory of Nyssa writes:

We should be justified in calling all that nature which came into existence by creation a movement of Will, an impulse of Design, a transmission of Power, beginning from the Father, advancing through the Son, and completed in the Holy Spirit.<sup>22</sup>

This structure, present in creation, is true for all of God's works, especially his work of redemption. John writes, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that who-

ever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). In this one verse the trinitarian activity is evident. The redemption of man originates from the Father, who sends the Son, proceeds through the Son, who descends in human flesh, and finishes in the Spirit, who reveals the Son to us by working faith. In this way, God's movement to us is inseparably connected to his activity of grace through which he comes to save us. In other words, this trinitarian activity is the gospel. The gospel is the power of God for salvation not because it simply originated with him, but because through it God gives himself.

Yet the Triune God does not come to us without purpose. He comes to us that we might approach him as our loving Father. Paul writes, "And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph 2:17-18). For Paul, there is a two way movement in God's saving activity. First, he reveals himself through the preached gospel. Second, through the gospel we are brought into communion with the Spirit so that we call God "Father." Bishop Ware writes, "The final end of the spiritual way is that we humans should also become a part of the trinitarian coinherence or perichoresis, being wholly taken up into the circle of love that exists within God."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the purpose of God's saving activity is to transform us into a temple for the trinitarian life. Jesus teaches this when he tells his disciples, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (Jn 14:23). Gregory of Nyssa summarizes this trinitarian activity when he writes,

You see the revolving circle of the glory moving from Like to Like. The Son is glorified by the Spirit; the Father is glorified by the Son; again the Son has his glory from the Father; and the Only-begotten thus becomes the glory of the Spirit. . . . In like manner, again, faith completes the circle, and glorifies the Son by means of the Spirit, and the Father by means of the Son.<sup>24</sup>

For Gregory of Nyssa, God comes to create faith, which makes us a participator in the life of God, a partaker of the divine nature (2 Pt 1:4).

The trinitarian activity begins and ends in the Father. He is the source and unity of the Godhead as well as the goal of the trinitarian activity. An Orthodox theologian writes, "God the Father is the 'fountain' of the Godhead, the source, cause, or principle of origin for the other two persons."<sup>25</sup> And Gregory of Nazianzus writes, "And the union is the Father from Whom and to Whom the order of Persons runs its course."<sup>26</sup> Yet we know God as Father not in the eternal begetting of the Son (*opera ad intra*), but in our free and gracious adoption as his children (*opera ad extra*). Paul writes, "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of sonship. In him we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" (Rom 8:15). In this regard Cyril of Jerusalem writes,

For however high the privilege we have received of saying in our prayers, "Our Father which art in heaven," yet the gift is of loving-kindness. For we call him Father, not



as having been by nature begotten of our Father which is in heaven; but having been transferred from servitude to sonship by the grace of the Father, through the Son and Holy Spirit, we are permitted so to speak by ineffable loving-kindness.<sup>27</sup>

For Cyril of Jerusalem, God's fatherhood is seen in his activity of grace by which he adopts us as his own children. William Weinrich makes this connection when he writes,

God's fatherhood is indicated independently of any cooperating participation by another. God literally *makes* Abraham and his descendants to be His sons. It is this prevenient, free, and willing making of a people that we term grace (See Deut 7:6-8). Precisely as the God of grace is God "Father."<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, to say that God is Father makes two very important points. First, God is Father in that he is the beginning point, the fountain, from whom the trinitarian movement toward us begins. Second, God is our Father in our free and gracious adoption as his own sons so that we pray, "Our Father . . ."

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***As the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son is not only the means through which the Father comes to us but also the means through which we come to the Father.***

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The Second Person of the Trinity is the Son, the Logos or Word of the Father. To speak of the Son and the Father is at once to speak of a relationship, a movement of love beginning in the Father and moving to the Son, through whom it is returned to the Father. However, this movement of love does not remain hidden in the inner essence of God (*ad intra*), but extends out to the world (*ad extra*). That is to say, the Father of the only begotten Son becomes the Father of mankind through the Son. John teaches this when he writes, "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (Jn 1:18). And again, "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (Jn 1:12). Irenaeus agrees when he writes,

And through the Word Himself who had been made visible and palpable, was the Father shown forth, although all did not equally believe in him; but all saw the Father in the Son: for the Father is the invisible of the Son, but the Son the visible of the Father.<sup>29</sup>

Here Irenaeus confesses that it is through the Son that the Father moves out of himself to the world and is made visible to the world.

