

GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION

Studies in the Faith

The Trinity, the Person of Jesus.



**GREEK ORTHODOX
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ASSUMPTION**

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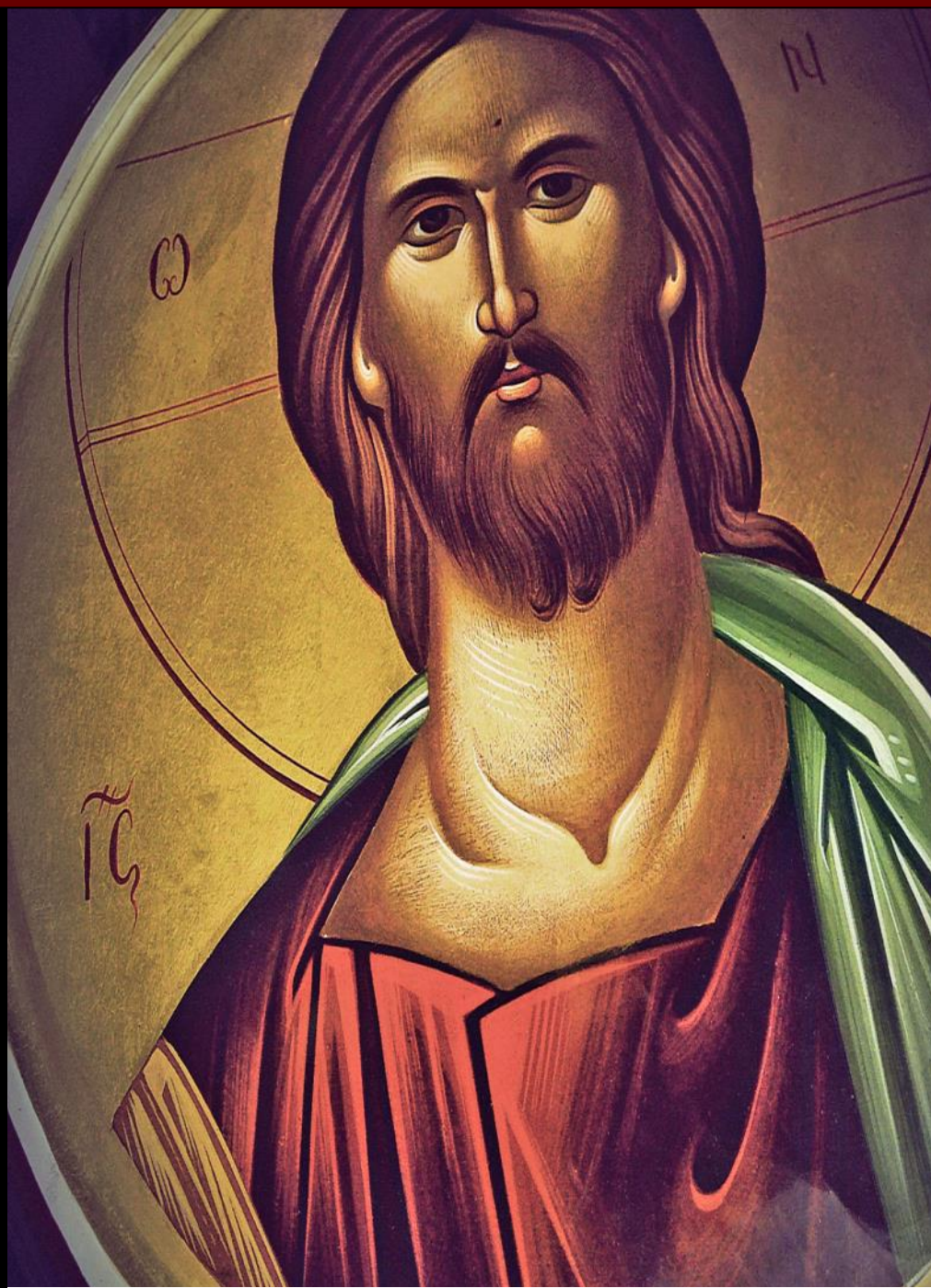
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THE TRINITY, THE PERSON OF JESUS.

“We glorify not three Gods but one Godhead. We honor the persons that are truly three, The Father unbegotten, the Son begotten from the Father, The Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father, One God in three: And with true faith and glory we ascribe to each the title God.”

(From the Lenten Triodion)

READING ASSIGNMENTS

The Orthodox Church: by Timothy Ware, Pages 70-83 & 202-212.

The Orthodox Way: by Kallistos Ware, Pages 33-53.

St. John's Gospel: Chapters 13:1–18:1

WHO IS JESUS?

Who is Jesus? The Orthodox Church believes that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior. He is the second person of the Trinity, the Trinity being made up of The Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is fully God and fully man, who came into history. He was crucified and resurrected so that we may have eternal life with him in his kingdom.

Jesus is the Greek for the Jewish word "Joshua" which means God is salvation. He was named Jesus because his primary purpose was to save people from their sins. *"...she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."* (Matthew 1:21 RSV)

In the Greek, Christ is the word which means the "anointed one." The Greek word "Christ" is the equivalent of the Hebrew word for "Messiah." Hence Christ is Jesus' title which gives emphasis to His purpose.

It is important to remember the significance of the meaning of the name and title of God since in speaking God's name we are confessing the essence of what we believe as Orthodox Christians. We are confessing our faith that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, or the one anointed by God who came to save His people from their sins.

The Nicene Creed also tells us who Jesus is. The Creed describes Jesus as Lord, a word used throughout the Old Testament for God. Within the Nicene Creed, Jesus Christ is emphasized. The first seven articles which emphasize Christ as Lord and Savior were defined by the Ecumenical Council in Nicea in the year 325 A.D. in the face of heresy.

Why is it important that Jesus be affirmed as 100% man and 100% God at the same time? In the beginning, Adam and Eve were made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26). However, due to man's own free will, man fell away from God. As a result of the fall, God's image in man was tarnished. Not totally destroyed but tarnished because man separated himself from God. In essence, when the separation of God and Man occurred, God's image in Man became less than perfect. In order to bring that image back to its fullness our Lord and Savior came into the world to, once again, sanctify human flesh and thereby restore man's fallen image to that which existed prior to the fall of Adam and Eve. This sanctification of human flesh is only possible if Jesus is both fully God and fully man. Our flesh is sanctified because his flesh was holy. If he was less than 100% man and 100% God, our sanctification, our salvation would not be possible.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

St. Paul in his second letter to the Thessalonians 2:15 states the following, "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter." What are these Traditions? What are their sources? How do these Traditions define our faith? A study of the Trinity as understood in the Orthodox Church will answer the above.

In the Orthodox Church there are five sources from which our faiths Traditions were developed. They are as follows:

1. The Holy Scriptures
2. The Liturgical life of the Church
3. The Ecumenical Councils
4. The Saints and Church Fathers
5. Church art which includes iconography and Church Architecture.

