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Ray Waaraniemi

The Triune God

God's Word teaches us that "God has revealed Himself to us as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That is why we speak of God as the Triune God" (Christian Doctrine 43). The content of our Christian faith has been gathered into three articles of faith and is documented in the creeds from the 4th and 5th centuries, namely: the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. The Apostles Creed is the most familiar to us.

In the book *By Faith* it is written: "The matter of salvation requires faith in all of the Articles of Creed. The Holy Spirit gives birth to such a faith. When the Third Article opens up, then the First and Second Articles also open" (BF, p.61). There are many who claim to believe in the Triune God, but their understanding is not of the Spirit. The Third Article is especially obscure to them, and for that reason the Living God is hidden from them.

The Triune God is commonly referred to as the "Godhead" or the "Holy Trinity." We understand that there are three members of the Godhead: God the Father, Jesus Christ His Son, and the Holy Ghost. Yet there is one God. Paul writes to the Ephesians: *There is one body, and one Spirit... One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.* (Eph. 4:4-6) John writes in his first epistle: *For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one* (1 John 5:7,8).

As children and youth in Sunday school and confirmation, we were taught the Apostles Creed with the help of Luther's Small and Large Catechisms. Then we memorized the three Articles of the Creed and their meanings. Thus from childhood the Apostles Creed has helped us to understand the Triune God and the work of each member of the Godhead. When we recite the Creed, it is truly a confession of our faith. Each Article begins with "I believe."

God, the Father, the Creator

The First Article of the Apostles Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

Luther explains that in the First Article we confess that God is our creator, provider, and protector. He gives us our families and all things needed for the preservation of our lives. He does it as a loving and merciful father without our having merited it.

The first words in the Bible are, *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth* (Gen.1:1). The writer to the Hebrews writes, *Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear* (Heb.11:2,3).

In the first book of the Bible, we find these words, And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness (Gen. 1:26,27). God gave life to man, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul (Gen. 2:7).

Although it is above our reason, we simply, in a childlike way, believe that God is our creator. He has numbered our days and established the boundary of time for each of us (Job 14:5). He is the source of all things pertaining to our daily bread. Although multitudes of people in the world profess a belief in God, relatively few know the living God. Apostle Paul writes about men of the last days, *Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away* (II Tim. 3:5). We see the steady progression away from God's Word in the world. The "form of godliness" for many people of our time is that they create a god according to their own reason, will, and hopes. We hear opinions like, "my god is not so narrow-minded." In the LLC Position Statement, "Right and Wrong," the following excerpt addresses man's departure from God's will.

God is Lord over life and death

As knowledge increases and technology advances, man strives to take decisions of life and death into his own hands. This manifests itself, for example, in the prevention of conception, the termination of pregnancy, some kinds of gene manipulation, efforts to clone humans, and euthanasia. People have forgotten that God is the Creator and upholder of all, Lord over life and death. He alone has the power to create life and take it away (1 Sam. 2:6; Job 10:12; Ps. 139:13-16). He has not authorized man to control life. The duty of medicine is to protect life, alleviate suffering, and promote and maintain health while respecting humanity. (LLC Position Statement, Section 2, Item 5).

What is God like?

God is omnipotent, or all powerful. The power and majesty of God is incomprehensible to us. Before God we find ourselves so small. With weak faith we can only marvel with the Psalm-writers, *O LORD our Lord... When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him?* (Ps.8:1,3,4).

When God called Moses to lead His people, Moses doubted his own credibility before the people. God said to Moses, *Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you* (Ex. 3:14). The name that God used in Hebrew was YHWH or Jehovah. It means "to be," or "He Is," or "I AM." God is timeless.

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, she doubted. *Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?* (Luke 1:34). Gabriel then said *For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said... be it unto me according to thy word* (Luke 1:34, 37-38). Mary believed in a childlike way even though she didn't understand.

"For with God nothing shall be impossible." Through weak faith we believe this and endeavor to live in obedience of faith, even then when it is contrary to our carnal reason and the commonly held views in the world. We are small and weak, but we have a Heavenly Father who is almighty to do as He wills. We can approach Him in time of need as children do to their loving fathers.

As God is all powerful, He is also omnipresent, or everywhere simultaneously. Imagine, He is with each of us all the time wherever we are. Even when we are ashamed and do not want God to see us, He sees. Adam and Eve in their guilt tried to hide from God. God called out to them “*Where art thou?*” The psalm-writer writes *Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?* (Ps. 139:7-10).

Just as God is everywhere, He also omniscient, or all knowing. As individuals it means that we cannot hide our thoughts and deeds from God. He knows our intentions and the secret places of our minds and hearts. Paul writes to the Romans, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?* (Rom. 11:33-34).

God knows our needs and we can trust in Him for our daily bread. Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount regarding our temporal needs, *For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things* (Matt. 6:32). So when we doubt and are tempted concerning our daily bread we can trust in our Heavenly Father and approach Him with our cares and worries.