However, as the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son is not only the means through which the Father comes to us but also the means through which we come to the Father. Jesus teaches this by proclaiming, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn 14:6). Later he says, "so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you" (Jn 15:16). Here Jesus proclaims that he is the mediator, the representative of the Father to man and the representative of man to the Father. This implies that to approach the Father in any other way than through the Son is to deny the doctrine of the Trinity, to become an idolater. In a similar way, to confess that God comes to us in any other way than through the Son is a denial of the Trinity. Martin Luther writes,

Therefore be on your guard against ideas that disregard the Word and separate and tear Christ from God. For He did not bid you soar heavenward on your own and gape to see what God is doing in heaven with the angels. No, this is His command (Matt. 17:5): "This is My beloved Son; listen to Him. There I descend to you on earth, so that you can see, hear, and touch Me. There and nowhere else is the place for those to encounter and find Me who desire Me and who would like to be delivered from their sin and be saved."<sup>30</sup>

The Third Person of the Trinity is the Holy Spirit, the breath of God, who comes from the Father through the Son. While the Son reveals the Father, the Spirit reveals the Son. He works in us to bring us to the Son and in him to the Father. In other words, the Spirit is the One in whom we participate by faith and share in the trinitarian life. Bishop Ware writes,

The third person is the Holy Spirit, the "wind" or "breath" of God. While appreciating the inadequacy of neat classifications, we may say that the Spirit is God within us, the Son is God with us, and the Father God above or beyond us. Just as the Son shows us the Father, so it is the Spirit who shows us the Son, making him present to us.<sup>31</sup>

According to Bishop Ware, the Spirit is tied to the Son, for it is only through him that the Spirit proceeds. Jesus teaches, "But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me" (Jn 15:26). As a result, to attempt to have the Spirit apart from the Son is to deny the Trinity, for the Spirit must come through the incarnate Word. John of Damascus summarizes this trinitarian relationship when he writes,

"For if any one hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom 8:9), saith the divine apostle. And we confess that he is manifested and imparted to us through the Son. "For he breathed upon his disciples," says he, "and said, 'Receive ye the Holy Spirit.'" It is just the same as in the case of the sun from which come both the ray and the radiance (for the sun itself



is the source of both the ray and the radiance), and it is through the ray that the radiance is imparted to us, and it is the radiance itself by which we are lightened and in which we participate.<sup>32</sup>

Therefore, it is only in the Spirit who comes through the Son that we can call God "Father." This we sing in Luther's hymn, "Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord":

Come, holy Light, guide divine,  
Now cause the Word of life to shine.  
Teach us to know our God aright  
And call him Father with delight.  
From ev'ry error keep us free;  
Let none but Christ our master be  
That we in living faith abide,  
In him, our Lord, with all our might confide.  
Alleluia, alleluia! (LW 154)

#### *Implications for Worship*

This trinitarian activity by which he comes to save us and make us participants in his life is by no means limited to the past or to the Son's earthly ministry. Luke writes in the first chapter of Acts, "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up" (Acts 1:1-2). This implies that, for Luke, Jesus' ministry of revealing the Father and saving mankind continues beyond the ascension. As a result, in the book of Acts Luke centers on the continuing work of Jesus through the preaching of the word and the administration of baptism. This salvific work of Christ is the work of the Trinity in the life of the church.

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### ***Today, the trinitarian activity continues in the divine service as the gospel is preached and the sacraments are distributed.***

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Today, the trinitarian activity continues in the divine service as the gospel is preached and the sacraments are distributed. This means that the "real presence" in the divine service is the trinitarian presence and, therefore, cannot be passive or reduced to the object of our action. The trinitarian presence acts on us; he cannot do otherwise. That is to say, the divine service is nothing other than the trinitarian movement to us from the Father through the Son in the Spirit. This activity creates faith so that we participate in his movement and approach our Father in the Spirit through the Son. In this way, worship that lives and breathes the means of grace is thoroughly trinitarian.

The invocation is very significant in light of the trinitarian presence. The pastor begins, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," not because he wants everyone to stop talking and sing a hymn. Rather, the invocation is an address

to God so that he will look upon us with favor and fill our worship with himself. Luther Reed writes,

As used here at the beginning of the Service, however, it [the invocation] has the value of an "invocative blessing." As the name indicates, it is addressed to God and not to the congregation. . . . We formally express our "awareness" of the presence of God. . . . We confess our faith in the Holy Trinity, for whose worship we are assembled.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, in the invocation we address the Trinity so that every act in the divine service is permeated with his action. In fact, our worship depends on it. Peter Brunner says it this way: "The human actions which fill the worship service from beginning to end are entirely dependent on the Triune God's filling them with his action."<sup>34</sup> This defines the holy ministry of preaching and distributing the sacraments as a trinitarian activity, as are the prayers and responses of the saints.

The pastoral office as a trinitarian ministry derives from the preaching of Jesus. Our Lord says, "For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me" (Jn 12:49-50). Here Jesus teaches that he comes to us not as an orphan but as the Son of the Father. His mission is to make the Father known, to stand as the Father's representative. This has great significance for the preaching office, for Jesus says, "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (Lk 10:16). Therefore, the pastor stands in the stead of Christ as he proclaims in the absolution: "and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins." The point is that the pastor, by standing in the stead of Christ, stands as the representative of the Father.