The above are not independent of one another. For example, the Saints and the Church Fathers defined the theology of the Church. The Liturgical life of the Church also expresses the Theology the Church Fathers developed. The canons of the Ecumenical Councils regulated the Liturgical life of the Church and the Spiritual life of the Saints and Church Fathers. In essence, the above five sources of Tradition are interdependent and develop, naturally, by relying on one another. Therefore, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they do not conflict. The above five sources are listed in the order of their importance in the life of the Orthodox Church.

Therefore, in our Study of the Trinity, let us first take a look at the **Holy Scriptures**. In the Old Testament, we have hints of the doctrine of the Trinity. For example, read Genesis 1:26. Is the singular or plural used to define God? _____ The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity also manifests itself in the New Testament as well. The most direct reference can be found in Matthew 28:19.

Read Matthew 28:19. Are all three persons of the Trinity present here? _____

What are they? 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Read the account of our Lord's Baptism in Matthew's Gospel 3:16. How is the Trinity depicted here?

Read St. John's Gospel 17:21-23. What does Jesus say about His relationship to the Father?

Read St. John's Gospel 15:26. What does Jesus say about the Holy Spirit in this short passage?

Read St. John's Gospel 16:13. What does the Holy Spirit do?

Read the 1st Letter of Peter 1:2. How does Peter begin his letter?

Hence, even though the word Trinity is used nowhere in the Bible, all three elements of the Trinity are clearly present in Scripture.

Let us now take a look at the **Liturgical life of the Church**. In an ancient document called "The Teaching of the Lord to the Gentiles by the Twelve Apostles" it is clear that the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) was very much an integral part of the Liturgical life of the Church. The author of this document has written (around the year 150 A.D.) *"Now concerning Baptism. Baptize as follows, when you have rehearsed the aforesaid teaching: Baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, in running water."* (Didache 7:1). From the very beginning, all Liturgical actions were done in "threes" to seal the action in the Holy Trinity.

The earliest creed of the Church, The Apostles Creed, also reproduced in its earliest form in the Didache is tridic in structure. This early creed which was recited in the worship service of Baptism (and other worship services as well in the early Church) clearly showed a dependence on St. Matthew Gospel 28:19 (*"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit..."*)

St. Justin the martyr (+155 A.D.) in his Apology also reflects on the established use of the Trinitarian structure of the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit in the Liturgical life of the Church in general. He also writes about the use of the Trinity specifically in the service of Baptism and the celebration of the Eucharist.

Hence, the Trinitarian concept was alive and well and in use in the early Church, although, as of yet, not defined as Trinity.

The concept of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as Trinity came into being through the **Fathers of the Orthodox Church**. Specifically, St. Athanasius (+373) emphasized in his writings the oneness of God, while the three Cappadocian Fathers - St. Basil the Great (+379), St. Gregory of Nazianzus (+390) and St. Gregory of Nyssa (+394), emphasized in their writings the individual properties of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

St. Athanasius defended the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as one God as a result of the Arian heresy. He clearly taught that $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$. That the Father is the same God as the Son, which is the same God as the Holy Spirit. For example, St. Athanasius writes, "The Son is not just similar to the Father, but is the same thing in similitude out of the Father." He used the word "*homoousios*" to define the Father, Son and Holy Spirit of the Trinity. Homoousios is an ancient Greek word which gives emphasis to the fact that there is a generic similarity, a homogeneity, between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That homogeneity is simply the fact that they are all one and the same God.

Hence, St. Athanasius taught, and the Church affirmed and accepted at the first Ecumenical Council at Nicea (325 A.D.), that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one and the same God. However, St. Athanasius failed to affirm how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are different from one another.

Here is where the teachings of the Cappadocian Fathers come into play. The Cappadocian Fathers emphasized the individual properties of the Trinity. They affirmed that God the Father is "Unbegotten," that God the Son was "Begotten," and that God the Holy Spirit "Proceeds." Hence, they affirmed that there are "three in God, distinct as *hypostaseis*" (persons) but undistinguished in "*Ousia*" (in essence or substance). Understanding that all analogies used to understand the Trinity fall short, to explain their position, the Cappadocian Fathers use the example of Adam, Eve and Seth. They are three individuals, yet they are of the same human race. They affirm that God is "...undivided in Three who are distinct."

Hence, each person of the Trinity has distinct properties as defined by the Cappadocian Fathers and accepted by the first Ecumenical Council. These distinct properties are further defined below:

- a. The Father is the maker of heaven and earth and is therefore **Unbegotten**. There was never a time when the Father was not. The Father is the Creator.
- b. The Son who is incarnate is **begotten** of the Father. The Son is the Savior.
- c. The Holy Spirit, the commonality which exists between the Father and the Son, **proceeds** from the Father. The Holy Spirit is the sustainer of the Church and the giver of life.

The Second Ecumenical Council, by adopting the term "proceeds" from the Father, intended to affirm the individual property of the Holy Spirit

Again, the Cappadocian Fathers found it necessary to define the unique properties of the Trinity in light of the Arian, Apollinarian and Macedonian heresies. The **First and Second Ecumenical Councils** affirmed the teachings of St. Athanasius and of the Cappadocian Fathers. It is through their work that we have the concept of Trinity today. A concept developed four centuries after the Church was first established.

The Tradition of **iconography** in the Orthodox Church depicts our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As the creed states, it was the Son who was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary. Since Jesus (the second person of the Trinity) came into history through the incarnation and walked on earth, it is only Jesus who can be depicted in iconography. Icons where God the Father is depicted as a white haired old man are not Traditional Orthodox Icons. Neither are icons in which the Holy Spirit is depicted as a man, Traditional or true to the Theology of Orthodoxy. The only person of the Trinity which can be depicted in Orthodox theology and Tradition is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ since he was the only person of the Trinity which took on flesh.

Please understand, the Trinitarian Godhead itself is a mystery and cannot be explained. The Fathers of the Church, in conjunction with the Ecumenical Councils, only defined the properties of the Trinity. These properties were defined to protect the Church from heresy and in no way contradict Holy Scripture or the Living Tradition of the Church. The outcome of all the above is the Creed which we recite at every Liturgy. The Creed expresses our dogmatic belief of the Trinity. The Creed is a concise statement of the teachings of St. Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers as accepted by the Church.

The Doctrine of the Trinity not only manifests itself in the life of the Church through its Liturgy, the Doctrine of the Trinity also has some very practical applications for our own lives. The Nicene Creed expresses our belief about the Trinity and therefore, gives definition to the way we are to lead our life.

Given the Trinity, we as Christians cannot see ourselves as individuals. The practical application of the Trinity resides in the fact that a person as an individual cannot be a Christian, but rather a Christian exists only in the context of community where a Christian is in harmony with others. This model of Christian living is derived from the Doctrine of the Trinity, the three persons of the Godhead being in perfect communion, being in perfect harmony with one another. To deny a Christian's existence in the context of community is to, in essence, deny the communion of, and the harmony of, the three Godheads of the Trinity. Our salvation therefore does not depend on our learning about God, but rather our salvation depends upon us entering into a personal communion with Him in the context of community.