God is a jealous God

God is a Spirit (John 4:24), and carnal reason cannot comprehend spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:14-16). Man tends to trust in and worship temporal things and things made with hands to such a degree that these things become their gods. God will not tolerate anything or anyone to be placed above Himself. Moses has recorded the words of God, *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image... Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God* (Ex. 20:4-6).

God is love

Through faith we know the living God as a loving father who has manifested His love for us in His son. John writes *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life* (John 3:16). Again John writes in his first epistle, *Beloved, let us love one another... for God is love.* (1 John 4:7).

Jesus Christ, His Son, the Redeemer

The Second Article of the Apostles Creed

I believe in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

We join through faith with Luther’s explanation of the Second Article that Jesus is the son of God. He is true God and true man born of the Virgin Mary. He is our redeemer and has purchased us with His suffering and shedding of His precious blood so that we can be His own in His kingdom eternally.

God’s Word teaches us that “God speaks to us in nature, our life’s fate, and the phases of nations. He speaks to us in our conscience. But God especially reveals himself to us in the Holy Scripture

and in our Redeemer Jesus Christ” (Christian Doctrine 4). The Epistle to the Hebrews shows this: *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.* (Heb. 1: 1,2).

Jesus was with God in eternity

After God had created the earth and the animals, who did he speak to? *And God said, Let us make man in our image* (Gen. 1:26). Did he speak to the Son and to the Holy Ghost? In the beginning of the Gospel of John it is written: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. ... In him was life; and the life was the light of men.* (John 1:1-4). We understand the Word and the light to be Christ. Jesus once told the Jews, who placed so much stock in being the children of Abraham, that they were not able to believe that He who Abraham believed upon as the promised savior was in their midst. He said, *“Before Abraham was, I am”* (John 8:58). This made them so angry that they took up stones to stone him, but Jesus went away from them – it wasn’t His time yet.

Death reigned

As a result of the fall into sin, the pall of death fell upon all men. It became necessary for sin-fallen man to be redeemed from sin and death and reconciled with his Creator. *Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned* (Rom. 5:12).

The promise

Under the sentence of death the first human pair hid in fear from God their creator. But *“God is love (1 John 4:8),”* and he prepared a way of redemption and salvation for sin-fallen man. He made this known when he said to the serpent: *And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel* (Gen. 3:15). So Adam and Eve were able to begin the journey in faith. They believed God’s promise of the Savior who would come and atone for their sins and the sins of all people.

God reiterated the promise numerous times to the Old Testament believers. After Abraham was obedient to God and would have sacrificed his son Isaac, God said, *That in blessing I will bless thee... And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice* (Gen. 22:17,18). So it is through faith that we are the children of Abraham.

Isaiah understood that the promised one was also God: *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace* (Is 9:6).

The promise was fulfilled when Mary, a virgin who had conceived a child by the Holy Ghost, gave birth to the promised Savior: *And she brought forth her firstborn son* (Luke 2:7). The shepherds received the good news from the angel while tending their flocks, *Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour* (Luke 2:11).

Paul writes to the Galatians of the Redeemer: *But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons* (Gal. 4:4,5).

True God and True Man

Christ was true God as we see in Paul's letter to Corinthians, *God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself* (II Cor. 5:19).

From the Gospel of John we read:

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

Christ was also true man. Paul writes to the Philippians:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. (Phil. 2:5-7).

He was born of a woman into a family as Mark writes, *Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us?* (Mark 6:3).

He was tempted as a man, as the writer to the Hebrews writes, *For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin* (Heb. 4:15).

The Holy Ghost, the Sanctifier

The Third Article of the Apostles Creed

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy Christian Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

Luther explains that with our reason we cannot believe in Jesus but that the Holy Ghost calls through the Gospel, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ.

Jesus foretold the coming of the Holy Spirit

While among His disciples for the last time, Jesus promised to send them the Holy Spirit to teach, lead, and comfort them. *But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you* (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit joins us to the arisen and glorified Christ. Jesus wanted to prepare His own for the time when He would no longer be with them in the flesh. He also wanted to teach them about the Holy Spirit. He knew that they could not fully understand and remember the things he had taught them. *I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth* (John 16:12,13).

Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled on Pentecost

Before ascending to heaven Jesus gave instructions to the disciples, Luke recorded the words of Jesus in The Acts of the Apostles: *And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith*

he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence (Acts 1:4,5).

The second chapter of the book of Acts relates of this momentous event: *And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4).* It was a remarkable demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit. Many people from several countries were in Jerusalem for the feast of Weeks or the feast of Harvest also called Pentecost. After the Apostles were filled with the Holy Ghost, they began to speak, and the listeners, who spoke many languages, heard them in their own languages. The sermon of Peter pricked the hearts of many of the listeners and about three thousand of them received grace to believe.

