

TRINITY AND PROCESS: RELEVANCE OF THE BASIC CHRISTIAN CONFESSION OF GOD

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THIS SHORT essay aims at contributing something to the appreciation of the relevance of the Trinity. Since it has been traditionally the central mystery of the Christian faith, any effort in this direction can hardly be misplaced. The doctrine of the Trinity stands starkly expressed in the lapidary formulas of the Christian confessions: "In God there are three divine Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit"; "God is one in essence and three in Persons," and so forth. The immediate relevance of such a mystery is not clear. And it is becoming increasingly less so. The question is asked openly, or experienced privately: Why should my faith be so complicated? Surely the contemporary believer has enough problems in keeping a simple and straightforward belief in God, without complicating the issue with an insoluble mathematical problem that seems to owe more to Greek speculation than to genuine Christian experience. Why need modern Christians hold to such a complicated faith?

Perhaps the orthodox would reply that the question is wrong from the start. If God has revealed Himself, He reveals Himself in the fullness of what He is. A dissatisfaction at the complexity of what God is serves merely to indicate that the supposed believer has fallen into a typical state of *hybris*. He is just not prepared to accept God for what He is, to let Him be Himself. He is not open to the fact that God, through revelation, has shown us the reality of *God*.

For the present, it is not to our purpose to pass judgment on the question or its rejection. Nonetheless, one thing is clear: there is a decided tendency at all levels of Christian thought today to bring out the integral humanism of the gospel we believe in. A rich burgeoning of theological themes along anthropological, existential, and secular lines attests this. The problem remains with regard to the tying together of all these aspects into a coherent whole; but this lack of completion does not distract from the widespread sense that our salvation is a human salvation, and that the mysteries that are presented to our faith do have a human meaning. Yet what of the Trinity? It does not readily appear to us as *our* mystery. It remains, still, more on the side of mystification.

When cognizance is taken of this state of affairs, the following possibility opens up: to present the Trinity as a process necessarily involv-

ing man. Process theology is at the moment one of the most widespread attempts in the English-speaking world to establish the relevance of the reality of God to the human situation.¹ It has an immediate appeal in its proposed rejection of an incomprehensible and infinite other-worldly absolute in favor of a starting point that takes into account the real state of the world and man's experience of his own being. As we shall see, there are grave problems attached to this stream of theology; but its basic intention must be correct, namely, to underline the relevance of the reality of God. Hence we are presented with the possibility of availing ourselves of the insights of process theology to help establish more clearly the relevance of the Trinity, and perhaps even to assist in the forming of a broader and more ecumenical pattern of discussion concerning this central Christian mystery.

First, a brief statement about process theology is required. As a trend accenting the dynamic and evolving, as opposed to the statically abstract and fixed, most modern theological thought could be called process theology. Here I have in mind mainly those who have claimed the name. I refer to the works of C. Hartshorne, J. B. Cobb, Jr., and above all to the very cogent *The Reality of God* by Schubert Ogden.² Along with the unsatisfactory nature of the classic and traditional theism in establishing a vital and real relationship between God and man, the increasingly atheistic assumptions of our contemporaries are registered by these theologians. If God is presented as Pure Act, immutable and impassible, this must make Him completely extrinsic to our world. He is not affected by it. From this starting point, a number of principles for a neoclassical approach to the reality of God are laid down. I am here referring mainly to Ogden's work mentioned above: God must be considered in terms of being and existence as we know them and experience them. We experience ourselves in being, precisely in our creative becoming, in interaction with events, with a society, with a world. In this creative becoming, what it means to be becomes luminous to us. If God is the supreme instance of being, he must, for such an appellation to have any meaning, be the supreme instance of creative becoming. God must be eminently social and related to the world. He must be a temporal self in this sense, since creative becoming necessarily implies a becoming in time. The necessary relationship

¹ Here we use this term in a fairly technical sense, as will appear. Admittedly, much of modern theology and philosophy is "processive" in a general sense, in its placing the accent on the dynamic rather than the static.

² London, 1967. See also C. Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity* (New Haven, 1948); R. E. James, *The Concrete God* (New York, 1967), a detailed analysis of Hartshorne's thought; J. B. Cobb, Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology* (Philadelphia, 1965).

between God and the world means that God is involved with the world, and with man, in a community of action and passion. He experiences in His own being, a "give and take" with the world and with history. God is really affected by human events, and hence really related to the world. Such a God is a worthy ground for our confidence in the future, for our future—in fact, God's future too.³ It seems, however, that the God-world relationship is not completely symmetrical, because God is affirmed to be dipolar in this process theology.⁴ Ralph E. James, in his thorough commentary on the work of Hartshorne, explains this as God having two poles in His being: "an abstract pole, which is the logical necessity that some events be actualized," and "a concrete pole fully conditioned upon what happens in the universe."⁵ In this mode of thought, God can be absolutely distinguished from the world, and yet at the same time be seen as totally related to it. Or, as Ogden has it, God is constant in His abstract "existence" and completely relative in His concrete "actuality."⁶ As far as I can see, this dipolar distinction is made so that process theology can say that God as a continually identifiable reality is related to the world. He is not, as it were, completely defined by the world.