The above, for example, is why any change to the understanding of the Trinity as defined by the Nicene Creed is so dangerous. To change the Creed, to change our understanding of Trinity is to change the whole meaning of what it means to be a Christian in the context of community.

The development of the Doctrine of the Trinity is not the view of one man, but is rather the consensus of the whole Church as defined by the Fathers of the Faith and the Bishops of the Ecumenical Councils.

WORKSHEET #1

REVIEW

1. How was the Trinity manifested in the world?
2. Do we believe in three Gods?
3. What do we mean by “three persons—one essence”?
4. Does Scripture tell us of the Trinity? Amplify.
5. What do we mean when we say that the Doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery?
6. How accessible is God to us, and in what ways?

We believe “...in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages, Light of Light, True God of True God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father, through whom all things were made.” (Article from the Nicene Creed).

7. How does God communicate with us?

8. As we read Romans 10:9, 1 Corinthians 12:3, and Colossians 2:6, what do we learn about Jesus?

9. What does the word “Jesus” mean?

10. What do we confess when we speak the words “Jesus Christ”?

11. How does Jesus’ humanity differ from our humanity?

12. Was Jesus God and man? Explain.

13. Is Jesus present in the Divine Liturgy? Explain.

14. Jesus came to save the world from sin. What had the world done?

15. How do we partake of this salvation?

16. What does it mean to make Jesus our personal Savior?

CLASS CHECK LIST

- Attended class
- Review
- Read pages 70-83 & 202-212 of The Orthodox Church, by Timothy Ware.
- Read pages 33-53 of The Orthodox Way, by Kallistos Ware.
- Read St. John's Gospel: Chapters 13:1–18:1

NOTES



"An Introduction to the Orthodox Faith"

The Trinity - The Biblical Foundation

Robert Arakaki, 2001

The doctrine of the "Trinity is one of the core beliefs of Christianity. Without this doctrine it is impossible to understand who Jesus is and how God saves us. The Bible in both the Old and New Testaments, from Genesis to Revelation, reveals to us God as Trinity – one God in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Bible has an implicit understanding of the Trinity. It is later when the early Church was forced to defend the Faith against heresy that we find the doctrine of the Trinity stated in a more explicit and precise manner.

I. THE OLD TESTAMENT

When we read the Old Testament we find emphasis given to the oneness of God: "*Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Isaiah 45:5, II Kings 8:23).

At the same time we also find indirect references to God as "Trinity. The Old Testament evidence consists of passages that point to the divine Son of God and to the divine Holy Spirit. References to the divine Son of God can be found especially in the messianic prophecies (Psalm 2, Proverbs 30:4, Isaiah 9:6, 11:1-2, 61:1, Daniel 7:13-14). References to the Holy Spirit can be found throughout Old Testament: the Holy Spirit as Creator (Genesis 1:2), the Holy Spirit as Creator and Sovereign over creation (Proverbs 8:22 ff.), the Holy Spirit as Covenant Mediator (Exodus 31:18, Deuteronomy 9:10), the Holy Spirit as the Giver of Life (Psalm 104:30), the Holy Spirit as the Cloud of Glory (Exodus 40:34-38, II Chronicles 7:1-3).

In the creation narrative we find one of the earliest witnesses to the "Trinity". A careful reading of Genesis 1:26-27 shows the author using pronouns in ways that point to both the unity of the Godhead and the multiplicity of persons within the Godhead.

"Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that Move along the ground."

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26-27, emphasis added)

References to the Trinity can also be found in the various messianic prophecies. The word 'Christ' comes from the Hebrew 'Messiah' which means 'Anointed One', i.e., anointed with the Spirit of God.

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of, his government and peace
there will be no end. (Isaiah 9:6-7a)*

*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness the prisoners...*
(Isaiah 61:1)

II. THE NEW TESTAMENT

It is not until we come to the New Testament that we find the fullness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. In the New Testament we find a profusion of references to God as Trinity. In what follows I'll be tracing the biblical evidence through the major salvation events.

The Annunciation. This is the turning point in human history when God is about to act decisively in the Incarnation of the Son. We read in Luke's gospel of the angel Gabriel coming to Mary and giving her the amazing message that she was about to become the Theotokos (the God Bearer). In response to Mary's question how all this could be, Gabriel answered her:

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God " (Luke 1:35, emphasis added)

Jesus' Baptism. Jesus' baptism was more than a baptism, it was all epiphany – a moment in history when God's glory is revealed to humanity.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is My Son, whom I love; with him I am well-pleased." (Matthew 3:16-17)

Here we see the Holy Spirit coming down upon Jesus the Son of God and the Father declaring Jesus' son-ship (see also John 1:32-34).

The Transfiguration. On the mountain Jesus' face Shone like the sun (symbolizing the divinity of the Son), then a bright cloud surrounded Jesus and his disciples (symbolizing the divinity of the Holy Spirit), and a voice spoke (God the Father) declaring Jesus' son-ship, "This is My Son, whom I love." (Matthew 17:2-5).

The Resurrection. Jesus' resurrection was an act of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 1:20 Paul writes of the Father raising Jesus from the dead. In John 10:17-18 Jesus teaches that he has the power to lay down his life and to take it up again. In Romans 5:11 Paul writes of the Holy Spirit raising Jesus from the dead.

The Great Commission. After he rose from the dead and just before his ascension to heaven Jesus gave his disciples the task of world evangelism.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20)

Here is one of the most explicit mentions of the Trinity to be found in the Bible. Notice that in this passage that we are baptized into the name (singular), not the 'names'. The Singular 'name' safeguards the doctrine of God's oneness, whereas the plural form opens the door to the heresy of tritheism (belief in three gods).

The Ascension. Before his departure Jesus repeated the promise of the Holy Spirit to his followers:

Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5).

This is the basis for the sacrament of Chrismation. The Holy Spirit is promised by the Father and given through the Son to the new believer. In his ascension Jesus Christ (the Son) is going back to God (the Father) and he ascends into the clouds (the Holy Spirit).

Pentecost. On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came down upon the disciples and the miracles of tongues took place attracting a great crowd. Peter took advantage of the opportunity using it to preach the first Christian sermon. Note Peter's use of Trinitarian language.

Exalted to the right hand of God, he (Jesus) has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear (Acts 2:33).

The Second Coming. At his trial Jesus answered the high priest's question whether or not he was the Messiah:

"I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of Heaven." (Mark 14:62)

This verse complements Matthew 24:30 where Jesus describes his coming back on a cloud (the Holy Spirit).

The Gospel John. John's gospel is unique in that it records Jesus' Upper Room discourse in which he teaches his disciples in great detail about the coming of the Holy Spirit.

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you (John 14:26).

When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will testify about me (John 15:26).

He will bring glory to me by taking what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you (John 16:14-15).

