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The Trinitarian God. Contemporary Challenges and Relevance

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BEDE UCHE UKWUIJE, C.S.Sp.

***THE TRINITARIAN GOD. CONTEMPORARY
CHALLENGES AND RELEVANCE. MUMBAI, INDIA: ST.
PAUL'S PRESS, 2013. ISBN: 978-978-52136-7-6. 208 pp.***

Ukwuije's quest for the contemporary relevance of the doctrine of the Trinity is driven by two concerns: remedying the dichotomy between theology and economy in classical Trinitarian theology and the deficit of the Trinity in African inculturation theology.

In Part I, *Epistemological Challenges*, Ukwuije reflects on atheism in western thinking and naming God in African theology. He claims that the difficulty of thinking the Christian God in the two contexts comes from the limits of their common epistemological basis: western theism that thinks God without God's revelation in Jesus-Christ. Opposition to theism gave rise to atheism: God is man's projection (Ludwig Feuerbach), theology is reduced to anthropology, religion becomes the opium of the people, man is man's redeemer (Karl Marx), and God is a contradiction to life (Frederick Nietzsche). The Supreme Being conceived by African theologians falls short of the conception of God in African religious traditions as well as in Christian Trinitarian theology. Mbiti considered the deities of Africa as personifications of God's activities and manifestations; Idowu saw them rather as ministers of Olodumare, the Supreme Deity. Efforts abound to name the African Jesus according to African patterns – king, ancestor, *force vitale*, e.t.c. – but often the dissimilarities loom higher than similarities.

Part II discusses the *Scriptural and Dogmatic Foundations of the Doctrine of the Trinity*. In the Old Testament, Yahweh operated with his Word and Spirit and showed God's self as relational. The gospels show God revealing himself on the cross as Father of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit assuring the unity of them both and bringing us to participate in the Trinitarian communion. The Councils of Nicea (325 C.E.) and Constantinople (381 C.E.) developed the scriptural understanding of the intimate relations in God into a doctrine of the Trinitarian God. Various heresies, including Arianism, had posited that the Son and Spirit were merely creatures, or were divine but of lower rank than the Father, or were modes or manifestations of the same God the Father (modalism). Were they of the same being (*homoousios*) as the Father, or of like being (*homoiousios*) though not really equal to the Father? The creed gave a definitive answer: "light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in being (*homoousios*) with the Father..." (p. 104) Christian prayer confesses this in the Three Glorias - to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

Part III discusses the *Unity and Distinctiveness of the Persons of the Trinity*. The Latin Father, Tertullian, was the first to use “*persona*” to designate three persons in one God. Augustine (396-430) used the psychological analogy of memory, mind, and will; he also invoked the analogy of love: Father as Lover, Son as Loved, Spirit as Love of both. All activity outside the Godhead is common to all three persons (*principle of appropriation*), even though we speak of the Father creating, the Son redeeming, the Spirit sanctifying. In Greek, person was *prosōpon*, but this word could also mean the mask worn by an actor, risking a falling back to modalism. The Greek Church preferred the word *hypostasis*, but to Latins this sounded “substance” or “essence,” as if the Trinity were three gods! The Western and Eastern Churches each stuck to its term. Thomas Aquinas tried to bypass the issue by speaking of three “subsistent relations.” The Greek Father, John Damascene (c. 675-749) had coined the term, *perichoresis* (moving around in each other) to indicate the love and sharing of everything.

Constantinople (381 C.E.) spoke of the Holy Spirit *proceeding* from the Father (cf. John 15:26). Latin Fathers, especially Augustine, had, however, spoken of the Spirit proceeding from the Father *and* the Son (*filioque* clause). In the 8th century, *filioque* was added to the Nicene Creed in the court of Charlemagne at Aachen. Pope Benedict VIII (1012-1024) sanctioned this and what followed was the schism of East and West in 1054 – for the East, this introduced two origins and contradicts the monarchy of the Father. Karl Barth rejected Augustine’s psychological analogy, preferring the analogy of God’s revelation in Scripture: one Lordship of God, subject of his revelation, three modes of being. Karl Rahner’s axiom, “the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity,” seems to make divine activity outside the Trinity a necessity, no longer freely willed decision. For Moltmann, the approaches of Barth and Rahner shut God up in loneliness, no community of persons. Using the analogy of human community, he shows the Cross of Jesus revealing the divine community in love and suffering. For Catherine LaCugna (1991) God is communion, a mystery of persons in communion who embrace death, sin, and all forms of alienation for the sake of life.

The book ends with Part IV, *Contemporary Relevance of the Trinitarian God*. If Christian faith portrays God’s relational being as made visible in the self-dispossession of Father, Son, and Spirit, God’s Trinitarian being, in which humanity partakes, becomes the *regula fidei*, the grammar for Christian living in the society. This understanding of God finds a correspondence in the African understanding of the human person as a network of relationships, not an individual; one is actualized as one transcends self toward communion with others. This leads to the rediscovery of humanity’s and creation’s kinship with God through Christ, which Archbishop Anthony Obinna, of Owerri, Nigeria has translated into neologisms, theofilance (theofiliation) and confluence (conflation): Christ *filiated* himself to creation and humanity to effect a new

kinship with God. At Pentecost, the Spirit banished ethnic divisions, created a community of differences among cultures and languages, and universal co-filiation of peoples. The current environmental crisis is actually a spiritual crisis: man has lost the meaning of the world as gift from the triune God entrusted to man's stewardship. Creation is open to God and has God as its future (cf. Rom 8:19-27). "A life structured by the Trinity will not be preoccupied with its self-preservation but with self-donation" (p. 197).

James Chukwuma Okoye, C.S.Sp.

ANTHONY C. THISELTON

THE HOLY SPIRIT – IN BIBLICAL TEACHING, THROUGH THE CENTURIES, AND TODAY. GRAND RAPIDS: WILLIAM B. EERDMANS, 2013. ISBN 978-0-8028-6875-6. PAPERBACK. 500 pp. WITH BIBLIOGRAPHY, INDEXES, 565pp. \$46.

This exposition of the history, theology, and spirituality of the Holy Spirit surveys over a hundred ancient and modern authors; the author's own analysis of the relevant Scripture texts is found on pp. 1-160. Throughout, Thiselton engages in often negative dialogue with the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements.

In the Old Testament, *ruah* refers to wind, breath, spirit (of man, of God). LXX translates it as *pneuma* (264 times), but *anemos* (49 times) when it means wind. Some passages are ambiguous: is the *ruah* of Gen 1:2 "mighty wind" or the Spirit of God? *Ruah* is distinct from God, yet conveys God's presence/power. "Holy Spirit" occurs only twice – Isa 63:10 and Ps 51:11; it is not found in Greek literature outside the LXX. The Major Prophets received revelation through the word, only in Ezekiel and once in Deutero-Isaiah is it through the Spirit. The Spirit is sometimes given in contexts that require learning or training - leadership, administration, craftsmanship, physical strength. "I will put my Spirit within you" (Ezek 36:26-27) suggests that right relationship with God needs the Spirit. "When you send forth your Spirit they are created" (Ps 104:30) depicts the Spirit's role in creation.

In Judaism, the Spirit is agent of prophecy, also active in the study of Torah. Qumran associated the Spirit with holiness and purification, Mishna and Talmud with the resurrection from the dead, though the Spirit does not give righteousness, rather is given in response to it.