This theistic scheme put forward by the process theologians is logically a very respectable one, and of such cogency and coherence that much of modern thought looks quite thin compared to it. However, its weak points are becoming more obvious.⁷ Some of these could be briefly mentioned at this point, though I feel that the presentation of the strengths and weaknesses of this style of thought will unfortunately be very truncated by reason of space. The process theologians would have to answer with some rigor the following three questions before they could begin to feel completely satisfied with their approach: (1) If God is somehow contained within the process of the development of the universe, is not the process itself more fittingly called God than the "divine" reality which is subjected to it? Does it not have a prior reality, a more absolute measure, a more comprehensive scope than "God" who is contained in its law? Should we not, in short, adore the process rather than the Deity? (2) Further, what guarantee have we that God will actually survive the process? In His evolvment, would He not be a possible casualty like any number of ourselves? If He is really exposed to the risk of existence, might He in the end be one of the unlucky ones? (3) Have not these theologians been misled by a very misleading term, the *relatio rationis*, in that they understand

³ *The Reality of God*, pp. 56-70. ⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 59 ff.

⁵ *The Concrete God*, pp. 125 ff. ⁶ *The Reality of God*, p. 60.

⁷ See my article "God: How Near a Relation?" to appear in the *Thomist* this year.

it as implying that a God of Pure Act is utterly static and related to creation in a literally extrinsic and unconcerned way? Have they given sufficient credit to the full richness of the concept of *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*, with its necessary implication of personal will, by which God freely chooses to commit Himself to us, so as to make Himself, from eternity, and in all that He is, *our God*?

Were these questions further teased out and driven home, I believe they would expose some serious shortcomings in the process scheme of theology. But to assert this, precisely defines our present task: we feel sympathy for the project, yet feel that it has fallen short. So it is up to us to try an alternative, whereby the values and insights of the process theology can be respected and its shortcomings remedied. Hence the question arises regarding the possibility of process theology, deserving of the name, yet structured on the central mystery of the Christian faith, the Trinity.

It might be objected that such an approach would evacuate the content of natural theology unduly: if the process aspect of God is seen to depend on revealed data, is not natural theology an extremely meagre matter? Yes. Revelation makes God known in a fulness of divine reality that we would not otherwise have known. Natural theology is natively meagre, since it consists more in pointing to the ultimate intelligibility of the world than in a direct understanding of the divine. God is affirmed indirectly, as the One implied, as the Ground or Cause of being. Revelation identifies this anonymous mystery and sets us in a unique personal relationship to it. Within this personal relationship, we have revealed a process by which God dwells in the world, and in which the world dwells in God. It must be admitted that there is evidence that the process theologians tend to treat the question of natural theology and revealed theology *per modum unius*.⁸ It seems to me that their point can be most forcefully made and with the least theological compromise from the point of view of revealed theology, especially when one understands by process (a) a dynamic view of reality, (b) a coherent affirmation of God's concern for the world, (c) a clear statement of God's *real* involvement in the world; (d) the world finding its transcendent future in God. Thus we come to the enunciation of our thesis: the revealed mystery of the Trinity is *the process par excellence*, and as such it is the beginning and the end, the explanation and the support, of the integral human process. If this thesis can be substantiated, the Trinity will appear to be a vitally relevant mystery. Before addressing ourselves to the main task, a few general remarks after the manner of a *status quaestionis* might be in order.

⁸ Cf. *The Concrete God*, pp. 128-69; *The Reality of God*, pp. 66-69.

First, the general statement can be offered: if the Trinity is revealed as anything, it is revealed as a process. Our general understanding of the notion of process, as mentioned above, allows us to see immediately the main features of a real process declared in the very terms in which the Trinity comes to our knowledge: God communicates Himself to man and thus communicates with man. There is no question of a fixed and static thing. The Father "sends" His Son into the world. The Son, through His paschal act, returns to the Father as the head of many brethren. The Spirit is sent by the Father to witness to Christ and to communicate a life of sonship in Christ. This life is intimate, growing, spontaneous, lived out through the whole course of human existence, in inner experience and in public history. This general view should be allowed to condition our approach from the beginning.

Secondly, not only is the Trinity revealed as "processive," but it has been consistently interpreted as a process after the analogies of human and worldly process. There were the crude physical images of the early Fathers (e.g., Ignatius of Antioch speaking of the crane of Christ's cross lifting stones to the temple of the Father, using the Holy Spirit as a rope), as well as images of a much more refined type, beginning very early in the history of Christian thought, e.g., Justin's interpretation of the Son as some kind of emergent intelligence within the Father. Athénagoras followed similar lines.⁹ This general style of thought reached a stability, if not a maturity, in what we now call the "psychological image" theology of the Trinity. There are, of course, many variations on this theme. Augustine and Aquinas remain the two leading exponents of this kind of thought. The style of this mode of theological reflection is worth pondering in our present context. God in His Trinity was interpreted after the model of a process which happens in the world, namely, the vital self-consciousness of the human person. The human person knows himself in the utterance of an interior word and rejoices in his self-possession in love or serenity.¹⁰ From such an analogy theology finds a way to express some intelligibility of why there are processions in God; why there are only two processions; why one procession is different from the other; why there are relations of origin; how this can lead to some consistent understanding of a real distinction between three, and only three, divine Persons; finally, how each of these three can have personally characteristic actions, qualities, etc., within the one reality of God, and in the world and its history.¹¹

This type of speculation avails itself of what must be one of the most remarkable and coherent hypotheses ever made in theology. The psy-

⁹ Cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (4th ed.; London, 1968) pp. 96-101.