Paul's Letters. There are many Trinitarian references that can be found in Paul's letters.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God – the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, Who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 1:1-4, emphasis added).

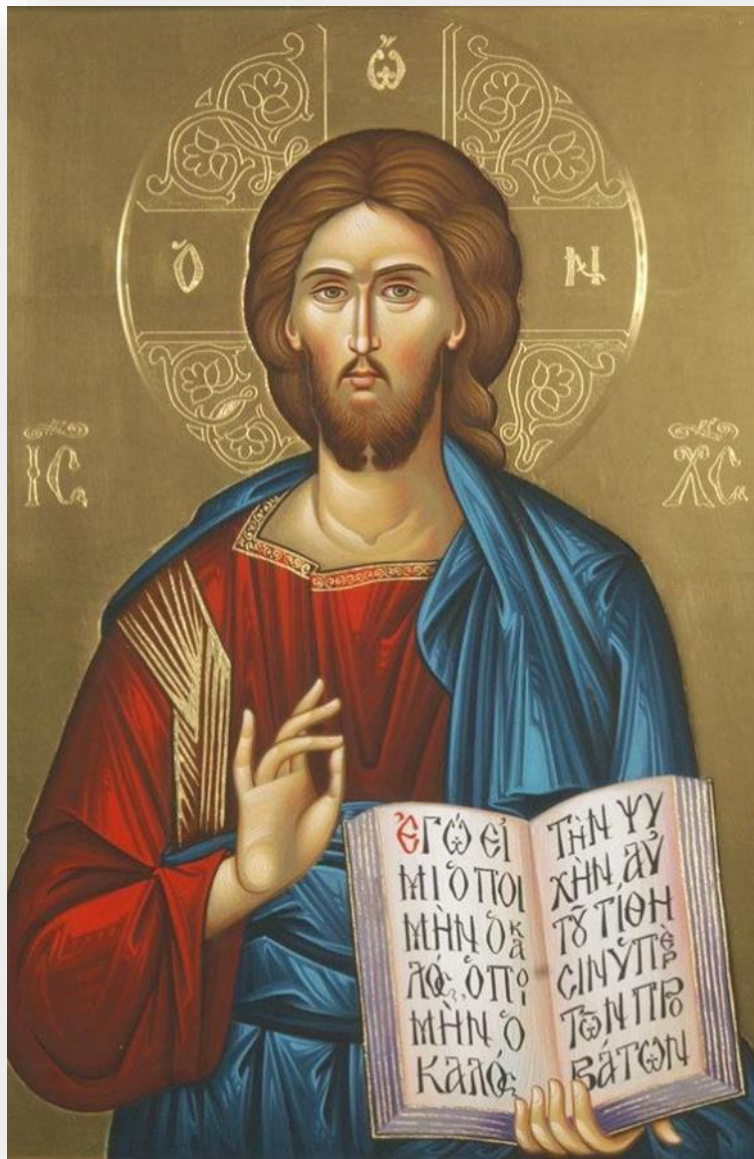
He came and preached peace to you who were far away and to those who were near. For through him (Christ) we both (Gentiles and Jews) have access to the Father by one Spirit (Ephesians 2:17-18, emphasis added).

The Book of Revelation. The book of Revelation which closes the New Testament canon is full of references to God as Trinity. In the opening chapter we find a reference to the Trinity in the preamble to the letter addressed to the seven churches in Asia Minor:

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. (Revelation 1:4, emphasis added)

[Note: the phrase "seven Spirits" is most likely a symbolic reference to the Holy Spirit and his several gifts.] Revelation closes with the vision of the new heaven and the new earth. In this vision we read of humanity reunited with God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in New Jerusalem.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city (Revelation 22:1-2).



“God as Trinity”

From “The Orthodox Way” by Timothy Ware, pages 27-41.

O Father, my hope:
O Son, my refuge:
O Holy Spirit, my protection:
Holy Trinity, glory to thee.

(Prayer of St. Ioannikios)

O Trinity, uncreated and without beginning,
O undivided Unity, three and one,
Father, Son and Spirit, a single God:
Accept this hour hymn from tongues of clay
As if from mouths of flame.

(From the Lenten Triodion)

GOD AS MUTUAL LOVE

I believe in one God’: so we affirm at the beginning of the Creed. But then at once we go on to say much more than this. I believe, we continue, in one God who is at the same time three, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is in God genuine diversity as well as true unity. The Christian God is not just a unit but a union, not just unity but community. There is in God something analogous to ‘society’. He is not a single person, loving himself alone, not a self-contained monad or ‘The One’. He is triunity: three equal persons, each one dwelling in the other two by virtue of an unceasing movement of mutual love. *Amo ergo sum*, ‘I love, therefore I am’: the title of Kathleen Raine’s poem can serve as a motto for God the Holy Trinity. What Shakespeare says concerning the human love of two may be applied also to the divine love of the eternal Three:

So they loved, as love in twain,
Had the essence but in one;
Two distincts, division none:
Number there in love was slain.

The final end of the spiritual Way is that we humans should also become part of this Trinitarian co-inherence or *perichoresis*, being wholly taken up into the circle of love that exists within God. So Christ prayed to his Father on the night before his Crucifixion: ‘*May they all be one: as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, so may they also be one in us*’ (John 17:21).

Why believe that God is three? Is it not easier to believe simply in the divine unity, as the Jews and the Mohammedans do? Certainly it is easier. The doctrine of the Trinity stands before us as a challenge, as a ‘crux’ in the literal sense: it is, in Vladimir Lossky’s words, ‘a cross for human ways of thought’, and it requires from us a radical act of *metanoia* - not merely a gesture of formal assent, but a true change of mind and heart.

Why, then, believe in God as Trinity? In the last chapter we found that the two most helpful ways of entry into the divine mystery are to affirm that God is *personal* and that God is *love*. Now both these notions imply sharing and reciprocity. First, a ‘person’ is not at all the same as an ‘individual’. Isolated, self-dependent, none of us is an authentic person but merely an individual, a bare unit as recorded in the census. Egocentricity is the death of true personhood. Each becomes a real person only through entering into relation with other persons, through living for them and in them. There can be no man, so it has been rightly said, until there are at least two-men in communication. The same is true, secondly, of love. Love cannot exist in isolation, but presupposes the other. Self-love is the negation of love. As Charles Williams shows to such devastating effect in his novel Descent into Hell, self-love is hell; for, carried to its ultimate conclusion, self love signifies the end of all joy and all meaning. Hell is not other people; hell is myself, cut off from others in self-centeredness.

God is far better than the best that we know in ourselves. If the most precious element in our human life is the relationship of 'I and Thou', then we cannot but ascribe this same relationship, in some sense, to the eternal being of God himself. And that is precisely what the doctrine of the Holy Trinity means. At the very heart of the divine life, from all eternity God knows himself as 'I and Thou' in a threefold way, and he rejoices continually in this knowledge. All, then, that is implied in our limited understanding of the human person and of human love, this we affirm also of God the Trinity, while adding that in him these things mean infinitely more than we can ever imagine.

