The_Economic_Trinity

The "world"$_s$ as we have suggested before, is a live concept for theology only insofar as it is viewed as God's '-orId. This has the further implication that the more concretely God is seen in relation to the world the more veiM and vitality tl idea of the world will assume. Conversely, a theology which only sets forth an abstract picture of God's relation to the world is very likely to produce an emaciated and purely formal idea of the world. In the latter case the temptation will naturally arise to by-pass the dull and uninteresting idea of the world as soon as possible in order to treat "more concrete" doctrines, for example, the love of God revealed in Christ or the life of faith in the Body of Christ.

In this context the doctrine of the economic Trinity takes on special importance. For if it can be shown that the triune God is related to the creation and if some of the characteristics of that relationship can be depicted, it will be much'raggre easy?<to understand that the world in which we live is in fact God's world. It will also be easier to see that the G$_o$d who is concretely related to us in the sphere of redemption is none other than the God who establishes us and our world by His creative "ill. The doctrine of the economic Trinity in relation to creation, in other words, should be a fitting completion to our foregoing consideration^ of God and His creation because it draws the lines between the two even more firmly and more concretely.

Without wanting to suggest that the discussion of the economic Trinity which follows provides the key to a lively doctrine of the worlds of which the natural world, is. a- partj , it is at least interesting to note that in the writings of Barth, -Brunner, and "Ithaus, the idea of the economic Trinity in relation to creation seems to be deemphasized or altogefthei missing. Barth discusses the economic Trinity almost exclusii in relation to redemption. Brunner conceives of the Father as being directly related to the creation, but chiefly in the sense that, in relation to sin, He is F. Father of Wrath drivir men toward redemption and holding out the possibility of final judgment. Brunner also conceives of the eternal Logos, the Bon, as being directly related to creation, but this relation is limited by Brunner chiefly to the fact that the Logos is the one who makes the quest for truth possible through a structuring of both subject and object. In [K]lthaus[1] thought there is a veil on the doctrine of the Trinity in general, though, his thought is implicitly trinitarian throughout. It is no surprise, then, that He does not indicate how God's trinitarian character manifests itself in His relation to the creation.

It may be — and our ensuing considerations are intended to indicate this indirectly — that our theologians' views of the natural world would have taken on more vitality and more concreteness if they had given more careful attention to the economic Trinity in relation to creation. Jfee- pointris,"then, ~~ndt-thaf-'-tfte-'-foflowing — oonai^ratims . — are — perfecty-indeod~~-they liavn--tba--eiwraetey-ef-a4-^a^^^^^tline .—but that_considera- tions ~~like thea~~ could ~~assume a key place~~ play an important role in a dogmatic system.

nTo the Father is attributed the beginning of activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things."(Calvin Inst, I, xiii, 16 P. Ih2)

As the Father is the source of the whole Trinity, so it is fitting to consider Him to be the initiator and sustaining will behind all the divine activity ad extra. The Son, the eternal Logos, as perfect linage of the Father(cf. II Cor. fh Us3-6, $C_0$1. 1:15) — "image" having the connotation of active reception —, may be fittingly said to be the perfect embodiment and efficacious power of the Fatherly will. The Spirit, the eternal and vital bond between the Father and the Son, may fittingly be considered as the One who communicates the intention and power of the Father and the Son in perfect harmony.'*' Let us consider some of these points in greater detail.

t In the appropriation of the works of the Son and Spirit ad extra we are following Irenaeus primarily: "Since the Word establishes, that is to say, gives the body and grants reality of being, and the Spirit gives order and form to the diversity of powers; rightly and fittingly the Word is called Son, and the Spirit the Wisdom of God."(Demonstration of the ApostcQic Preaching, 6, p. 7h.) Calvin holds a somewhat different view; "to the Son (is attributed) wisdom, counsel, and the ordered disnostion of all things; but to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of that activity."(Inst, I, xiii, 18, p. Ih2.)