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 27, a. 3. ¹¹ *Ibid.*, qq. 27-43.

chological image enables theology to respect so much of the revealed data, at the same time clearing away so many of the crudely anthropomorphic ideas that would tend to clutter the development of a respectable theology.¹² St. Thomas' treatment of the mystery of the Trinity through the psychological image continues to draw the interest of modern commentators. Eminent among these is Bernard Lonergan. He has made Thomist Trinitarian theology a living issue in modern thought, inserting it, as he does, into his over-all ontology and psychology.¹³

It is not here to our purpose to give any kind of evaluation of this type of theological speculation. Suffice it to say that if the starting point and presuppositions of psychological-image theology of the Trinity are consciously taken into consideration, then we do have an illuminating and coherent approach to the mystery of the revealed God. On the other hand, it can become a barren deduction, can seem to subordinate the mystery of the Trinity to certain problematical preconceptions concerning human psychology. If this is the case, nothing is more calculated to ostracize the Trinity from the realm of the relevant. However, the point to make here is a different one. The Trinity is being conceived of as a process. The process in question is that of human subjectivity. Through the establishment of an analogy between the human and the divine in the area of personal and spiritual life, a base is laid for making ontic statements about the divine reality. This procedure differs from Ogden's approach.¹⁴ He also conceives of the divine reality after the model of human subjectivity, but, according to his logic, God must be understood even according to the finite modalities of human subjectivity: the divine reality must be temporal, related, and so forth.¹⁵ The former approach, according to its logic, which derives from an absolute affirmation of God as an *unlimited* instance, must allow the being of God to surpass the finite modalities of the analogue. God is left essentially "unsaid" in His unlimited act of existence. In other words, the worldly, historical, personal process that the

¹² The hypothetical character of the psychological image should be noted. This analogy is used for what it is worth to illuminate the objective mystery, not to "solve" it. Consequently the force of *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 32, a. 1, ad 2m: "Trinitate posita, congruunt huiusmodi rationes, non tamen per has rationes sufficienter probetur Trinitas personarum." Similarly *De potentia*, q. 9, a. 5: "...modeste tamen et reverenter absque comprehendendi praesumptione. Nec talis inquisitio est inutilis cum per eam elevetur animus ad aliquid veritatis capiendum quod sufficiat ad excludendos errores." So too in the *Summa c. gent.* 4, c. 1 (towards the end).

¹³ Cf. *De Deo trino* (Rome, 1963). ¹⁴ *The Reality of God*, pp. 56-77.

¹⁵ See also "The Temporality of God," in *The Reality of God*, pp. 144-64.

theologian of Thomist tradition uses in his affirmation of the Trinity does not encapsulate the mystery conceptually. God is placed outside of the worldly process, yet at the same time a divine process is discerned within the divine reality which is the original explanation of the fact, structure, and dynamism of the finite process.

One cannot but feel that Ogden's theory would have been helped had he taken more cognizance of this traditional scheme of process theology. On the other hand, it must be admitted, he and his fellow process theologians do wish to say far more about God than the rather agnostic traditional theologians.

Among the modern theologians who have given their attention to the significance of the Trinity, two might be mentioned. They conceive the Trinity after the model of a process, even though implicitly or explicitly they have little time for the psychological-image scheme. I refer to Karl Rahner and John Macquarrie.¹⁶

Rahner begins by noting that the standard theology of the Trinity talks rather uncritically about the three divine Persons in the one God, and is thereby in danger of leading to some kind of cryptotrithemism. He implies that the Scholastic approach to the Trinity especially is not sufficiently conscious of the given nature of its starting point, which is the Trinity in the "economy" of salvation history.¹⁷ The abstract and highly reflex nature of the usual Western theology is instanced in the unusual difficulty that is met with in allowing for the truly personal roles of the divine Persons, in their actions *ad extra*. The divine Unity tends to swallow up the Trinity and makes the Trinitarian aspect of the mystery of our salvation something of an afterthought. A somewhat banal summary of Rahner's objection to the usual scheme of Scholastic Trinitarian theology might be given in this way: theology, having put the divine Persons in God, cannot quite get them out again.

Against the deficiencies of this type of theology, Rahner constantly repeats his axiom: "The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity."¹⁸ Our only reason for confessing the Trinity at all is the fact of our meeting the three divine Persons in the experience of our salvation in Christ. Rahner proceeds to investigate the dimensions of our encounter with the one God in the experience of salvation, and strongly accents the dynamic character of this moment. It is an absolute divine self-communication that is taking place.¹⁹ Though he does not analyze the

¹⁶ Cf. K. Rahner, "Der dreifältige Gott als transzendenter Urgrund der Heilsgeschichte," in *Mysterium salutis*, ed. M. Loehrer and J. Feiner (Einsiedeln, 1968) pp. 318-98; J. Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (London, 1966) pp. 175-86.

¹⁷ "Der dreifältige Gott," pp. 319-27. ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 327 ff. ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 371-82.

analogue of self-communication, it seems that his basic model is the process of the personal giving of ourselves to others in our truth and in our love.²⁰ Tie this in with Rahner's further thought on evolution, hominization, and Christology, and one sees that the Trinity is indeed conceived of in terms of a cosmic process through which God is absolutely communicated to man and his world.

Then, from a different standpoint, we have the well-known approach of Prof. John Macquarrie.²¹ He interprets the mystery of the Trinity in the categories of his existential ontology. For him, the basic definition of God is Being. Primordial Being, communicating itself and setting itself in relation to the world of beings, is the Father. Being actually communicated and expressing itself through the beings of creation is the Word or the Son. And the mode of Being that unites and reconciles all beings with Being is the Spirit. Hence we have Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Primordial Being, Expressive Being, and Unitive Being respectively, three "modes" of Being, movements within the dynamic yet stable mystery of Being.²² Here, too, we see an attempt to express the basic process character of the mystery of the Trinity. We have a powerful presentation of the relevance of the Trinity in terms of the initiative, self-expression, and unification by which Being is related to the universe of beings.