Personhood and love signify life, movement, discovery. So the doctrine of the Trinity means that we should think of God in terms that are dynamic rather than static. God is not just stillness, repose, unchanging perfection. For our images of the Trinitarian God we should look rather to the wind, to the running water, to the un-resting flames of fire. A favorite analogy, for the Trinity has always been that of three torches burning with a single flame. We are told in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* how a brother once came to talk with Abba Joseph of Panepho. "Abba", said the visitor, "according to my strength I observe a modest rule of prayer and fasting, of reading and silence, .and so far as I can I keep myself pure in my thoughts. What more can I do?" In answer, Abba Joseph rose to his feet and held up his hands towards the sky; and his fingers became as ten blazing torches. And the old man said to the brother: 'If you wish, you can become completely as a flame.' If this image of the living flame helps us to understand man's nature at its highest, can it not also be applied to God? The three- persons of the Trinity are 'completely as a flame'.

But in the end the least misleading ikon is to be found, not in the physical world outside us, but in the human heart. The best analogy is that with which we began: our experience of caring intensely for another person, and of knowing that our love is returned.

THREE PERSONS IN ONE ESSENCE

"I and the Father are one", said Christ (John 10:30). What did he mean?

For an answer we look primarily to the first two of the seven Ecumenical or Universal Councils: to the Council of Nicaea (325), to the first Council of Constantinople (381), and to the Creed which they formulated. The central and decisive affirmation in the Creed is that Jesus Christ is 'true God from true God', 'one in essence' or 'consubstantial' (*homoousios*) with God the Father. In other words, Jesus Christ is equal to the Father: he is God in the same sense that the Father is God, and yet they are not two Gods but one. Developing this teaching, the Greek Fathers of the later fourth century said the same about the Holy Spirit: he is likewise truly God, 'one in essence' with the Father and the Son. But although Father, Son and Spirit are one single God, yet each of them is from all eternity a person', a distinct center of conscious selfhood. God the Trinity is thus to be described as 'three persons in one essence'. There is eternally in God true unity; combined with genuinely personal differentiation: the term 'essence', 'substance' or 'being' (*ousia*) indicates the unity, and the term 'person' (*hypostasis, prosopon*) indicates the differentiation. Let us try to understand what is signified by this somewhat baffling language, for the dogma of the Holy Trinity is vital to our own salvation.

Father, Son and Spirit are one in essence, not merely in the sense that all three are examples of the same group or general class, but in the sense that they form a single, unique, specific reality. There is in this respect an important difference between the sense in which the three divine persons are one, and the sense in which three human persons may be termed one. Three human persons, Peter, James and John, belong to the same general class 'man'. Yet, however closely they co-operate together, each retains his own will and his own energy, acting by virtue of his own separate power of initiative. In short, they are three men and not one man. But in the case of the three persons of the Trinity, this is not the case. There is distinction, but never separation. Father, Son and Spirit - so the saints affirm, following the testimony of Scripture have only one will and not three, only one energy and not three. None of the three ever acts separately, apart from the other two. They are not three Gods, but one God.

Yet, although the three persons never act apart from each other, there is in God genuine diversity as well as specific unity. In our experience of God at work within our own life, while we find that the three are always acting together, yet we know urge each is acting within us in a different manner. We experience God as three-in-

one, and we believe that this threefold differentiation in God's outward action reflects a threefold differentiation in his inner life. The distinction between the three persons is to be regarded as an eternal distinction existing within the nature of God himself; it does not apply merely to his exterior activity in the world. Father, Son and Spirit are not just 'modes' or 'moods' of the Divinity; not just masks which God assumes for a time in his dealings with creation and then lays aside. They are on the contrary three coequal and coeternal persons. A human father is older than his child, but when speaking of God as 'Father' and 'Son' we are not to interpret the terms in this literal sense. We affirm of the Son, 'There never was a time when he was not'. And the same is said of the Spirit.

Each of the three is fully and completely God. None is more or less God than the others. Each possesses, not one third of the Godhead, but the entire Godhead in its totality; yet each lives and is this one Godhead in his own distinctive and personal way. Stressing this Trinitarian unity-in-diversity, St Gregory of Nyssa writes:

All that the Father is, we see revealed in the Son; all that is the Son's is the Father's also; for the whole Son dwells in the Father, and he has the whole Father dwelling in himself... The Son who exists always in the Father can never be separated from him, nor can the Spirit ever be divided from the Son who through the Spirit works all things. He who receives the Father also receives at the same time the Son and the Spirit. It is impossible to envisage any kind of severance or disjunction between them: one cannot think of the Son apart from the Father, nor divide the Spirit from the Son. There is between the three a sharing and a differentiation that are beyond words and understanding.. The distinction between the persons does not impair the oneness of nature, nor does the shared unity of essence lead to confusion between the distinctive characteristics of the persons. Do not be surprised that we should speak of the Godhead as being at the same time both unified and differentiated. Using riddles, as it were, we envisage a strange and paradoxical diversity-in-unity and unity-in-diversity.

'Using riddles ..': St Gregory is at pains to emphasize that the doctrine of the Trinity is 'paradoxical' and lies 'beyond words and understanding'. It is something revealed to us by God, not demonstrated to us by our own reason. We can hint at it in human language, but we cannot fully explain it. Our reasoning powers are a gift from God, and we must use them to the full; but we should recognize their limitations: 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. 'Let all mortal flesh keep silent, and stand with fear and trembling' (The Liturgy of St James):

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The first person of the Trinity, God the Father, is the 'fountain' of the Godhead, the source, cause or principle of origin for the other two persons. He is the bond of unity between the three: there is one God because there is one Father. 'The union is the Father, from whom and to whom the order of the persons runs its course' (St Gregory the Theologian). The other two persons are each defined in terms of their relationship to the Father: the Son is 'begotten' by the Father, the Spirit 'proceeds' from the Father. In the Latin West, it is usually held that the Spirit proceeds 'from the Father and from the Son'; and the word *filioque* ('and from the Son') has been added to the Latin text of the Creed. Orthodoxy not only regards the *filioque* as an unauthorized addition - for it was inserted into the Creed without the consent of the Christian East - but it also considers that the doctrine of the 'double procession', as commonly expounded, is theologically inexact and spiritually harmful. According to the Greek Fathers of the fourth century, whom the Orthodox Church follows to this day, the Father is the sole source and ground of unity in the Godhead. To make the Son a source as well as the Father, or in combination with him, is to risk confusing the distinctive characteristics of the persons.