One should not conclude Wat the Father is somehow more distant from His creation because He initiates the creation a because the Son is the creation's power for being and acting. Here the principle, opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt, should receive special attention.'~~n appropriating the works of the Trinity the problem of the Divine presence and transce ence is not under discussion. As Luther might say, the whole Godhead is present in a grain of com. The Father is no more distant from, or no closer to, His credition than the S_0n or the Spirit.(cf. Eph. li:6) Futhermore, the Kingdom of God Is rjroperly^related first of~a.il to the Father. He ±s~the~ Father of all.(Eph h:6) From Him are all things.(I Cor 8:6) It is His Kingdom which is to come.(Mt. 5:10) And, all thing are from Him, through Him and to Him.(cf. Ro. 11:36)

The Father establishes His Kingdom, however, only through the Son, the eternal Logos. The Father has put all things under the S_{on},($_c$f, I Cor. 15:28, -In. 3:35) This the Father did from the very beginning: all things are created through the ^{d}on.(I Cor 8:6, Jn 1:3/.c?I^{r}57b. 11:3) One may say, then that the Kingdom of God is in truth the Kingdom of the '■'on, the eternal Logos. He is the mediator of all the Father's acts. Conversely, the Kingdom of the Son is the Kingdom of God; the ^on does nothing except by the father.(cf. Jn 5:19) As all things are from and through and to the Father, moreover so all things are at once in and through and for the Son. (cf. CQ1. l:16f) One day, finally, when all things have reach- their telos in the Son, the Son will conclude His mediatorial role and will deliver the Kingdom to the Father and the I'athei rail be all in all.(cf. I Cor. 15:2h, 26)

Before we draw out some of the implications of these consider- ations, however, it is necessary to make explicit a distinetic which lias been wholly implicit to this point. This is a distinction which is deeply embedded in the theological tradii the conception of the general work of the Son ad extra, on the one hand, and the idea of the '•'on's special work ad extra, on the other hand. The first is often called the Logos asarkos, the second the Logos ensarkos. •'•his entails a corresponding distinction between the Kingdom of the Son andthe Kingdom of Christ. Admitedly these points cannot be read off the pages of the New Testament. Like the doctrine of the •└rinity,

they are dogmatic constructions. But, — again like the doctrine of the Trinity, — they are essential if the New Testament is to be understood properly. Otherwise, one of two things will happen. Either the New Testament passages dealing with the role of the u>on in creation(e.g. Jn 1:1-3,-J Gor 8j6) will be rejected or neglected and the theological point of these passages will be lost, ^hen it will be difficult if not impossi to find New Testament authority to say that the God whom I encounter in ^hrist is my Creator, — which is clearly what the passages in question want to say. Or the same passages will be taken literally and we will be forced to make the self-defeating assertions that the man Jesus existed before the creation and before the incarnation and that He had a part in the creation of all things, presumably including his own body and soul. Although this brief excursus by no means answers all the questions which the Logos-asarkos, Logos-ensarkos distinction suggests, it should indicate the general nature, function, and importance of the distinction.

Note on Col. 1:15ff

All idlings are established in the Son, the eternal "ord. This we may take to suggest that the "ord is the power which preserves all things. Without His immediacy nothing could conti to be. As Luther says in his characteristically concrete way, — "This Word is present in the very body of the hen and in all living creatures; the heat with which the hen keeps her eggs warm is the result of the divine "ord, because if it were withou the Word, the heat would be useless and without effect." God is faithful to His whole creation in the Son. In His Word He preserves what He establishes, making efficacious His covenant with day and night and the ordiraces of heavean and earth, (cf. Jer. 33:2f>) In His "'ord He holds bricks and steel in their pisses - and.manages the- ehb and flow of the- tides — In His ---- Word He also the empowers the genes to give continuity to the human race. Similarly, in His Word He inspires mankind to appropriate its past and thereby help to confirm its own identity.

Genesis, Z3

All things are also established through the Son. The eternal Word, we may say, is the power for new constellations of being. Through Him the Father carries the course of the whole creation onward, ultimately to its telos. The Word "establishes, that is to say, gives boqy and grants reality of being."(Irenaeus) In the human sphere the eternal Son establishes new ideas and intention, thoughts and feelings, convications and passions, and new patterns of behaviour. Through the work of men the sane S_0n creates new buildings and bridges, tunnels and road?, planes and computers. In the natural sphere the eternal Word empowers subatomic particles so that they move here and there to form new microscopic structures which man may never apprehend. Through the Word the planets once cooled and assumed orbits around the burning mass we now call the sun. Though the Word little patches of obscure life began hre and there on the planet earth, —• the Word continually establishing more complex organisms, on, to, and through the story of man. Through the Word the galzxies speed on their hectic courses onward and outward, thus occasiong chains of change of which we may be only dimly aware. Indeed the "ord is now establishing constel-lations of be ng throughout the universe of .hat hitorical mankind may never be aware.