Clearly, each one of these approaches has its good points. The psychological-image scheme gives us clarity and coherence without thereby establishing the full relevance of the mystery it illuminates. Rahner, with his more "Greek" approach, gives us a firm initiation into the relevance of the Trinity but misses out on an ultimate clarity: there is a lack of coherence in explaining how his approach differs finally from the psychological-image approach, for without this it is difficult to see how he does in fact radicate the economic Trinity in the immanence of God.²³ Macquarrie, with characteristic clarity, establishes the relevance of the mystery but, owing perhaps to the brevity of his treatment, there does seem to be some lack of precision with regard to the precise relationship between the Trinity, affirmed in terms of Being, and the Trinity as manifested in a *special* history of salvation. In what sense, if any, is the Trinity a "supernatural" mystery? Further, the exact ontic significance of the divine Persons as *modes of Being* is not clearly distinguished from old modalist and Sabellian errors.²⁴

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 374 ff. ²¹ *Principles of Christian Theology*, pp. 174-86.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 182.

²³ "Der dreifältige Gott," pp. 392 ff.

²⁴ This is to say that it is not immediately clear that each "mode of Being" has the full absolute character of the divine reality that the older conceptuality of *natura-persona* demanded.

These remarks do not preclude the possibility of a well-rounded defense of the approaches. Our intention here is to point to actual plurality of conceptions of the Trinity, and it is only incidentally that these apparent inadequacies are alluded to. The real point to make is that these theories have an agreement: each expresses itself in terms of process (in the sense in which we have taken it). From now on, the task is to explicitate as much as possible this common element, by integrating the various contributions into a broad scheme. This will leave particular questions unanswered. But these can wait. The broader concern is the more urgent one. The following reflections can be elaborated under three headings: (1) the Trinity revealed; (2) the Trinity now; (3) conclusions and comparisons.

THE TRINITY REVEALED

A general statement that the Trinity is involved and revealed in the history of salvation contains two elements: (a) man is the addressee of the Word of revelation; (b) the three divine Persons are encountered in the total experience of salvation. The connection between these two elements resides in the fact that the Trinity does not reveal itself *in vacuo* or as an abstract truth, but is manifested to man as involving him. We cannot properly confess the Trinity unless we set it from the beginning in the place of its self-revelation. This is in the life and history of man. And here man must be taken as a whole, profoundly present to himself and his world in all his aspirations, and consequently before God.

Man Is the Addressee of the Word of Revelation

I would like to approach this topic from two complementary points of view. The first one is the more static. It points to man's being "defined" in a certain way by God as the possible receiver of a divine and absolute self-communication. The second one is more dynamic and looks more to God's address to man in his making of himself.

With regard to the first point, one notices that in all theories of the Trinity a correlative nature of man is implied. To some the Trinity appears merely as the objectification of man's spirit nature, as influenced by "grace." Those of this opinion would be some type of theological subjectivists. On a more orthodox level, functionalists would see the Trinity as the expression of the reality of God's insertion of Himself into human history, even though nothing can be stated about the objective reality of God. The classically orthodox would see man,

through a rather ample route of theological reflection, as the finite image of the Trinity, while the Trinity would be the first and final exemplar of man.

A too rapid condemnation of any one of these expressions of the Trinity would result in an indefensible position. Undoubtedly, the Trinity is the transcendent fulfilment of man's needs and the objectification of all that he aspires to. Likewise, this mystery is first recognized and confessed as it "occurs" in the Church's experience of salvation, no matter how implicit this recognition might be. In the same way, there must be some sense in saying that man is in the image and likeness of God, and indeed of the Trinity, if the witness of the Scriptures is to be respected. Yet, neither of these three qualifications of the Trinity quite hits off the issue. It might be better expressed in this way: man, by nature, is the possible addressee of God. He is, in his intelligence and freedom, a "natural" for a divine self-communication. By nature, man is a being-toward Truth in Love. This founds the possibility of his being the receiver of God, in all His truth and in all His love. Revelation can be said to "define" the nature of man in a way that philosophy cannot. Revelation marks man out as the possible hearer of the Word and possessor of the Spirit. This is to say that man is revealed to himself as a being-from and a being-toward the Trinity.

This line of argument can be extended: man is a "natural" for the revelation of the Trinity in history. As spirit, he is open to a transcendent fulfilment. This is the unattainable excess present in his historical attainments, his thematized objects, his immediate affirmations, and his worldly loves. Nonetheless, he is defined by history. He is placed in space and time and in the society of his fellows and in solidarity with his world as incarnate, embodied, "there." God's self-communication to man in history could not really be in some hidden spiritual way. Man can be "got at" only in and through his history. For this reason God gives Himself to man as incarnate Truth and as the gift of Love. This Love gives man the real historical possibility of claiming this divine Truth as his own. In this way man is touched and possessed by God in the totality of his human dimensions. God gives Himself to man's history, offering Himself to man's liberty, and empowering that liberty to accept God as the ground of man's future.

In this context man is defined by God as the possible brother of Christ. Christ is the Word made flesh, and the possessor of that Spirit of Love that is to be poured out on the world. As the brother of Christ and the possessor of the Spirit, man is a being who praises, loves, and returns to the Father through his history in the world. This openness to God results in man—better, is man—because God has made it so

originally. It is not because man is *such* a being that he sees God as the Trinity. It is because the Trinity is what it is that we see man as such a being. Perhaps our sense of the inadequacy of Trinitarian theology regarding the relevance of Trinity to man comes from our failure to respect sufficiently the terms of revelation. Here we have communicated to man a theology of God and an anthropology for man. The Trinity must look abstract if we have not seen ourselves in our world, with all its processes, as the possible and actual recipients of God, the Trinity. Indeed, man is what happens when God chooses to give Himself personally to creation. Man is the "divine presupposition" to God's becoming man and uniting all men in Christ.

