

TRINITY SUNDAY  
May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2013

## Here is a hard one!

I often talk about **kenosis** – self-emptying. I often propose a model of being human, not in a grandiose and glorious way, but in a self-emptying and poured-out way. It is, for sure, the way I understand Jesus – the way of the crucified. I don't want to repeat that here.

Often, when we think of our lives as our little attempt at emptying and pouring out ourselves for others, we think about our dying. We might well see it as the final and most complete emptying and pouring out of ourselves. I think it is. We might also imagine God – in all God's fullness – filling up our final emptiness with God's presence, and we think we have some idea of what heaven will be like. I think that is a good approach to it, too, at least a good beginning.

But sometimes I wonder if that is the whole story. What I wonder about is the Holy Spirit. We call the Spirit, Love. We call the Spirit – working from the word spirit itself – a Breath of Love. I like the word 'gasp' of Love even better. I like to understand this Gasp of Love as done mutually, together, by both Father and Son. It is like their cry of delight when they are together.

But I would like to stop there, and chance my arm a bit. The Father would be utterly and completely engaged in that Gasp of Love. So would the Son. This means that **each of them empties whoever they are into that Gasp**. So I can imagine these two divine persons as self-emptying and outpouring into the Gasp so that nothing is left for either of them independently of that. The Spirit, too, as the Gasp, seems to **lack any 'solidity'** (such as the words 'Father' and 'Son' would suggest, even if that is immediately qualified and denied for the sake of the oneness of the one God). The Spirit is all Breath.... So I can actually come up with **three utterly poured out and solidity-emptied 'persons'**. I put persons in inverted commas, because all other persons aren't that poured out or solidity-emptied. And so they are not all that 'personal' – in the usual sense - as a result.

So I am beginning to think that it is not just you and I that are asked to empty ourselves, it was not just Jesus who emptied himself, but that God – and in particular the three persons in God – is/are actually in an eternal gasp of self-emptying. Maybe it is the only way (or at least one way) that three persons are in one ultimate kenosis, or one Gasp or Breath or Spirit. Maybe to understand God as three in person like this is a marvellous way of protecting the oneness of the One God. The communion of the three is a communion in the Gasping and the Gasp. The one divine nature is really kenosis.

Yes, if God is like that, God would lose a lot of characteristics we often attribute to God. God – the Father – would lose a lot of paternalism. God – the Son – would lose a lot of filial (or is it Oedipal?) achievement in being equal to his Father. God – the

Spirit – would lose a lot of mysterious strangeness, and the impression that he is the unnecessary (and theologically uninvited) third party. But that loss perhaps is not such a bad thing. It makes God and all persons in God follow the same ‘rules’ as we do and Jesus did.

I am trying to focus on **the Spirit**, not one extra problem after we thought we understood the Father and the Son, but the key to a deeper grasp of both Father and Son...None the less, it is only one limited way of trying to understand. Can you grasp a gasp?

The God of Jesus emptied his Godness into Jesus in love. Jesus emptied himself for the sake of the poor people he loved. Something made them do it. Paul calls it the Spirit. The Spirit of self-emptying. So in the real God there are indeed three: the self-emptied God (Father) and the self-emptied Jesus (Son) and the self-emptying mystery (Spirit). Call them persons if you like, as long as you mean persons who empty themselves in love for other such persons. If you see the trinity that way, you could say it is experiential, it is historical, it is a summary of the whole liturgy from advent to Pentecost. It is the point behind the incarnation and the death-resurrection. Where do you find this Trinitarian self-emptying? You do see it in some people around us. In married couples, in parents, in children also – they do it because they love one another. When they do it, God, the Three, are there in what they do and who they are. If you believe in the Trinity, don't go looking for the Trinity somewhere else. It's here often unknown, but longing to be recognized.

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It might be a paradox, but I want to see this kenotic trinity as a mystery of freedom. I mean a freedom from all constraint, command, or compulsion. I mean a lack of reluctance to enter into the kenosis together. I mean, could I say, a certain happiness and cheerfulness about it.

Not only the Trinity, but Jesus, and ourselves, are invited into that. I suppose we have to tolerate a bit of management and administration and organisation, but from a more mysteric and theological angle, it doesn't matter so much. Let whatever be. The real issues are emptied of those things. And we, in them all, are free. It is a sort of unwritten law. You get to know that the real law is not writable.

Paul insists that this ideal of the Christ life be portrayed, exhibited, displayed, painted as in a clear picture, presented graphically and plainly, so that hearers are moved to be spectators. The Christ so communicated is the Christos estauromenos (the Christ in an ongoing state of crucifiedness). He is present, and so presented, in other Christs, so that all can learn from one another the mind of Christ, and become imitators of Christ.

Even with all this, the transition from compulsion to freedom (= the way Christ lived) has to be worked on by us. Work out your salvation...with fear and trembling, not through fear of hell, but through fear of not being kenotically free like that. At root, the only – unacceptable - alternative is a regime of external control.

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