

KOINONIA:

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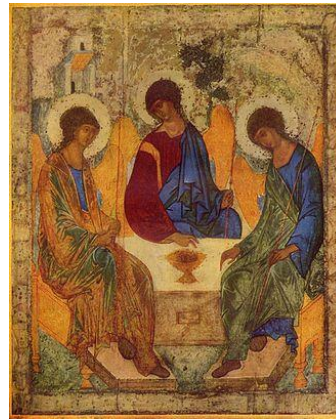
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PREACHING THE TRINITY by Archpriest Eric G. Tosi

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.”

(Matthew 28:18-20)

I had an opportunity a few years ago to write an academic review of a book written by a non-Orthodox scholar on the Holy Trinity, in which he intended to take a fresh look at the subject. The book was well written, but something about it really disturbed me as I delved deeper into his theology. Finally, I realized that despite the book being written about the Trinity and, specifically on the emergence of Trinitarian teaching in the early Church, the writer did not have an understanding of the Trinity from the Patristic sources. Page after page of the book examined the Trinity, yet it



completely missed the mark. The author understood the Trinity in a very shallow manner: the Father was beyond comprehension and reduced to platitudes; the Son was based on the idea of a personal Savior who had no cosmic dimension to His work; and the Holy Spirit was vague and frankly incomprehensible. It was a different Trinity than we Orthodox understand and the Church Fathers taught.

Sadly, this is very often the case when the theology of the Trinity is discussed outside of the Church. Little context is given for the unfolding of the Fathers' teachings, and certainly the varied perceptions of the Holy Trinity in the non-

Orthodox world contribute further to the confusion. More and more people come to the Church seeking answers, and they often come with a quite deficient understanding of who and what is the Trinity. So it is an evangelistic imperative that we spend a considerable time discussing the Trinity with our seekers and helping them understand the relationship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We are a Trinitarian Church, and our prayers consistently and constantly refer to the Trinity. So our witness to these references must be coupled with a solid theological presentation of the Tri-Personal God.

In a world where many basic theological concepts are misunderstood – and where often, terms like “God” and “The Holy Trinity” have widely differing meanings to different people – we must proclaim the Trinity as the foundation of our beliefs and the bedrock of our Orthodox witness. As St. Irenaeus states: *“And this is the order of our faith, the foundation of [the] edifice and the support of [our] conduct.”*

The Trinitarian Relationship

“In every expression of Christian life, but especially in mission, the work of Christ is done with the presence of the Holy Spirit ...”

Jesus Christ is seen in a continuous relationship to the Father and the Holy Spirit. He is the One sent (*Apestalmenos*) by the Father. The Holy Spirit opens the way for Him, works with Him, accompanies Him, sets the seal on His work and continues it from ages to ages. Through Christ's preaching, we come to know the Father and the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, even the preaching of Christ would remain incomprehensible without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, impossible to put into effect without the presence of the Paraclete.

In every expression of Christian life, but especially in mission, the work of Christ is done with the presence of the Holy Spirit; it is brought to completion within historical time by the

uninterrupted action of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit “recapitulates” all of us in Christ. He forms the Church. The source and bearing of our own apostolic activity resides in the promise and precept of the risen Lord in its Trinitarian perspective: “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:21-22)

The Christ-centeredness of the one Church is understandable only within the wider context of Trinitarian dogma. The one-sidedness of the Western type of Christocentrism was often caused by restrictions of the image of Christ to the so-called “historical Jesus.” However, the Christ of the Church is the eternal Word, “the only Son, who is in the bosom of the

Father” (John 1:18), Who is ever present in the Church through the Holy Spirit, risen and ascended, the universal Judge, “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev 22:13). The faith and experience of the Church are summed up in the phrase: The Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit, creates, provides, and saves. Essentially, mission in Christ's way is mission in the light of the Trinity, in the mystical presence and working together of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

*From “Mission on Christ's Way” in **Mission in Christ's Way** by Archbishop Anastasios (Yannoulatos) (Holy Cross Orthodox Press: Brookline, MA 2010), pp 7-8.*

An Ecclesiology of Catholicity

“Orthodox theology insists clearly that the communion of the Holy Trinity is the very foundation of ecclesial communion...”

For Orthodox ecclesiology, the church is more than a community with a special vocation. It is the sign of the contemporary presence of Christ and active compassion in God's world. Against all instrumental and operational views of the church, Orthodox theology insists clearly that the communion of the Holy Trinity is the very foundation of ecclesial communion. The Trinitarian divine *koinonia* generates and shapes communion in the body of Christ. The all-encompassing will of God sustains the catholicity of the church. The church glorifies the three persons of the Trinity as the

unity of God. A deficient theology of this divine *koinonia* will have consequences for the understanding of ecclesial communion.

...In his meditation on his communion with the Father (John 17:20-24), Jesus' prayer is that all may be one as he and his Father are one. This is not a semantic analogy but the affirmation of interconnected ontological realities. A divine communion determines the quality of the human community. The concern of Jesus for all and for the unity of all is part of his historical experience. “What

we have seen and heard we declare to you, so that you and we together may share in a common life, that life which we share with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). John sees the community of the Holy Trinity as a reality which holds together human society and orders common life. The new life is life within the community.