To sum up this point: man is the structure he is, and the promise of a process, precisely because he has been so "set up" by God. This, in turn, means that man is the outcome of a prior process in God whereby God has determined to communicate Himself to creation. Hence the structure and the dynamics of the process in man is founded, supported, and finalized by the structure and the dynamics of an absolute process. This absolute process is identified with the Being of God, in the fulness of His freedom to communicate Himself.

This same point can be made from a more dynamic context of consideration. At every stage of human history we are presented with man not so much existing as a fixed and timeless essence, but as a historical existence, making himself, within his operative structure, what he aspires to be. This is more the case now. Man manipulates nature to his ends rather than being a patient sufferer under its processes. Now it would seem that all too often Christian theology has presented God as heading off the process of genuinely human development which is man's making of himself. It looked as though man were wrenched out of his native sphere into a higher though less congenial order. From this point of view, God's gracious activity looks more like an interference in the worldly process than what it surely must be: God entering into the process of man's making of man. The divine Self communicates with man in his self-making. Through this, the human project is given a transcendent and ultimate assurance. Man's powers are healed, strengthened, and elevated. Operating from this principle of the grace of the Spirit, man can go on to a new freedom, in the power to make himself anew, according to a graciously divine dimension.

This is the context in which the Trinity is revealed. Man is called to the Father as his ultimate Future. He will "arrive" only when he has come to the Father, when he exists *pros ton theon*. This pull of the absolute Future is actually brought home to man through the Word. Christ is the Word present in man's history. As such He is the offer of

the new creation and the foundation on which to build it. This new Future, offered and promised to us in Christ, is made an actual possibility through the gift of the Spirit. It can be said, then, that the grace that is at work in man's making of man is not unspecified. It is the active presence of the Trinity, enfolding man into an absolute order of futurity. Man is called out of a secularistic optimism as much as he is won from existential despair. What he must live by is a joyful and undeluded vision of the Future, which we call hope.

So much for this double consideration of the manner in which the Trinity is revealed to man. We are now in the position to say something positive on each of the three divine Persons. This will be done within the general perspective of a process theology.

The Three Divine Persons

To speak of the Father is indeed to refer to man's absolute Future. This is so, however, only by virtue of the primary characteristic of this divine Person: He is the *fons et origo* of everything in God and outside God. He is the source as well as the end of all human existence. He is presented to man in this way because He is primordially the source within God. He is the principle from which God's self-possession in Truth and Love stems. In this primordial character He is the beginning and end of the human process, understanding this as man's making of man. As such, He is not contained within the process nor measured by it. Rather, He contains it. He measures it as the absolute fulfilment of the human process. While it is true that He communicates Himself in His Word and through His Spirit, He remains the Ineffable, the Un-said, the One who cannot be categorized by human expressions nor rivaled by human achievements, despite His presence in truth and love in the human process. Thus He remains the great silence in the very utterance of His Word. This brings home to man the relativity of his present attainment, and the necessity of waiting and working for the transcendent Future that has been promised. The presence of the Father is felt through negation, it might be said: man is conscious that he has not yet reached his goal, not attained his end. He does not yet "see God," nor see himself as he will be.

Even in the Father's communication of His Spirit, there is no implication of the final and complete presence of first divine Person as man's Future. The Spirit of the Father's Love is given to penetrate and orientate the human process from within. Through the Spirit, human history comes to have a Fatherward thrust. It tends toward the genuine Future that the Father guarantees for man. It will have an outcome only in the presence and in the possession of the Father. To

this degree the Father is outside the process, and the process is subject to Him, in that He is the one who initiates it and concludes it.

The Father is revealed, then, as the transcendent Beginning and End of the human process of man's making of himself, and as the ultimate guarantor of its success. He is so characterized because He is the primordial principle within the Deity, from whom all process, divine and human, takes its origin.

Through the Son the Father calls all men to accept God as their absolute Future. The Son became man. This must mean that through the Son God enters into the world process. He identifies Himself with it by being one with humanity. He is subject to its structures and its dynamisms. Paradoxically, it means that the process in some way enters into God. He irreversibly claims it as His own. Despite the vagaries of human existence, He definitively rescues it and saves it from falling away into nothingness. History in this way comes to have an inner consistency in that it turns, from within, on God, communicated to it in Christ. Through the Truth that is the Word of God Himself, it coheres in meaning.

This Word is uttered to man in his own language. It expresses the truth about God and the truth about man. It presents God's involvement with man and man's involvement with God, for man now has an opportunity of communion with God. This Word of God appears as historically embodied. He is spoken out into human history in all the actuality that He is.

This coming of the Word, the gift of God's presence to the inner process of man's history, is not an abrupt act of dispossession on God's part. It is the gift of a real personal presence that respects the freedom of the addressee. God does not foist Himself upon man. Indeed, God's approach to man takes on the aspect of exposure, since God lets Himself be at the mercy of man. As man, He takes on the risk of evil and all the experience of suffering. This is the way in which the Word offers the full reality of God to man in his strivings for the future. He respects the scope of man's liberty and the conditions that situate it; for He becomes incarnate in the risk of history, exposed to suffering in the opacity and fragility of all that is human. God's Word in person offers God as man's Future. He is God asking man to accept God's Word on human history, and His Last Word on man's making of himself.

