

## Column

“Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; / Praise him all creatures here below; / Praise him above, ye heav’nly host: / Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.”

More people have derived their understanding of the Trinity from the Doxology than from any other source, it is often alleged. There is no doubt truth in this observation, inasmuch as the words of our songs and prayers often find their way into our minds and hearts.

I am thinking today of the Doxology because Trinity Sunday fell on June 16 in this year’s calendar. On this day, the Christian Church celebrated God’s self-revelation of Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

But what do Christians mean when they say God is one and God is three? The language, after all, is paradoxical.

First, they affirm, along with the ancient Hebrews, the unity of God. The ancient pagans had ‘gods many’, but for Jews and Christians, there is only one, living and true God.

Secondly, they affirm the three-ness of God. It is at this point that they part ways with Jews and other monotheistic religions. The Christian name for God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Father eternally begets the Son and generates the Spirit. In so saying, Christians are using human language – the only language we have – to describe a divine reality taught in Scripture. It is of necessity precise language. For example, when the Son is spoken of, it says that He was begotten, rather than created.

Why is this important? It is important because a man begets something of the same essence as Himself, but creates something quite distinct – a birdhouse, for example. The language of begetting affirms Jesus’ full divinity and oneness with the Father.

The early ‘Fathers’ of the Church were insistent on this language because if Jesus were anything less than God, then it would follow that Christians were guilty of idolatry when they offered payers to Him and worshipped Him.

Did they see themselves laying aside the faith of their spiritual forebearers in the Old Testament – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? No, instead, if asked,

they would have said that their picture of who this One God is has been expanded and sharpened with the coming of Christ and the Spirit.

A human metaphor may be helpful here. When a man is walking toward a great mountain, it may appear to him to be a single mass, but, as he gets closer, he discovers that this mass in fact has three peaks. Something like this happened with the early Christians.

Does anyone have a perfect understanding of the Trinity? Probably not. In the end we must say, “we see through a glass darkly.” Even so, our finite, limited understanding does not keep us from crying out: Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost and putting our lives under the control of the great triune God.

*ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who hast given unto us thy servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity; We beseech thee that thou wouldest keep us stedfast in this faith, and evermore defend us from all adversities, who livest and reignest, one God, world without end. Amen.*

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