

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



Pentecost, on June 12 this year, is also the Feast of the Holy Trinity. It's a good day to consider this question: How can God be One and Undivided, as Christians claim, and at the same time be three distinct Persons, as Christians also claim?

Part of the answer is that this is how God has shown Himself to be in Scripture, both the Old and New Testaments. The Book of Genesis is one example of this. The second verse of the book says that "the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters" at the time of creation.

Then, in 1:26, God says, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness." This verse with its plural "our" is what the Gospel writer John is referring to when he writes, "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (1:3). John is describing Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as co-creator with the Father.

So the Bible clearly establishes the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as the three Persons of the Trinity. Yet some Biblical commentators contend that when God speaks in Genesis about making man "in our image" He is addressing not Christ, but the beings who surround Him in heaven, the members of the heavenly court.

This contention doesn't really make sense. The angels and the beings around God are still created by Him. They can bear His image, but they cannot share it as His equals by nature any more than we can. They too are creatures, even though they are privileged to stand before their Maker in heaven.

Father Alexander Schmemmann, writing about the Creed in "Celebration of Faith" Volume I, gives the other part of the answer. He says that God **MUST** be a Trinity of Persons:

"We believe in one God, but not in a God who is alone, not in a God who is self-centered, not in a God who lives in and for Himself. God is love, Christianity says. But to love is to be turned towards the Other, and at its most exalted, to love is to surrender to Him. The Father, says the Gospel, loves the Son and gives everything to Him. The Son, says the Gospel, loves the Father and gives Himself totally to Him. Finally, the Holy Spirit is this gift of love itself, this love itself as gift, joy, fullness, existence, thirst and quenching of thirst, giving and receiving.

And through this love, through this giving, God creates the world, calls each of us into life, makes each of us beloved and bestows His love, His Spirit, so that each can partake of divine Life. Thus we pray to the Spirit: 'Come and abide in us'...And in answer He comes to abide in us, to lead us, as Christ promised, into all truth...to give us eternal life.

TROPARION OF PENTECOST

Blessed art Thou, O Christ our God,
Who hast revealed the fishermen as most wise
by sending down upon them the Holy Spirit -
through them Thou didst draw the world into Thy net.
O Lover of Man, glory to Thee!

This then is the radiant mystery of Christian faith, the mystery of God who is Trinity, the God who is Love."