The Holy Spirit is generally characterized as God's Love. The communication of the Spirit is the gift of God's absolute love, both as a favor and as an enabling power. Because this Love is God, and because it is communicated to man, man is enabled to accept God as his Future.

This is the Future that has been offered him in the Word. He is able to direct himself to this Future without unwittingly cutting it down to the size of a mere human project. The Spirit is God communicated as the enabling power to have an immediate and intimate relationship with God, who is the mystery of man's future. Through the Spirit, God does not show Himself as a stark objective judgment on the world, but as a Love enabling man to love.

This Love that is communicated to man is directed toward the God of man's future offered to man in the Word. For this reason it is not a vague enthusiastic impulse, uncertain in origin and unspecified in direction. It is a Love founded on the given reality of God in the Word. It leads to a future in accord with the specifications that the Word lays down in His incarnate reality. This Love, then, is the enlivening principle of a structured process. The Word is not a dead utterance, but one looking to Love. "Filius est verbum non quaecumque sed spirans amorem."²⁵ The process of man's making of himself is centered on the given presence of the divine Truth. And it is empowered by a divine Love. Word and Spirit, Truth and Love face man toward the ultimate Future that God has promised—and is.

This love causes the process of man continually to reintegrate itself and to maintain its essential consistency; for it causes men to love, bringing about community, disposing of functions and gifts within the community, and directs the community to be ever beyond itself in its concerns. It tends to displace individual and group bias with charity, and an active and hopeful concern for man's future. This Spirit enables us to love our brethren "in Christ," that is, with a final and ultimate love, bearing on the final form of the world in the attainment of God as its Future.

Thus, the self-communication of God as Love is a divine liberty bringing about a genuinely human liberty. Man is all too prone to sell himself short in petty slaveries, obsessions with present structures, and preoccupations that preclude the ultimate. In this the real process of man is lost sight of. Through the Spirit, however, a new and genuine liberty is offered and created: man can come to himself, and dispose himself and his world according to divine dimensions.

So, the intervention of the Trinity in man's making of man results in the coming to be of the New Man. He is not yet, fully. But a process has begun which cannot fail; for it is structured on the Word, animated by the Spirit, and finalized by the Father.

To sum up this section, may we say that already the Trinity appears

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 43, a. 5, ad 2m.

to be remarkably relevant to man's situation? It stands out as the fact of God's total presence to man in the essential concerns of his history. It initiates man's process of self-development, structuring it, rescuing it, finalizing it, and, in general, explaining it. The Trinity is the very Being of God in His own taking possession of Himself in truth and love that is the mysterious guarantee of man's ultimate future. God communicates something of His own self-consciousness. He makes his own self-possession the inner support of man's ultimate self-possession. It is the divine self-consciousness that is the promise of man's final coming to himself, as a being destined to "arrive" and to find completion, finding himself not ultimately alone but with God in the midst of many brethren.

THE TRINITY NOW

Up to this point we have been treating of the mystery of the Trinity more from the ontological point of view. Now we must swing the consideration to more existential aspects. Certain approaches can be disengaged from the general consideration in order to point out the relevance of the Trinity to the lives of individuals and societies. It is, in short, a question of now pointing to the Trinity as a presence in the world rather than as an explicative fact.

The burden of the last section was that the Trinity was revealed as the total presence of God to the total reality of man. God communicates Himself to man in man's individual and social dimensions, in the ransoming of the past, in his present self-possession, and in his anticipation of the future. Here four points might be made out of the many that come to mind: the Trinity and (a) man's secularity, (b) man's personhood, (c) man's society, (d) the signs of the times.

Man's Secularity

The revelation of the Trinity in human history makes the secular order stand out. The world of human meanings and temporal values and processes is assured of a genuine secularity. It is enabled to be itself. The reason for these statements lies in the fact of the Incarnation. This is the central moment in the revelation of the Trinity. Through the Incarnation God claims the world as His own. The Word becomes man. In the first place, this means that all reality is integrated into the order of the cosmic Christ. Within this divine scheme, however, God's becoming man underlines the objective reality of man. It places man, his structures, his dynamisms, his processes in an independence which man himself must learn to respect. Of course, this is a point that demands little emphasis at the moment. Nonetheless, it is worth men-

tioning, for the Christian's way to an integrated secularity is through the Incarnation, when this is understood in the context of the mystery of the Trinity.

The doctrine of the Trinity further underscores secularity and the processes it implies. God reveals Himself as the Beginning and End, and as the enlivening Spirit of the universe in its true becoming. The Trinity enfolds creation into itself in a way, by concurring with its becoming and respecting its structures. This decisively excludes the dualism that has blighted different religious epochs. So much for an obvious enough point.

Man's Personhood

From the general view of the Trinity we have been putting forward, ample consequences result for man's status and development as a person. Human personality in its spontaneous freedom is menaced as much by the anonymous forces of a technological age as by the new philosophies of structuralism. These latter are a radical about-turn away from the personalism and existentialism that have been in vogue up to the present. Two observations will have to suffice.

First, the revelation of the Trinity assures man of the ultimately personal nature of reality. The revelation of the Father as the one who is to come to give man his future saves man from building a kingdom of things in which as a personal self he would be a stranger. Likewise, the presence of God in the Incarnation has a personalizing effect on man, engaged as he is in activities and processes of making his world. Christ pulls man into a point of integration. Instead of man's activity and aspiration being stultified in a paltry and brutal functionalism, they obtain the deepest personal significance in the cosmic design which is Christ. To complete the picture, the Spirit animates and possesses all human processes. He establishes man at every step in a communion of persons. He is the unbreakable and vital link between ourselves and those who have gone before us, with those with whom we co-operate now and with the people of the future. The result is that the Christian in confessing the Trinity is always called to the personalist view. He must pursue personal values far beyond the world of mere objects or projects. The reality of the world is ultimately personal. He addresses it not as an impenetrable fact but as a Presence.