From the viewpoint of the holy ministry the trinitarian character of preaching becomes evident. The preacher stands as the icon of the Father; the word he speaks is nothing other than Jesus Christ, the Word who dwells among us. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:1-2). However, the word remains meaningless unless it is received in the Holy Spirit, for it is the Spirit who enlightens the mind and bears witness to the Son. Paul continues, "and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Cor 2:4-5). Therefore, proclaiming the word in the divine service is an act of the Trinity. The preacher stands as a representative of the Father; he preaches the word which is the Son; and it is received by the hearers in whom the Spirit creates faith.

The trinitarian character of the Mass is also evident from the perspective of the pastoral office. In the sacrament of the altar the gospel is made visible for the church. The Father gives the Son in the bread and the wine, which is received worthily by the saints through the Spirit who dwells within them. In this way, the

church becomes a participant in the trinitarian life and is united with her Lord. One Orthodox theologian writes, "Through the sacraments corrupt man, sprung from the corrupt root of Adam, is united with the new root, that is, with Christ, and partakes of incorruptibility and divine life."<sup>35</sup> Thus the service of Holy Communion is thoroughly trinitarian. After the Preface, we sing to the thrice holy God, and then pray:

Blessed are you, Lord of heaven and earth, for you have had mercy on us children of men and given your only-begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. We give you thanks for the redemption you have prepared for us through Jesus Christ. Send your Holy Spirit into our hearts that he may establish in us a living faith and prepare us joyfully to remember our Redeemer and receive him who comes to us in his body and blood.<sup>36</sup>

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*The pastors and teachers of the church must begin to understand theology liturgically and the liturgy theologically.*

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After this prayer the Lord's Prayer is said, which in the context of the mass leads one to interpret "daily bread" sacramentally, especially in light of the succeeding petition for the forgiveness of sins. Hence the eucharistic liturgy emphasizes that we are praying to the Father, thanking him for the banquet of his Son that he has spread for us, and asking him for the Spirit that we might receive it worthily.

The trinitarian activity, however, is a two-way movement. He comes to us to create faith so that even our responses are part of the trinitarian activity. God comes to us in the divine service from the Father through the Word in the Spirit to create life. Prompted by the Spirit, we respond to God through the Son. Peter Brunner writes,

The side of spiritual activity in worship immediately directed to God is based exclusively on that activity through which God addresses Himself to man and offers him and conveys to him His gift of salvation. The Word evokes the response, the gift of God evokes man's devotion to God.<sup>37</sup>

For Peter Brunner, it is impossible to have faith and remain passive. We must actively respond; we cannot do otherwise. Faith does not turn us to ourselves but to the Trinity, where we "live and move and have our being."

The trinitarian character of our response is seen most clearly in prayer. Jesus says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my

name, he may give it to you" (Jn 15:16). And Paul writes, "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of sonship. In him we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" (Rom 8:15). Here the Scriptures teach that our prayers are to proceed in the Spirit through the Son to the Father. In this way the Trinity forms our prayers. The source of our prayers is not the sinful heart (*ex corde*), but the trinitarian liturgy, which fills our mouths and makes us one flesh with Christ. When our prayers are embedded in the liturgy of the word, they proceed as participations in the trinitarian life. One Orthodox theologian writes, "Prayer is not a magical method of bringing compulsion to bear on God, but is the spiritual means whereby man is elevated towards him."<sup>38</sup> The point here is that the Trinity is not the passive object of our responses but the active subject who makes us sharers in his activity.

CONCLUSION

The pastors and teachers of the church must begin to understand theology liturgically and the liturgy theologically. If they remain separated in our preaching and teaching, untold harm will most certainly ensue. We must again discover that the application of our doctrine is not primarily found in the individual lives and experiences of people, but in the common life of the church, namely, its liturgy and doxology. If this is done, the application of doctrine in the lives of people will be profound, because it will unite them into the one life of the church, which is the one life of the Holy Trinity.

The mystery of the Trinity is the source and power of the liturgical life of the church. First, he makes worship possible through the revelation of his name, which gives access to himself. Second, this revelation comes in the divine activity. This trinitarian activity is a two-way movement. He comes to us from the Father through the Son in the Spirit for the sole purpose of making us participants in the Spirit through the Son to the Father. Thus the Trinity permeates our worship so that every act and every word is and must be trinitarian.

Therefore, it is my hope that by uniting theology and liturgy we may return to the true worship of God, which is to worship him in Spirit and in truth (Jn 4:23)—that is to say, in the Holy Spirit and in him who is the Truth, Jesus, our Savior. Therefore we pray:

Triune God, oh, be our stay;  
Oh let us perish never!  
Cleanse us from our sins, we pray,  
And grant us life forever.  
Keep us from the evil one;  
Uphold our faith most holy,  
And let us trust you solely  
With humble hearts and lowly.  
Let us put God's armor on,  
With all true Christians running  
Our heav'nly race and shunning  
The devil's wiles and cunning.  
Amen, amen! This be done;  
So sing we, "Alleluia!" (LW 170)

## NOTES

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