

In Heaven As It Is on Earth: Learning to Live the Trinity



A Call and Challenge from the Holy Father

“To make the church the *home* and the *school* of communion: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God’s plan and respond to the world’s deepest yearnings.

But what does that mean in practice? Here, too, our thoughts could run immediately to the action to be undertaken, but that would not be the right impulse to follow. Before making practical plans, we need to *promote a spirituality of communion*, making it the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons, and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are being built up. A *spirituality of communion* indicates above all the heart’s contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the faces of the brothers and sisters around us...

Let us have no illusions: unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. They would become mechanisms without a soul, ‘masks’ of communion rather than its means of expression and growth.”

—Pope St. John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*: Apostolic Letter for the Third Millennium, paragraph 43

Summary Points

1. “To make the church the *home* and the *school* of *communion*: that is the great challenge...if we wish to be faithful...and respond to the world’s deepest yearnings.”
2. This precedes the “making of practical plans” and must guide *all levels of formation* and *all the institutes of formation*. Families, parishes, and communities are involved.
3. A promotion and proposal for a *spirituality of communion* is a sign of “the heart’s contemplation of the Trinity dwelling in us,
 - a. and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the faces of the brothers and sisters around us.”
4. The greatest illusion is that we think “external structures of communion” will “do the job”; rather, it is a spiritual path that we must first *inhabit*.
5. The greatest danger is to fail to discern “masks” of “communion”: dichotomies of liberal and conservative, this group or that group, that parish or my parish, my spirituality or yours, my view versus theirs.

Exploring Together

- 1) The Law of Life for the Church: The New Commandment. → 2) Be What You Are! → 3) Augustine and Dom Gregory Get Carried Away.



1. The Law of Life for the Church: The New Commandment.

Against A Rugged Individualism: Consequences of Separating Spirituality and Theology

“Genuine Christian life is an imitation of the Trinity. Just as there is one God in three Persons, so, in Christ, we are all ‘members of one another’; there is, and we are called to become, *a single Man in a multitude of persons*” (Olivier Clément, *On Human Being. A Spiritual Anthropology*, 44).



“For when God became man, he drew one man to himself and into unity with God, and in so doing he has attracted the humanity of all men and women...The humanity of Jesus Christ is at one and the same time the divine fishing-rod, which has encountered the one humanity of all men and women, so that the humanity of all men and women is led into the unity of the Body of Christ, the God-Man, and is led out of the death-dealing of that separation which is called sin” (Joseph Ratzinger, *Die Einheit der Nationen. Eine Vision der Kirchenväter*, 31, 32, 33).

“Those of us who are older...have been spiritually formed in an individualist way...If there ever was an experience of the Spirit that took place among people as a group and is normally understood as such...it is the experience of the first Pentecost in the church, an event—we must presume—that certainly did not consist in the casual meeting of a collection of mystics who lived individually, but in the experience of the Spirit had by the community...I think that in a future spirituality the element of a fraternal spiritual communion, of a spiritually lived together, would play a more decisive role, and that slowly but surely we must go in this direction” (Karl Rahner, “*Elementi di spiritualità nella Chiesa del futuro*,” in *Problemi e prospettive di spiritualità*, 440-441).

“...despite their orthodox confession of the Trinity, Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere ‘monotheists.’ We must be willing to admit that, should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged” (Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, 10-11).

Summary Points

1. Doctrinally and theologically, the spirituality of a Christian is founded on a salvation that is not only between *me and God*, but *me in and through you to God*: the reality of the Trinitarian revelation is that we are no mere *individuals* but *persons in communion*.

2. There has been a tendency to promote a spirituality of *me and Jesus*, and it just so happens that I am with other people.
3. A shift in that perspective would be: *me and Jesus, who I experience in and through you because we are all in Christ*, and so my encounter and salvation only come about *through and in you, another person*.
4. The church is not a bunch of people in line for the grocery, each with his or her own goods, waiting to check out.

Conversion: Towards What?

Conversion “is being grasped by ultimate concern. It is other-worldly falling in love. It is total and permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations...For Christians it is God’s flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us. It is the gift of grace...Deciding is one thing, doing is another” (Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 240-241).

Towards Jesus’s Deepest Desire (John 17:21-24): The Root and Reason

21a “That all may be one

21b As you, Father, are in me and I am in you,

21c may they also be in us,

21d so that the world may believe you have sent me.

22a The glory that you have given me I have given them.”