Further, the Trinity calls man to the development of himself as a person. The knowledge that man attains is mediated to him through the Word. The Word is God's Truth in person. He is partially glimpsed in all the inklings of conscious human existence. In this perspective man does not amass a great load of objects. Rather, he is seen to be

coming into a more conscious communion with Truth and Understanding in Person.²⁶ Through His role the Spirit transforms the capacities of man's freedom. Man is given the ability to abandon himself at every stage of his existence to supremely meaningful realities. So, through the enabling Gift of the Spirit, man uses his freedom not to become "nothing," or a mere haver of things, but to become a man completely for others—indeed, all things to all men. He is completely oriented in his existence by persons, because he finds himself to be the son of the Father with the divine power of loving. Thus the Trinity makes man into a person and calls him to a communion where he will be known and loved, rescued from solitude and slavery, and be presented with the fulness of his own personhood.

Man's Society

In many ways the crisis of our time is that of society. Questions are asked about the very possibility of a community of meaning and aspiration that would make possible the building of the one human history. Certainly the very exuberance of man's existence makes for rifts and tensions. Yet, all can feel a progressive irrationality latent in our age, a tendency to revel in the Kafkaesque, to be productive in a succession of rebellions without causes. Here, once more, the Trinity stands before us as the relevance of God to man, but this time to man in his social process.

If society means anything, it must mean that there is a community of meaning accessible to man, and a community of possibility built on that common meaning. The community of meaning is offered to man in the presence of the Word of God in man's history. Because it is "there" in man's history, the Word is accessible to man in the making of himself. It is presented to him as the ultimate logic of human existence. It is the Last Word on man's dignity and his future. Even though this common meaning has not yet been found, it is there to be found. From this point of view, a vision of society as large and wide as humanity is possible.

Society also needs a common possibility. Where is the integrating force to come from that can ultimately reconcile men to one another, so that a conscious possibility of a common and truly human history will be realized? This integrating factor is revealed to us in the person of the Holy Spirit. He is presented to us as the Spirit of mankind's true history together. He is the Spirit of the New Man, from whom all the differences of partial viewpoints and limited projects are banished.

²⁶ For an excellent Thomistic treatment of this point, see F. E. Crowe, "Pull of the Future and Link with the Past," *Continuum* 7 (1969) 35-45.

In the Spirit the establishment of the one community of mankind becomes, in fact, a possibility. It is really offered to man.

The Signs of the Times

This category, "the signs of the times," is increasingly used, in Catholic theology especially, in our effort to designate the presence of God in the world, calling us to a new way of development. Now if we continue along the present path of thought, it is not difficult to see that the Trinity is precisely the "reason" why the times have "signs." The Trinity establishes the divine significance of human events. God has claimed the world as His own. He has poured out His Spirit upon it, to be the animating force of history. Because of this, and despite the manifold and ever ominous reality of evil, the world will have an outcome. Notwithstanding this irreversible presence of God in the world, no one age can grasp the totality of its humanity save in hope. It can approximate more closely to the idea of the New Man through an analysis of its aspirations and by an examination of the paths it spontaneously travels. The full coming-to-be of the New Man as understood in the Word and as realized through the Spirit is not yet. Till the decisive moment, it is a matter of appropriating our humanity in an ever more final manner, until we "own" it, as the Word of the Father already owns it, in the achievement of God's design. The Word and the Spirit, then, are the reality of God's presence to our world, illuminating and inspiring men to find themselves as they have already been found by God. The confession of the Trinity demands that men look for signs in history, to discern the moment of grace, which is the way to the Future.

This theme can be tried in another way. At some stage our confession of the Trinity seems to have lost much of its reality. It appears that the Trinity was, as it were, taken out of the sphere of public history and locked in the soul as an object of contemplation. The force of the New Testament demands quite a different emphasis. Christ is the very presence of God's Logos in human history. The Spirit is poured out upon all men. Both events have a place in the public reality of history. Our "times" are truly penetrated by God. They become a sign and a challenge because God dwells not only in our hearts but in our world. God is to be found in our world as our Truth, calling man to his real self in the presence of the Self of God. He is found there, too, as the power of enabling Love. By this we can, in fact, transform our world and make our own the absolute Future promised by the Father. We can realize a "transcendent humanism," to use Pope Paul's phrase.²⁷

²⁷ *Populorum progressio*, no. 16.

So it is that a realistic confession of the Trinity calls man not only to adore and love the presence of God within him, but to abide in God present in our world. Both aspects of God's presence must be respected. Both envisage a kind of mutual cohesiveness existing between God and man. Unless the Trinity dwells through grace in the world, the world is self-enclosed and brittle, at the mercy of a human liberty that need be little more than a cosmic whim. An absolute meaning and love could not be found within the terms of human life. On the other hand, it is only by its dwelling in the world that the Trinity is revealed to man and has meaning for him. As it is, God *has* communicated Himself to man. The experience of this totality enables us to confess God as Father, communicating Himself in the Word and the Spirit. God's infinite process enfolds the finite into itself. The human is given a transcendental completion.

To conclude this section: the Trinity is the divine presence in the total existence of man. It affects him in his secularity, his personhood, his society, his understanding of his world. That is why the Trinity is vitally implicated in the process of man's coming to himself, in the making of his world.