The second person of the Trinity is the Son of God, his 'Word' or Logos. To speak in this way of God as Son and Father is at once to imply a movement of mutual love, such as we indicated earlier. It is to imply that from all eternity God himself, as Son, in filial obedience and love renders back to God the Father the being which the Father by paternal self-giving eternally generates in him. It is in and through the Son that the Father is revealed

to us: 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life: no one comes to the Father; except through me' (John 14:6). He it is who was born on earth as man, from the Virgin Mary in the city of Bethlehem. But as Word or Logos of God

he is also at work before the Incarnation. He is the principle of order and purpose that permeates all things, drawing them to unity in God, and so making the universe into a 'cosmos', a harmonious and integrated whole. The Creator-Logos has imparted to each created thing its own indwelling *logos* or inner principle, which makes that thing to be distinctively itself, and which at the same time draws and directs that thing towards God. Our human task as craftsmen or manufacturers is to discern this *logos* dwelling in each thing and to render it manifest; we seek not to dominate but to co-operate.

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. Yet the relation is mutual. The Spirit makes the Son present to us, but it is the Son who sends us the Spirit. (We note that there is a distinction between the 'eternal procession' of the Spirit and his 'temporal mission'. The Spirit is sent into the world, within time, by the Son; but, as regards his origin within the eternal life of the Trinity, the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone.)

Characterizing each of the three persons, Synesius of Cyrene writes:

*Hail, Father, source of the Son,
 Son, the Father's image;
 Father, the ground where the Son stands,
 Son, the Father's seal;
 Father, the power of the Son,
 Son, the Father's beauty;
 All-pure Spirit, bond between
 the Father and the Son.
 Send, O Christ, the Spirit, send
 the Father to my soul;
 Steep my dry heart in this dew,
 the best of all thy gifts.*

Why speak of God as Father and Son, and not as Mother and Daughter? In itself the Godhead possesses neither maleness nor femininity. Although our human sexual characteristics as male and female reflect, at their highest and truest, an aspect of the divine life, yet there is in God no such thing as sexuality. When, therefore, we speak of God as Father, we are speaking not literally but in symbols. Yet why should the symbols be masculine rather than feminine? Why call God 'he' and not 'she'? In fact; Christians have sometimes applied 'mother-language' to God. Aphrahat, one of the early Syriac Fathers, speaks of the believer's love for 'God his Father and the Holy Spirit his Mother', while in the medieval West we find the Lady Julian of Norwich affirming: 'God rejoices that he is our Father, and God rejoices that he is our Mother.' But these are exceptions. Almost always the symbolism used of God by the Bible and in the Church's worship has been male symbolism.

We cannot prove by arguments why this should be so, yet it remains a fact of our Christian experience that God has set his seal upon certain symbols and not upon others. The symbols are not chosen by us but revealed and *given*. A symbol can be verified, lived, prayed - but not 'proved' logically. These 'given' symbols, however, while not capable of proof, are yet far from being arbitrary. Like the symbols in myth, literature and art, our religious symbols reach deep into the hidden roots of our being, and cannot be altered without momentous consequences. If, for example, we were to start saying 'Our Mother who art in heaven', instead of 'Our Father', we should not merely be adjusting an incidental piece of imagery, but replacing Christianity with a new kind of religion. A Mother Goddess is not the Lord of the Christian Church.

Why should God be a communion of three divine persons, neither less nor more? Here again there can be no logical proof. The threeness of God is something given or revealed to us in Scripture, in the Apostolic Tradition, and in the experience of the saints throughout the centuries. All that we can do is to *verify* this given fact through our own life of prayer.

What precisely is the difference between the 'generation' of the Son and the 'procession' of the Spirit? 'The manner of the generation and the manner of the procession are incomprehensible', says St John of Damascus. 'We have been told that there is a difference between generation and procession, but what is the nature of this difference, we do not understand at all.' If St John of Damascus confessed himself baffled, then so may we. The terms 'generation' and 'procession' are conventional signs for a reality far beyond the comprehension of our reasoning brain. 'Our reasoning brain is weak, and our tongue is weaker still', remarks St Basil the Great. 'It is easier to measure the entire sea with a tiny cup than to grasp God's ineffable greatness with the human mind.' But, while they cannot be fully explained, these signs can (as we have said) be verified. Through our encounter with God in prayer, we *know* that the Spirit is not the same as the Son, even though we cannot define in words precisely what the difference is.

THE TWO HANDS OF GOD

Let us try to illustrate the doctrine of the Trinity by looking at the Triadic patterns in salvation history and in our own life of prayer.

The three persons, as we saw, work always together, and possess but a single will and energy. St Irenaeus speaks of the Son and the Spirit as the 'two hands' of God the Father; and in every creative and sanctifying act the Father is using both of these 'hands' at once. Scripture and worship provide repeated examples of this:

1. Creation. 'By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the Breath of his mouth' (Ps. 33:6). God the Father creates through his 'Word' or Logos (the second person) and through his 'Breath' or Spirit (the third person). The 'two hands' of the Father work together in the shaping of the universe. Of the Logos it is said, 'all things were made through him' (John. 1:3; compare the Creed, '... through whom all things were made'); of the Spirit it is said that at the creation he 'brooded' or 'moved upon the face of the deep' (Gen.:1:2). All created things are marked with the seal of the Trinity.

2. Incarnation. At the Annunciation the Father sends the Holy Spirit upon the Blessed Virgin Mary, and she conceives the eternal Son of God (Luke 1:35). So God's taking of our humanity is a Trinitarian work. The Spirit is sent down from the Father, to affect the Son's presence within the womb of the Virgin. The Incarnation, it should be added, is not only the work of the Trinity but also the work of Mary's, free will. God waited for voluntary consent, expressed in the words, 'Behold, the handmaid of the Lord: be it unto me according to thy word' (Luke 1:38); and had this consent been withheld, Mary would not have become God's Mother. Divine grace does not destroy human freedom but reaffirms it.

3. The Baptism of Christ. In the Orthodox tradition this is seen as a revelation of the Trinity. The Father's voice from heaven bears witness to the Son, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'; and at the same moment the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, descends from the Father and rests upon the Son (Matt. 3:16-17). So the Orthodox Church sings at Epiphany (6 January), the feast of Christ's Baptism:

*When thou, O Lord, wast baptized in the Jordan,
The worship of the Trinity was made manifest.
For the voice of the Father bore witness unto thee,
Calling thee the beloved Son,
And the Spirit in the form of a dove
Confirmed his word as sure and steadfast.*

4. The Transfiguration of Christ. This also is a Trinitarian happening. The same relationship prevails between the three persons as at the Baptism. The Father testifies from heaven, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear him' (Matt. 17:5), while as before the Spirit descends upon the Son, this time in the form of a cloud of light (Luke 9:34). As we affirm in one of the hymns for this feast (6 August):

*Today on Tabor in the manifestation of thy light, O Lord,
Thou light unaltered from the light of the unbegotten Father,
We have seen the Father as light, and the Spirit as light,
Guiding with light the whole creation.*

5. *The Eucharistic Epiclesis.* The same Triadic pattern as is evident at the Annunciation, the Baptism and the Transfiguration, is apparent likewise at the culminating moment of the Eucharist, the *epiclesis* or invocation of the Holy Spirit. In words addressed to the Father, the celebrant priest says in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom:

*We offer to thee this spiritual worship without shedding of blood,
And we pray and beseech and implore thee:
Send down thy Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts here set forth:
And make this bread the precious Body of thy Christ,
And what is in this cup the precious Blood of thy Christ,
Transforming them by thy Holy Spirit.*

As at the Annunciation, so in the extension of Christ's Incarnation at the Eucharist, the Father sends down the Holy Spirit, to effect the Son's presence in the consecrated gifts. Here, as always, the three persons of the Trinity are working together.