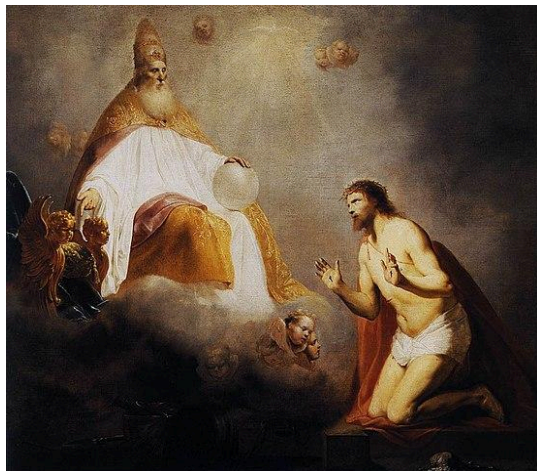
22b “That they may be one

22c as we are one.

23ab I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one,

23cd so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

24ab Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they may always see the glory you have given me.”



This prayer of Jesus is an “opening of vistas closed to human reason. For Jesus implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and in the union of God’s sons and daughters in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself” (*Gaudium et spes*, 24).

2. Be What You Are!



“The proper effect of the eucharist is the transformation of man into God” (Thomas Aquinas, *In Sent. IV*, dist. 12, q.2, a.1)

“Our participation in the body and blood of Christ causes us to be transformed into that which we believe and with all fulness we carry in our spirit and in our flesh, he in whom we are dead, buried and risen” (Leo the Great, *Sermo* 63, 7).

“The sharing in the body and blood of Christ has no other effect than to accomplish our transformation into that which we receive” (*Lumen Gentium*, 26).

**“Just as the living Father sent me,
and I live because of the Father,
so whoever eats me
will live because of me” (John 6:57).**

**“If I then, the Lord and Master, have
washed your feet,
you should wash each other’s feet” (John
13:14).**

Summary Points

1. The Eucharistic food and drink take the divine life existing between the Father and the Son and *re-locate* it on earth as our own, uniting those who will eat and drink the gift of God.
2. The whole trajectory of the Eucharist is to communicate the life among the Persons of the Trinity to men and women, and in that way, men and women enter into the space opened to them by God the Holy Trinity.
3. Thus, the command of mutual love finds its rationale: it is not simply a moral command to be at peace, but an ontological reality rooted in the fact that we are actually living the Trinitarian Life.
4. Christians are personally—ontologically—transformed into Christ himself (another word for a Baptism is a Christening, literally to make Christ) which enables the baptized to begin to live a new life, and to be related to the Father and the Spirit in the same way as Christ is by nature.

3. Augustine and Dom Gregory Get Carried Away



“If then you wish to understand the body of Christ, hear what the Apostle says to believers: ‘Now you are the body of Christ and members.’ (1 Cor. 12:27). If therefore you are the body of Christ and members, your divine mystery is set on the table of the Lord; you receive your mystery. To that which you are, you answer Amen...For thou hearest, ‘The Body of Christ,’ that their Amen may be true. Why then in bread?...Let us again and again hear what the Apostle himself says, when speaking of this Sacrament, ‘We, being many, are one bread, one body.’ (1 Cor. 10:17). Understand and rejoice: unity, truth, piety, charity...Be then what you see and receive what you are” (Augustine, *Sermo* 272).

“Was ever another command so obeyed? For century after century, spreading slowly to every continent and country and among every race on earth, this action has been done, in every conceivable human circumstance, for every conceivable human need from infancy and before it to extreme old age and after it, from the pinnacle of earthly greatness to the refuge of fugitives in the caves and dens of the earth. Men have found no better thing than this to do for kings at their crowning and for criminals going to the scaffold; for armies in triumph or for a bride and bridegroom in a little country church; for the proclamation of a dogma or for a good crop of wheat; for the wisdom of the Parliament of a mighty nation or for a sick old woman afraid to die; for a schoolboy sitting an examination or for Columbus setting out to discover America; for the famine of whole provinces or for the soul of a dead lover; in thankfulness because my father did not die of pneumonia; for a village headman much tempted to return to fetich because the yams had failed; because the Turk was at the gates of Vienna; for the repentance of Margaret; for the settlement of a strike; for a son for a barren woman; for Captain so-and-so wounded and prisoner of war; while the lions roared in the nearby amphitheatre; on the beach at Dunkirk; while the hiss of scythes in the thick June grass came faintly through the windows of the church; tremulously, by an old monk on the fiftieth anniversary of his vows; furtively, by an exiled bishop who had hewn timber all day in a prison camp near Murmansk; gorgeously, for the canonisation of S. Joan of Arc—one could fill many pages with the reasons why men have done this, and not tell a hundredth part of them. And best of all, week by week and month by month, on a hundred thousand successive Sundays, faithfully, unfailingly, across all the parishes of Christendom, the pastors have done this just to

make the *plebs sancta Dei*—the holy common people of God” (Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 744-745).

Reflections in the Trinity

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