A Mother that gives birth (sanctifies) and sustains her children

The congregation is our spiritual mother: *But Jerusalem which is [from] above is free, which is the mother of us all (Gal. 4:26).* Jesus called the congregation His mother: *Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother (Matt. 12:48-50).*

On the day of Pentecost thousands received new birth through the preaching of the gospel by the Apostles. Luther writes of the Third Article in the Large Catechism, p.87: “The Holy Spirit effects our sanctification through the communion of saints, the Christian Church...by leading us into his holy communion, in that He lays us upon the bosom of the church which becomes our teacher and leader to Christ.” We have experienced the work of the Sanctifier in our time when God has opened mission fields and sent His children to preach the gospel. Many from various places in the world have believed the gospel preached by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles of our time. In each of our personal endeavors of faith, we experience how the Holy Spirit sanctifies and sustains us. It is our “home teacher.” Luther writes that the Spirit is “one who has sanctified and still sanctifies us” P.87

Jesus’ work continues as the work of the Holy Spirit

Christ’s work in the world continues in His congregation as the work of the Holy Spirit. In the congregation of Christ, we are in living fellowship with Christ and other Christians. For this reason, the Scripture calls the congregation the body of Christ (Christian Doctrine 44). *God has placed all things under Christ’s feet and given Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body (Eph. 1:22-23).*

When the creation work of God and the redemption work of Jesus were complete and Jesus had ascended to heaven, then, as Jesus had foretold, the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Christ’s work on earth continued as the work of the third member of the Triune God, the Holy Spirit. Believers have received the Holy Spirit. Collectively they make up the congregation of God. In order to find God and His Son Jesus Christ one must find His congregation on earth.

The Holy Spirit empowers the believers to continue the work of Christ in the world, which is to preach the gospel – to forgive sins. Jesus gave this authority to His own: *Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained* (John 20:22-23). Unbelievers question, How can men forgive sins? Jesus' authority was also questioned, *Who can forgive sins but God alone* (Luke 5:21).

The congregation is guided by the Holy Spirit

Apostle Paul gave instructions to his young coworker Timothy when he asked him to remain at Ephesus to serve the congregation: *These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth* (1 Tim. 3:14,15).

It is vital to personal faith that we understand the role of the congregation mother. We always want to be obedient to the congregation of God. It is a beautiful matter that we can entrust our endeavor into the care of the congregation of God, our spiritual mother. I will borrow a portion Juhani Uljas' writing, *The Holy Spirit as our Comforter*, which touches on this matter of our relationship to the congregation.

During this changing time of searching, we have in Christianity expressed opinions on new matters and issues. We may as decades pass and times change look upon these previously expressed opinions with criticism. It is important for us to remember that the Holy Ghost has certainly guided the Christians in their decisions. We can admire the wisdom of the Holy Ghost in these decisions.

According to the doctrine of Christianity, our conscience is the voice of God inside of us. Our conscience requires us to act correctly and forbids us from wrong. Our conscience works based on God's Word. However, it is not always reliable in guiding us. It can harden so that we do not hear God's voice... In support of our valuable and tender consciences, God has allowed the voice of the Holy Ghost to sound in His congregation. It is possible that what we hear from our conscience is different than what we hear from God's congregation. Which authority do we then obey? In this situation it is better to listen to God's congregation.

When the Holy Ghost governs over the congregation, there will be no conflict between the Bible and the congregation. As children of God, we have our responsibility. When we preach, comfort, instruct or teach, it is important to remember the instruction: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" (I Peter 4:11). Juhani Uljas, *The Holy Spirit as our Comforter*, SRK Speakers and Elders Meeting, Summer 2007

The Holy Spirit makes the Word a living Word

The Holy Spirit has inspired the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit is the key that opens the Scriptures. Peter writes about the source of the Scriptures: *Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost* (II Peter 1:20,21).

While teaching His own about the end times and of the difficult situations that the believers will find themselves in, Jesus says to trust in the Holy Spirit: *But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost* (Mark 13:11).

The Holy Spirit will be with us always

Jesus said, *lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world* (Matt. 28:20). Although Jesus is no longer on earth as “*true man*,” He is with us through the Holy Spirit. *And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.* (John 14:16,17).

Dear brothers and sisters we are the most fortunate of people when we can be children of the Spiritual mother who cares for us and tends to our needs on the journey.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all (2 Cor. 13:13).

Points for discussion:

How does the attempt in our time to separate the three persons in Godhead manifest itself?

What kind of a god do people try to create for themselves in our time?

What are the idols or gods of today?

Relate a personal experience when you have especially felt the power of God in your life.

What does the phrase, “preach the gospel,” mean in practice?

Expand on the following: “When the Holy Ghost governs over the congregation, there will be no conflict between the Bible and the congregation.”