Demonstration 6, p. 7U

Calvin notices that we daily see the earth pouring foth to us riches from its lap, herbs pro-ducing seed, seed springing forth. "All this," he says, "flows from the same word." (Gen. 83)

All things, lastly, are established for the Son. % is the power which one day will bring the whole world to its final and radical' new constellation of being. All things, consequently, have theii

+.P1HS -in mm. One rinv. ->*. -> +.imeInnnwn nnlv +.n Fa+.hPf. all the

things will have reached their final shape in and through the Word: they will resemble Him as Ife resembles the Bather. Then the ^onwill conlude His mediatorial rule. No longer will the galaxies roam. No longer will the stars be held in their calces and the planets in their courses. Ihe rains and the gro..th of the lilies of the field will cease. Ihe infinitely complicated life of the subatomic world will come to a halt. I'he greet physical monuments of man, man's culture, and man himself will be rolled up like a scroll after the message has been read. The final realization of God's Kingdom shall have been established, the b_{on} will transfer the Kingdom directly to the Father and in and through a new heaven and a new earth the Father will be all in all.

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Brunner has devoted manyy many pages to this subject.

The second type of Logos doctrine is the kind Michis Z^ delineated in this, ' study. This is ^^^e or ..dur emphasis on the importance of the Mtine Will as a theologicd concept, We must say wit i Brunne Z then, (that the Mole world iis L;?preHensible by■ reason, it is nq% rational. These; con siderations' about thapprehensibility/of the/world intende be . ^rGy are necessary/however, we are to fill out our treacmerrtual the ■ e — Logos.

We have said that the Spirit is the One who communicates the intention and power of the lather and the B_0n in perfect harmony, Ahis is. to day that He is the effective Wisdom of the Oodhsad. he created world as a whole has its particular and harmonious interrelatedness through the Spirit The peculiar balance of the forces of the universe is arranged by the Spirit — the continued presence of a a particular atmosnhere on planet earth, for example, allowin man to breathe and live. By the Spirit the creature which one day was to be called man stood up and began to use what one day would be hands, hands which now paint and pray and carress as well as serving,as tools for lifting, fighting, , and grasping. By the spirit the human eye came to talgfaaoHUg. Also in and through the Bpiritfe workings the prehistoric beasts of the forest and the primeval leviathans of the deep flourished in their day and then perished when a new balance of things was arranged. <Zven now the whole universe is being adorned with unimaginabl gracesthe state -of the. whole .being effected perhaps by the movement of the smallest particle and the state of the smallest particle being effected by the movement of the whole And, in a sense perhaps grasped first and best by the hundred of workmen and draftsmen who labored for generations, the cathedral at Lhartes was not ^designed by men alone. Nor was the New York skyline or|rocket which^lnfts a man into outer space designed by men[1] alone. J^S^onepoAders the red-clay shores of Canada's Prince Edward Island being pounded and splashed by the blue-white waves of the 4H»emeasisal Atlantic, one also senses that in this sight ■ more than meets the eye. Here, there and everywhere are sks of the Spirit, The whole world, in its temporal an<1 spatial aspects, is one harmoniously interrelate' whole"ly^the works of the Spirit. That there are many notes of discord and that they mazrAiMexceedingly harsh to our ears, we have suggested before. But this fact merely underlines the exalted working of the Spirit; it does not — or it should not be taken to — undercut the fundamental idea of the spirit's work. In view of the activity of the Spirit it is entirely proper to speak of the whole creation as the "created system" even though we may not see or apprehend it as such.

Furthermore,

The beauty of the universe which we now perceive, says Calvin, "owes its strength and preservation to the power of the Spirit."(Inst, I, xiiif 1U, p. 138) J. Edwards lists as one of the three offices of the Spirit this: "to quicken, enliven, and beautify all things."(Edwards, Trinity, p. 98) he also calls /4,3/u-u^- the work "beauty + joy of the creation."

It is perhaps necessary to point out that in saying this we are not de- fending the possibility of a"natural thelogy."

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