*From “The Spectrum of Orthodoxy”, in **The Liturgy After the Liturgy** by Fr. Ion Bria (WCC Publication: Geneva, CH, 1996), pp. 73-74.*

From the Fathers: “On Apostolic Preaching” by Hieromartyr Irenaeus of Lyons

In this way, then it is demonstrated [that there is] One God, [the] Father, uncreated, invisible, Creator of all, above whom there is no other God, after whom there is no other God. And as God is verbal, therefore, He made created things by the Word; and God is Spirit, so that He adorned all things by the Spirit, as the prophet also says, “By the Word of the Lord were the heavens established, and all their powers by His Spirit”. Thus, since the Word “establishes”, that is, works bodily and confers existence, while the Spirit arranges and forms the various “powers”, so rightly is the Son called Word and the Spirit the Wisdom of God. Hence, His apostle Paul also well says, “One God, the Father, who is above all, and through all and in us all” – because “above all” is the Father, and “through all” is the Word – while “in us all” is the Spirit, who cries “Abba Father,” and forms man to the likeness of God. Thus, the Spirit demonstrates the Word, and, because of this, the



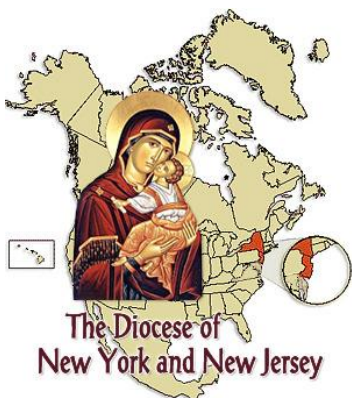
prophets announced the Son of God, while the Word articulates the Spirit, and therefore it is He Himself who interprets the prophets and brings man to the Father.

And this is the order of our faith, the foundation of [the] edifice and the support of [our] conduct: God, the Father, uncreated, uncontainable, invisible, one God, the Creator of all: this is the first article of our

faith. And the second article: the Word of God, the Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord, who was revealed by the prophets according to the character of their prophecy and according to the nature of the economies of the Father, by whom all things were made, and who, in the last times, to recapitulate all things, became a man amongst men, visible and palpable, in order to abolish death, to demonstrate life, and to effect communion between God and man. And the third article: the Holy Spirit, through whom the prophets prophesied and the patriarchs learnt the things of God and the righteous were led in the path of righteousness, and who, in the last times, was poured out in a new fashion upon the human race renewing man, throughout the world, to God.

*From **On Apostolic Preaching**, Chapter 1, Paragraphs 5-6 (translated by John Behr) (SVS Press: Crestwood, NY, 1997), pp. 42-44.*

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The Icons of the Mission

By Fr. Joel Brady, Holy Apostles Mission, Lansing NY



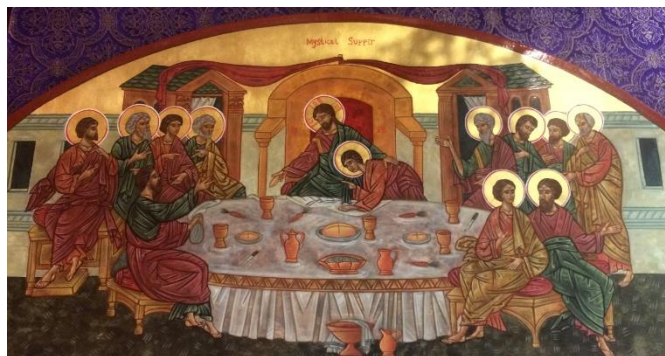
The Church isn't just a building. We've all been reminded of this at one point or another. But at the same time, a building is a real part of what the Church is. About a year ago, as a first step of re-opening, we started allowing people to come by appointment to receive Communion after Liturgy. When we did this, I was especially struck how much of an impact it made on people just to be in the church building after time away. That's not to diminish the Sacrament of the Lord's Body and Blood, which was the main reason for people's coming, or the community of believers that is also the body of Christ. But the building, as the particular place where that sacrament is offered and where that community primarily gathers, is sanctified in a real way, and the sanctified space of the church building is a part of church life whose immense importance was acutely felt in its absence.

One of our blessings as a mission has been that from the beginning, we've been able to meet in a space built as a church. For over ten years now we've been renting an old disused Roman Catholic church.

This has been an opportunity to learn about the beauty and importance of liturgical space in our years starting out, and we hope that this will serve us well in establishing our own beautiful space to make the kingdom of God more fully present in people's lives.

One element of beautifying (and, as I like to say, *Orthodoxizing*) our current space has been the ongoing project of making our iconostasis. The wooden structure was installed in 2013, originally with large icon reproductions, and through the great generosity and hard work of our iconographer Helena Clemente, we've been gradually adorning it with icons. The last icon, of the Mystical Supper, was just delivered recently and will soon be installed in its proper place. This marks a completion of one of our major projects in the current space, which we hopefully can transfer to our new space when the time comes – since our iconostasis is designed to be disassembled for transport.

The iconography in a church is not just an assortment of individual icons. It is that, but the icons also form parts of an iconic whole that is the entire church building. Each icon shows us the presence of Christ, or a particular saint, or a particular sacred event. In this way each icon is valuable in itself and by itself. But all together, along with the smoke of incense, the beauty of vestments, and the sounds of chanting resonating through a well-designed space, with well-conducted liturgical movements and with all the other aspects of beautiful church design, they show us the presence of a whole spiritual reality, in which Christ and the saints and the eternal realities of gospel events are all around us and in us. And this is why even for a small mission with limited resources, it's so important to make our space as beautiful as we can. The grandeur of the ancient cathedrals may be out of our reach, but making what we have as beautiful as possible within our means isn't a luxury; it's a necessity of Orthodox missionary work.



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