

# 1. The Mystery of God the Father: Paternity and Basileosis.



Originally published in *Intrepido Pastori*, Ivan Choma and Ivan Muzychka, edits. Rome: Universitas Catholica Ucrainorum S. Clementis Pape, 1984, pp. 39-50.

## THE MYSTERY OF GOD THE FATHER: PATERNITY AND BASILEOSIS <sup>1</sup>

### Introduction: The Trinitarian context

The dogma of the Holy Trinity is foundational to Christianity. The works of the Most Holy Trinity *ad exstra* are usually described in theology as being common to all three Persons. However, this statement may not be exaggerated because only the Second Person, the Divine Logos, became man. We must investigate the relationship with created reality of the Trinity *qua* Trinity, and of each of the three Persons individually. Because the act of creation is a work of the Trinity *ad extra*, the whole of created reality has its *arché*, its ultimate beginning, in the Trinity. Hence we can speak of created reality as “triadoarchic”; and we can speak of the very act of creation *ex nihilo* — from nothing — as “triadoarchy”.

The whole of the created cosmos is an icon of the Most Holy Trinity, and therefore we can term it “triadophoric” reality, bearing the image and seal of the Trinity. Since all of the visible and invisible cosmos, in its entirety, exists in the ubiquitous Triadic God who is the ground of its being it is totally dependent on Him for both its existence and its operation. For this reason, the total cosmic reality is “triadocentric”. Furthermore, the whole cosmos, in its tremendous dynamicity, is a “triadoteological” reality, for it tends towards the Most Holy Trinity as its definitive goal and Omega Point.

The divine acts of creation, love, attraction, vivification, strengthening, illumination, purification, redemption and salvation, sanctification, transfiguration, divinization and glorification constitute a great mysterious and inexpressible condescension of God to His creatures. By *God's condescension*, we mean that God waives the privileges of His transcendent dignity and majesty for the purpose of approaching us on our level — and this has no negative implications such as patronization. His divine loving condescension binds God and His creation into such a close reciprocal relationship that it overcomes the infinite abyss — and also the disparity of natures — between them. From the human point of view, God's condescension conquers not only our religious and moral remoteness from Him, but also what we tend to perceive as an ontological distance. While the Persons of the Trinity stand in utter immanence to one another (perichoresis; circumincession), *we progressively realize* the immanence of all cosmic reality part to part and to the

<sup>1</sup> We are indebted to Isabel A. Massey, Ph. D. in Theology, for the term *basileosis*, and for basic meaning of that term. Cf. *infra*.

Trinity; hence Christ offers a prayer which draws forth such further realization: "...that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in us..." (John 17:21). The radical condescension of the Triadic God is to be observed in the Byzantine Liturgy — as we read in the prayer before the ambo:

O Lord, who bleesest those who bless Thee, and sanctifiest those who trust in Thee: Save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance. Preserve the fullness of Thy Church. Sanctify those who love the beauty of Thy house; glorify them in return by Thy divine power, and forsake us not who put our hope in Thee. Give peace to Thy world, to Thy churches, to Thy priests, to all those in civil authority, and to all Thy people. For every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from Thee, the Father of Lights, and unto Thee we ascribe glory, thanksgiving, and worship: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

It is significant that this prayer is directed to the Most Holy Trinity, as indicated by the final doxology. There are Liturgical prayers which address one of the Persons of the Trinity and describe their condescension and philanthropic intervention in the history of salvation.

The condescension of each of the Divine Persons can be described by a special term bearing a very specific meaning proper to the particular Person of the Trinity in question. The ongoing condescension of God the Father can be called His Fatherhood and *basileosis*. The radical condescension of God the Son has been discussed by many and termed *kenosis*.<sup>2</sup> The ongoing condescension of the Holy Spirit can be termed *episkiasis*.<sup>3</sup>

In this article we intend to investigate the condescension of God the Father as Fatherhood and as *basileosis*. However, divine condescension necessarily implies the mystery of simultaneous divine transcendence and immanence with respect to created reality.

Some writers think that by minimizing immanence, they would preserve

<sup>2</sup> The present-day humanitarian climate which pervades the western world has been receptive to much theologizing on *kenosis*. The profound humanity of Christ is being stressed while the exalted divinity of Christ is less discussed (or denied). We do not suggest countering one extreme with the other, but would firmly advocate care in adhering to the balanced approach — both in theology and in Christian education. The firm foundation for this balance is the juxtaposition of *kenosis* and transfiguration in the New Testament.

As everyone knows, the *kenosis* discussions are based on Phil 2:6-11 which envisions Christ's Incarnation and obedient acceptance of death as an "emptying" — a choice to refrain from manifestation of His *doxa*. Cf. also II Cor 8:9.

On *Kenosis* besides the standard encyclopaediae, Karl Rahner & Herbert Vorgrimler, *Theological Dictionary* (N.Y.: Herder and Herder, 1965) 249; Lucien Cerfaux, *Christ in the Theology of St. Paul* (Freiburg: Herder, 1962) 164-166; Louis Bouyer, *Dictionary of Theology* (Tournai: Desclée, 1965) 259; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie* (Gerd Mohn: Gütersloher, 1966) 317-334; D.M. Baillie, *God was in Christ* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961).

<sup>3</sup> *Episkiasis* is a term derived from *episkiazein*, to cover or overshadow. The word is used to indicate the presence of God in both Testaments. Here we simply note that it implies protection (e.g. Prv 18:11, Ps 139:8; and in the transfiguration narratives it has a numinous connotation (Mark 9:7; Matt 17:5; Luke 9:34). In the NT the term has acquired its greatest intensity; hence there is in the Bible a progressive enrichment of the term; and hence theologically a progressive revelation of the presence of the Spirit of God. Therefore the theological term *episkiasis* indicates this progressive revelation of the Third Person of the Trinity. Again, we are indebted to Isabel A. Massey for the term and its basic meaning.