

Heartbeat 2021-03

The Mystery of the Trinity drives worship

Recently, I have been thinking about the Trinity and having celebrated St. Patrick's day during the month of March, it seemed like a good time to share some thoughts on the Trinity. The specific question that I have been contemplating is, "To what extent can and should the Trinity guide and form our actions towards one another?"

At first one might wonder why this question is even being asked. God is God and people are not. And that is a true enough statement, but the Triune God is relational. The Father, the Son and the Spirit are in a mutual relationship with one another, each fully divine, each is a distinct person and yet they are not divisible. They are equal in glory and majesty. This is how the Athanasian Creed describes this mystery. And because God is relational, there are many theologians who appeal to the Trinity in order to propose various social orderings and projects.

Social Trinitarianism, for instance, appeals to the way that God relates internally, between Father, Son and Spirit, as a pattern for how people ought to relate to one another. The argument normally goes something like this – The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father, The Spirit loves the Son and vice versa so people ought to love one another and seek the best interests of others instead of their own since that is how the persons of the Trinity relate. While this sounds very enlightened on the surface, there is a problem. The Father, Son and Spirit are perfectly holy, unstained by sin, righteous in all their ways and people are not. Human sin stands in the way of loving. Indeed, all of the Scripture has been summarized by Jesus in two commands – Love God and Love others – but humanity is unable to keep this law in our own power. To declare that society should be modeled on love and seeking another's best is to call men, women and children to be obedient to the Law. And we know that since the garden, people have been unable to keep the Law of God. At best, social trinitarianism is a picture of the heaven we await but it is unattainable en masse among unredeemed people. Maybe the Church can see glimpses of such an ordering of her members, but, as Paul reminds us, we still do what we don't want to do and we don't do what we want to do. Sin still hinders such a perfect relating of people, one with another.

Recently, however there is another way of appealing to the trinity in order to pattern society. Instead of appealing to the internal relationships within the Trinity, these theologians appeal to the way that God relates to people. The argument goes like this: God is gracious to humanity and relates by giving freely to those beneath him. Therefore, although people are not God, they can borrow the principles of God and enact those in society. Those with power can ensure that those without power are freely given all they need. Again, this sounds nice and progressive. But there are two problems. First, like social trinitarians, sin abounds in humanity. The same critique, outlined above, applies here. Second, the activity of God towards humanity is selectively chosen in order to fit the program that one desires and those actions of God that are not desirable are ignored. For instance, where is the wrath and judgment of God in this social vision? It is ignored. What about the extreme difference in resources at the disposal of

God? Can people draw upon the same unending resources? Such questions are ignored or assumed that all people have access to God without any call to repentance and conversion. Where is the call to obedience in order to continue to live under blessing? It is ignored. God becomes an example in all of these ways instead of one to be worshipped.

All this is leading me to think and believe that the Trinity cannot be used as a guide upon which to model a social program. Quite the contrary, the action and activity of the Trinity towards humanity is a unique reality that sinful humanity will never be able to repeat. In the Trinity internally, we see a picture of love and submission, sacrifice and honor which we yearn for but can't match. Furthermore, as the Trinity relates to humanity, we see how a God of perfection can relate to those who are imperfect and this causes us to stand in awe, be amazed and sing God's praise.

As we approach Holy Week, may the mystery of the Trinity drive you to worship.