CONCLUSIONS AND COMPARISONS

In this brief concluding section all that remains is to tease out some of the points that have been touched on, and to indicate some comparisons with current thought in this area.

The Subject-Object Dilemma and the Mystery of the Trinity

One of the great preoccupations of modern theology is the overcoming of the polarities of subject and object. God is not allowed to be talked of as an object on any account, as though He were alongside other objects, a thing in this sense. He is affirmed as the supremely personal. He is the all-embracing reality that cannot be thought of or experienced save as involving the human person. On the other hand, God is more than His involvement with the human person. He would exist even if human persons did not. To the degree that this is accepted and realized, in the same measure God is affirmed as an objective reality. Yet, because man places this objective reality through affirmation, he must necessarily experience himself as falling short. His concepts and categories are limited. His very desire to be objective about the reality of God throws him back into the experience of his own subjectivity. How, then, can he attain the real God without cutting the divine reality down to a human subjective scope? This is, of course, a much-vexed question. There are, with all their colorations, the typical

Catholic answers stressing the radical power of the human intelligence, and the typical Protestant principles underscoring the radical need of God's grace for any saving knowledge of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, while the doctrine of the Trinity is not a solution to this problem, it is a very relevant consideration. The Trinity is revealed in the context of God's total communication of Himself to man. In this manner the self-gift of God transcends the subject-object categories to some extent. God is revealed precisely as the abiding Mystery, yet this revelation comes about through His personal Word. This Word presents the mind with all the objectivity of the divine reality. But God's total self-gift also involves His presence to us as possessing our subjectivity. God makes our subjectivity correlative to the objective reality that He is. Through the Spirit we are enabled to acknowledge the living God without restricting Him to our finite conceptions or "subjecting" him. The total reality of God, the Trinity, is communicated to man in His divine objectivity, yet in such a way as to enable the subjectivity of man to accept it. Has theology sufficiently respected the finality of the doctrine of the Trinity from this point of view?

God "Really Related" to the World?

Classic theology, within the limits of its terminology, has consistently pointed out that God cannot be "really related" to the world. And this despite the fact that the world is "really related" to God in the very definition of creation. A symmetrical, real relationship would mean that creation would ontically affect the Creator. God would be qualified by something outside Himself, and really modified. I believe that the classic theology has in fact respected the transcendence of God, though it seems that the truly positive character of God's relationship to the world has not been sufficiently brought out. Thought on this matter has been too limited by the technical Aristotelian term, "relation." This fundamentally physical term can hardly be expected to do service in all cases of relationship, especially regarding the most *real* type of relationship, that existing between persons. The God-world relationship is certainly a most meaningful relationship, even if it is not "real" in the Aristotelian sense.²⁸ An investigation of three aspects of this relationship would help to substantiate this claim. Here we can give only the barest indication. (1) The totally interpersonal character of the relationship: there is the fulness of personal communion, even if God is not ontically affected in the absoluteness of His mystery. (2) The unchangeable God does really subject Himself to the

²⁸ For a concise and illuminating treatment of relation, see J. de Finance, *Connaissance de l'être* (Paris, 1966) pp. 464-75.

human process, He becomes man, changeable in the humanity that is assumed. (3) He eternally commits Himself, determining Himself to be "our kind of God," the God of this particular human and cosmic history. In all the infinite range of possibilities, God has elected to be *ours*. From these three points, and using the resources of classic theism, and setting the whole in a dynamic Trinitarian context, it can be affirmed that God is most meaningfully related to our universe, even if He is not "really" related in the technical sense of the Aristotelian category. This approach enables us to question a basic point in process theology. In seeking to establish God in a *real* relationship to the universe, does it not neglect a reality of relationship that is a natural part of Christian thought, and as the price of this neglect, finish in subjecting God to the world? Whatever the case, greater attention to traditional theological terminology was called for, obscure as it might be.

Presence

Our presentation of the mystery of the Trinity enables us to appreciate the point currently being made that we must go beyond ontological categories in our understanding of God.²⁹ On the one hand, it seems a fatal move for Christian thought to abandon the categories of being altogether. The notion of truth and language would argue against such a course. On the other, since the Being of God is totally given to man, it might well be best described as "Presence," or even "*the Presence*." God revealed as Trinity is *the Presence* in our lives, our world, our history, in the making of ourselves, in our process. This Presence assures us of the hope of finally finding ourselves in this Presence and the Future that it promises to man. Though it sounds too much like a slogan, the point can be briefly put: the Trinity is the Presence in the process. There is a process for man because there is a Presence for man. And there is a Presence for man because there is a process of a primordial type in God. This is the divine self-possession in truth and love. This is the ground for the Presence and the process in the existence of man.

The best way to end this sketch is to quote the thesis we enunciated at the beginning: "the revealed mystery of the Trinity is *the process par excellence*, and as such it is the beginning and the end, the explanation and the support, of the integral human process." To validate this, the "process content" of the various Trinitarian schemes was noted; then the relevance of the Trinity to the human process was indicated from a static and dynamic point of view; then we took each of the divine Persons and tried to indicate the role that each had in the

²⁹ For example, Leslie Dewart, *The Foundations of Belief* (New York, 1969).

process of man's making of man; this led us to see how the Trinity was present in the total human concern; finally, under a few headings, we drew conclusions and made comparisons in the hope of pointing out areas for further thought.

If the main drift of this broad and sketchy treatment is granted, I believe the conclusion is warranted. If the Trinity is taken as a process, it must be seen as involving the world, and as instigating, assuring, and completing the integral process of man's making of man. The Trinity is the most relevant mystery of God. Man has every reason to give glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.