PRAYING THE TRINITY

As there is a Triadic structure in the Eucharistic *epiclesis*, so there is likewise in almost all the prayers of the Church. The opening invocations, used by Orthodox at their daily prayers each morning and evening, have an unmistakably Trinitarian spirit. So familiar are these prayers, so frequently repeated, that it is easy to overlook their true character as glorification of the Holy Trinity. We begin by confession God three-in-one, as we make the sign of the Cross with the words:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

So, at the very beginning of each new day, we place it under the protection of the Trinity. Next we say, 'Glory to thee, our God, glory to thee' - the new day begins with celebration, joy, thanksgiving. This is followed by a prayer to the Holy Spirit, 'O heavenly King...' Then we repeat three times:

*Holy God,
Holy Mighty,
Holy Immortal,
have mercy upon us.*

The threefold 'holy' recalls the hymn 'Holy, holy, holy', sung by the seraphim in Isaiah's vision (Isa. 63), and by the four apocalyptic beasts in the Revelation of St John the Divine (Rev. 4:8). In this thrice-repeated 'holy' there is an invocation of the eternal Three. This is followed, in our daily prayers, by the most frequent of all liturgical phrases, 'Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit...' Here, above all, we must not allow familiarity to breed contempt. Each time this phrase is used, it is vital to recall its true meaning as a giving of glory to the Trinity. The Gloria is succeeded by another prayer to the three persons:

*Most Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.
O Lord, cleanse us from our sins.
O Master, pardon our iniquities.
O Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities
for thy name's sake.*

So our daily prayers continue. At each step, implicitly or explicitly, there is a Triadic structure, a proclamation of God as one-in-three. We think the Trinity, speak the Trinity, and breathe the Trinity.

There is a Trinitarian dimension also to the most dearly-loved, of single-phrase Orthodox prayers, the Jesus

Prayer, an 'arrow prayer' used both at work and during times of quiet. In its most common form this runs:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.

This is, in outward form, a prayer to the second person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ. But the other two persons are also present, although they are not named. For, by speaking of Jesus as 'Son of God', we point towards his Father; and the Spirit is also embraced in our prayer, since 'no one can say "Lord Jesus", except in the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 12:3). The Jesus Prayer is not only Christ-centered but Trinitarian.

LIVING THE TRINITY

'Prayer is action' (Tito Colliander). 'What is pure prayer? Prayer which is brief in words but abundant in actions. For if your actions do not exceed your petitions, then your prayers are mere words, and the seed of the hands is not in them' (*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*).

If prayer is to be transmuted into action, then this Trinitarian faith which informs all our praying must also be manifest in our daily life. Immediately before reciting the Creed in the Eucharistic Liturgy, we say these words: 'Let us love one another, so that we may with one mind confess Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the Trinity one in essence and undivided.' Note the words 'so that'. A genuine confession of faith in the Triune God can be made only by those who, after the likeness of the Trinity, show love mutually towards each other. There is an integral connection between our love for one another and our faith in the Trinity: the first is a precondition for the second, and in its turn the second gives full strength and meaning to the first. So far from being pushed into the corner and treated as a piece of abstruse theologizing of interest only to specialists, the doctrine of the Trinity ought to have upon our daily life an effect that is nothing less than revolutionary. Made after the image of God the Trinity, human beings are called to reproduce on earth the mystery of mutual love that the Trinity lives in heaven. In medieval Russia, St. Sergius of Radonezh dedicated his newly-founded monastery to the Holy Trinity, precisely because he intended that his monks should show towards one another day by day the same love as passes between the three divine persons. And such is the vocation not only of monks but of everyone. Each social unit - the family, the school, the workshop, the parish, the Church universal - is to be made an ikon of the Trinity. Because we know that God is three in one, each of us is committed to living sacrificially in and for the other; each is committed irrevocably to a life of practical service, of active compassion. Our faith in the Trinity puts us under an obligation to struggle at every level, from the strictly personal to the highly organized, against all forms of oppression, injustice and exploitation. In our combat for social righteousness and 'human rights', we are acting specifically in the name of the Holy Trinity.

'The most perfect rule of Christianity, its exact definition, its highest summit, is this: to seek what is for the benefit of all', states St John Chrysostom. '... I cannot believe that it is possible for a man to be saved if he does not labor for the salvation of his neighbor.' Such are the practical implications of the dogma of the Trinity. That is what it means to *live the Trinity*.

We glorify not three Gods but one Godhead.

We honour the persons that are truly three,

The Father unbegotten,

The Son begotten from the Father,

The Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father,

One God in three:

And with true faith and glory we ascribe to each the title God. (From the Lenten Triodion)

Come, all peoples, and let us worship the one Godhead in three persons,

The Son in the Father with the Holy Spirit.

For the Father gave birth outside time to the Son,

Coeternal and enthroned with him;

And the Holy Spirit is glorified in the Father together with the Son.

