

The Dancing Economy

¹²“I have much more to say to you, but you can’t handle it now. ¹³ However, when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you in all truth. He won’t speak on his own, but will say whatever he hears and will proclaim to you what is to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and proclaim it to you. ¹⁵ Everything that the Father has is mine. That’s why I said that the Spirit takes what is mine and will proclaim it to you.

John 16:12-15

How have you learned to think about the Trinity? What images have you seen used to explain the complex relationship of the three in one? A flame is common, fire, heat, and light; three in one. An early theologian suggested a red hot rod of iron: heat, light, and the iron which can be pounded and formed. The theologian was trying to explain how Jesus, the iron, could suffer physical torture while God could simultaneously exist unchanged. While these are very creative ways of thinking about the nature of God, I have always struggled to understand why it matters. What difference does it make if God is like a flame, or an apple, or three figures woven together? It’s entertaining conceptually, but where does the rubber meet the road?

What we want to talk about is the economic Trinity (and I don’t mean JP Morgan, Citigroup, and Bank of America). Economics is more than just money; economics is about work and relationships. The word eco-nomics is a combination of two Greek words, oikos and nomos. Household and law. Economics in its most basic sense is about household management. It is certainly concerned with finances, but more so, economics is about how members of a household interact with one another and the resources that are entrusted to them. So when we name the economic Trinity, we’re talking about how we have witnessed and experienced God working in the world. When we name God, it is because we have experienced God ordering and watching over the household of creation in particular ways.

Traditionally, the Church has called God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is a name rooted in the early Church’s experience of God in the Greco-Roman world. God, the Father is Lord of all creation (not the Roman Emperor). Jesus, the Son, has equal authority and stature. As John the Evangelist records today, Jesus says, “Everything that the Father has is mine.” The Holy Spirit is the invisible yet palpable presence of God that leads the Church in establishing God’s Kingdom on earth. **Father, Son, and Holy Spirit** is how the Church experiences God. Yet God has been present to us in many other ways.

A few decades ago, archeologists discovered a set of writings called the Dead Sea Scrolls, some of which had been composed 100 years before the birth of Christ. This Jewish community spoke of God like this, “Because you are a father to all the sons of your truth. You rejoice in them and like her who loves her child and, like a wet nurse, you take care of all your creatures on your lap.” We experience God like a father, but we also know God to be like a caring Mother, one who nurtures us and comforts us on her lap. When we come to church and receive forgiveness, it is like we are reborn, given the gift of new life. When a church member brings us a meal or visits us when we are sick, it is as if God’s own hand was caring for us. If you have experienced God’s care like this, it is right to call the triune God **Mother, Child, Womb of Life**.

John the Evangelist imagined God another way too. Like the teacher of Proverbs, John begins imagining God by starting at the beginning. “In the beginning” writes John, “was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John borrowed the idea of “Word” or *logos* from the Greek philosophers of his time. Among the earliest Christian thinkers, the “Word” was

understood as God's reason, the content of God's mind. The Word of our eternal Speaker was carried on the Breath of God and lo, all things came into being. God is **Speaker, Word, and Breath**, the one who gives order and reason to the world.

The Book of Proverbs names God poetically. In the beginning, when the earth was still a shapeless void and God had not yet separated the waters into the heavens and the seas, before Grandfather Mountain jutted up on the horizon and before the fields of the Piedmont sprung up with crops. First, there was Wisdom. She was with God. She dipped her toes into the primordial sea, she swirled circles on the face of the deep. She leaped and danced on the hill tops, and stretched her arms to the top of the sky. She stooped down low to touch the earth and she delighted in the fresh smell of soil. Wisdom was God's master worker, never farther (some traditions say) than the crook of God's elbow. If we stop to listen we can hear her voice today, calling from the hills and valleys, from the roadways and villages. "I delight in you, my creation, my child. Follow me." If you have seen God's beauty and heard God's still small voice, you know God is called **Artisan, Wisdom, and Guide**.

When we name the economic Trinity, we may also use our personal experience. There is family video of my little sister at the seashore. She was about six and she had these braided pigtailed curled up into loops on her head, held by little red bows. She was down by the surf playing in the sand, building castles and pushing up mountains. She took handfuls of wet sand and let it drip through her fingers. In a burst of delight she threw the sand down and sprung up to her feet. She giggled and ran playfully into the gushing surf, splashing and delighting. She did two cartwheels back to her castle, kicking up sand and salt water. She did a pirouette, a curtsy, and plopped back down on the beach.

The camcorder panned to the left, only a yard or two away. And there sat my grandfather, utterly captivated by his granddaughter's energy. His delight was radiant, his smile glowing. To watch his granddaughter play and create and imagine, it was his greatest glory. He lived his life for his granddaughter. Everything he had was hers. It was his hope and his joy to share it with her. In my experience, God is like a **grandfather, a granddaughter, and delight**.

In the gospel of John for today, Jesus speaks, "Everything that the Father has is mine. That's why I said that the Spirit takes what is mine and will proclaim it to you." Reading this, my tendency is to think of the Trinity as an old-fashioned bucket brigade. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit standing in a line passing buckets of truth to dump on the world. The Church, however, invites us to think of the Trinity in another way, not a line, but three persons dancing around. Our **Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer** whirling and twirling across all creation sharing laughter, truth, and delight. It is not an exclusive dance. In fact, we can only name it when we participate in it, when we get caught up in its rhythms and movements. Are you aware of the mysterious dance going on around you? It's calling you. It's moving you. What will you name it?