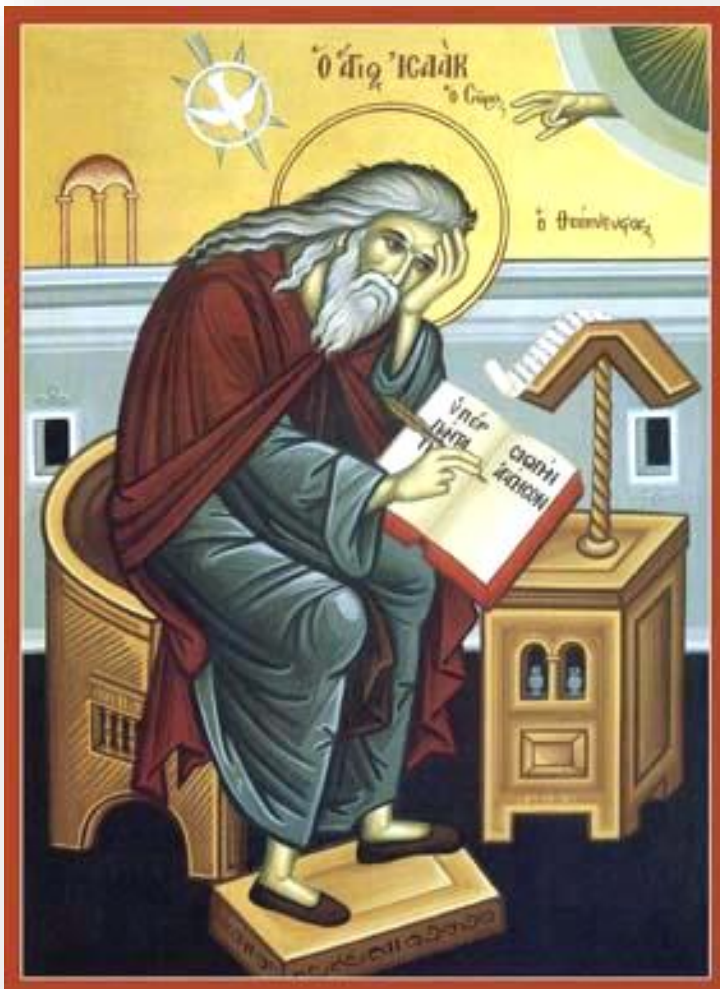
One power, one essence, one Godhead,

*Whom we all worship, and to whom we say:
 Holy God, who host created all things
 Through the Son, by the co-operation of the Holy Spirit;
 Holy and Strong, through whom we know the Father,
 And through whom the Holy Spirit came to dwell within the world;
 Holy and Immortal, Paraclete Spirit,
 Proceeding from the Father and resting on the Son.
 Holy Trinity, glory to thee.*

(From Vespers on the Feast of Pentecost)

*I praise the Godhead, unity in three persons,
 For the Father is light;
 The Son is light,
 And the Spirit is light.
 But the light remains undivided,
 Shining forth in oneness of nature,
 Yet in the three rays of the persons.*

(From the Lenten Triodion)



“Love is the kingdom which the Lord mystically promised to the disciples, when he said that they would eat in his kingdom: ‘You shall eat and drink at my table in my kingdom’ (Luke 22.30). What should they eat and drink, if not love?

When we have reached love, we have reached God and our journey is complete. We have crossed over to the island which lies beyond the world, where are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: to whom be glory and dominion. May God make us worthy to fear and love him. Amen.”

(St Isaac the Syrian)

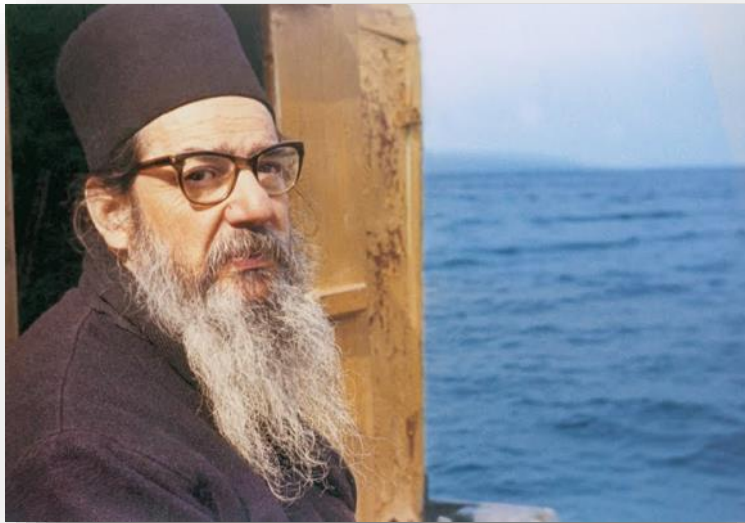
“However hard I try, I find it impossible to construct anything greater than these three words, ‘Love one another’ - only to the end, and without exceptions: then all is justified and life is illumined, whereas otherwise it is an abomination and a burden.”

(Mother Maria of Paris)



“There can be no Church apart from love.”

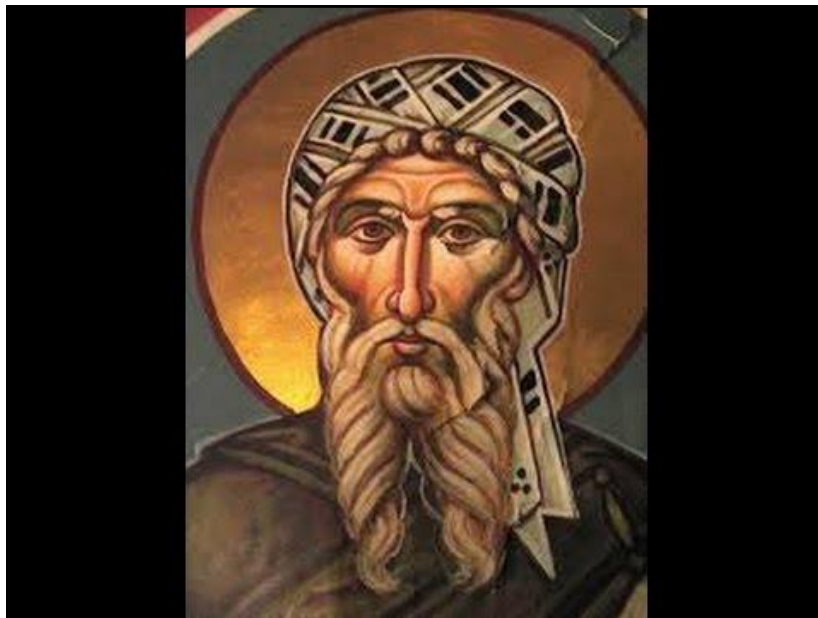
(St. John of Kronstadt)



“Believe me, there is one truth that reigns supreme from the fringes of the throne of glory down to the least shadow of the most insignificant of creatures: and that one truth is love! Love is the source from which the holy streams of grace flow down unceasingly from the city of God, watering the earth and making it fruitful. ‘One deep calls to another’ (Ps. 42:7): like a deep or an abyss, in its infinity love helps us to picture to ourselves the dread vision of the Godhead. It is love that fashions all things and holds them in unity. It is love that gives life and warmth, that inspires and guides. Love is the seal set upon creation, the signature of the Creator. Love is the explanation of his handiwork.

How can we make Christ come and dwell in our hearts? How else, except through love?”

(Fr. Theoklitos of Dionysiou)



“Give rest to the weary, visit the sick, support the poor: for this also is prayer.” (St. Aphrahat the Persian)

“The bodies of our fellow human beings must be treated with more care than our own. Christian love teaches us to give our brethren not only spiritual gifts, but material gifts as well. Even our last shirt, our last piece of bread must be given to them. Personal almsgiving and the most wide-ranging social work are equally justifiable and necessary.

The way to God lies through love of other people, and there is no other way. At the Last Judgment I shall not be asked if I was successful in my ascetic exercises or how many prostrations I made in the course of my prayers. I shall be asked, did I feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and the prisoners: that is all I shall be asked.”

(Mother Maria of Paris)



*O Trinity supreme in being,
O Unity without beginning,
The hosts of angels sing thy praises, trembling before thee.
Heaven, earth and the depths stand in awe of thee, all-holy Trinity:
Men bless thee,
Fire is thy servant,
All things created obey thee in fear.*

(From the Festal Menaion—Matins on 8 September)



"Let us commit ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God"